



## A Celebration of AHP and All Holistic Endeavours

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I can think of nothing more crucial at this juncture in our World History than our willingness not only to envision but to actually dare *live* our lives in a more holistic way. And thus in a more fully human way. We weren't managing to do this very effectively even before it was rendered impossible by the imposition of serial lockdowns as a means of handling the pervasive crisis of the Pandemic. This also increased the gulf between the day-to-day living experiences of the more fortunate members of society (which of course included the government) and the ever-growing mass of the less fortunate. So many have been worn down, 'getting by' as best they can while filled with fear as to how the future will unfold; trading water while knowing their situation is bound to deteriorate as inflation increases and price rises go on escalating. We literally aren't able to follow the instruction from on high to return to 'normal' because the so-called normal is in a state of continual slippage.

As we now know, our much-lauded Health Service has been underfunded for years, the staff sliding ever further into utter exhaustion, unable to deal with the backlog of untreated people, let alone those waiting for hours in long queues of ambulances in need of urgent attention. It is the same with Social Services, unable to respond in a timely or comprehensive-enough manner in situations of neglect or domestic violence, resulting in an alarming increase in murders. And what about all those in and out of work who just get jobs when they can. Many are likely to sink into resignation – the most unholistic of

conditions which leaves us bereft of hope. Not having enough to eat is a rapidly growing concern for millions of people in this 'advanced' and wealthy European country, followed by lack of heating as winter approaches. And it need not be this way. There *are* solutions. Some holistic thinking is required on the socio-political level.

I fear that I might be giving the impression that all is fine for the privileged and that they do not suffer too. Of course they matter as much as any other human being, and their relationships can be as challenging; sometimes even exacerbated by their wealth, and often emotionally deprived. Public schools have trauma built into the way they operate, and couldn't be less holistic.

But why am I writing all this, as if it would be read by the people I am challenging? I am writing to you, readers of *Self & Society*, to challenge you to become activists of some kind or another. Some of you drawn to focus on the political arena, some to offer and participate more fully in personal-development activities; face-to-face therapy wherever possible, dance, encounter groups, Alexander work, Reiki, meditation etc. All so much richer because fully present with the other or others. For both the receiver and the giver.

I believe we need not only to celebrate but also revisit and reconnect with the *roots* of Humanistic Psychology. I remember those early days so clearly and my participation in what we called 'the Growth Movement', and I feel privileged to have come across it at that point in

my life. What a variety of approaches was on offer!

I was involved in studying Philosophy at the time – evening lectures at Birkbeck College London while looking after two young daughters during the day. It had felt such an achievement to get to university at last, my father having refused to pay the fees for Capetown University all those years ago. As a girl, I was expected to have no expectations of that kind.

I was, and still am, a very slow reader. Not helped, perhaps, by having scant access to books when young. I keep stopping to ponder on things, which is what I thought would be necessary for a subject like Philosophy. So I was secretly very disappointed when we were studying the Ancient Greeks and I was struck by a metaphysical theory posited by Anaxagoras. Our lecturer, who was head of the department, came up to my desk when we were all working in something and asked me in a quiet tone what sources I'd drawn upon. 'Myself', was my reply. A pause. 'Is there something faulty about it?', I asked. 'Not at all, not at all, but I can't give you an "A" as I would like to because it's essential to list what other philosophers have put forward.' My heart sank – not only because I'd never have a chance to read all those books, but I had thought that the whole point was to think for yourself.

I somehow managed to fulfil what was required of me, and then one day I was just standing looking up at a beautiful avenue of trees when this 'knowing' descended on me from out of the blue. I'd only had a welcome 'knowing' as a child; never mind if I'm not loved because *I* can love. I've had a few in my life, and have always obeyed them. However, this one couldn't have been less welcome. 'You must give up studying Philosophy.' Nor could anyone understand why on earth I was being so perverse as to leave. I mumbled something about unexpected family matters but the Principal still tried to dissuade me by saying, 'Don't you realise that you could have a successful academic career?'. I was very surprised, but stuck to my so-called 'decision'. I could hardly declare that I had had an unwelcome prompting from another level of consciousness!

I retreated into myself somewhat, feeling lost. A sort of wilderness time. I have had short spells of depression at various points in my life, but always a sense that it would shift if I didn't flee from it and try to *make* something happen. So different from resignation. After about three weeks a letter was put through the letter-box. It offered something I'd never heard of before – a short course of four Wednesday evenings of encounter groups. I hadn't a clue what they were. A whole new world was to open up. A radical shift from intellect to expression of feelings. And we had to attend every session and complete the course. My husband, who was an actor, was surprised but very intrigued and happy to be there for the children those evenings – unless he got a job!

I seem to remember that we were a group of 15 people. We sat on the floor in a circle, along with the man who facilitated the procedure, and were invited to introduce ourselves. Very soon after that someone dived in and began confronting one of the others. Before long the facilitator told them to go into the centre of the circle. A furious exchange followed – they hurled abuse at each other – and I was absolutely stunned. Also amazed that everyone else seemed perfectly at ease with what was happening. I was fascinated by how OK they both felt after it, especially with each other. I remember thinking, 'I don't think I'll risk putting myself in that position!'. I then realised, as I lay wide awake that night, that I had simply absorbed the belief that anger was bad – or at least highly undesirable. My mother was very sure that was the case, and she wasn't sure about many things. For her it was always, 'Anything for peace' which actually, I suddenly realised, had inadvertently led to some really harmful repercussions. To my surprise, on the third evening I must have made some comment or remark, and found myself in the centre of the circle. That night I knew this was the world I wanted to explore.

As I was saying earlier, I believe we need to honour the *roots* of Humanistic Psychology which were birthed in what we called 'The Growth Movement' in the 1960s. I remember them so clearly and how exhilarating, stretching, scary but uplifting it all was. I feel privileged to

have come across it at that point in my life. Not that I'm suggesting we go *back* to that time but, rather, re-stimulate the Spirit of that time so as to live ourselves into a radically new future, by drawing on the whole of who we each are. When I think of the range and richness of the various approaches to self-development that I experienced in those early days – such a flowering of different 'species' from those roots. Most crucial was the lived experience of the facilitators. Discernment, not just curiosity and enthusiasm, is also an aspect of an holistic approach to personal growth. We have such varied needs and characters, but all long for connection and love, however much we might also value solitude.

I have become concerned to have come across some people who have decided they would like to become a therapist before they have sought any therapy for themselves. Like an interesting career choice. Writing essays, which of course involves reading books, prior to committed self-exploration. Writing *about* an essentially relational activity, and perhaps being awarded high grades with scant grounding in their own lived experience. Perhaps using techniques they've read about, and then being at a complete loss when the resulting effect on a client goes way beyond their experience. It is their trainers I am critical of, not the student. You can't get a 'grade' for intuition. It arises from a place way beyond the rational. A kind of trust, an obedience, that accesses a Mystery beyond description. And then all kinds of unexpected connections can take place in the client, and they need space to assimilate and integrate what has emerged, and rest for a while – slip off to sleep or go for a walk if this occurs in a group setting. Or leave their session early if working one to one.

I am *not* saying that there are no really helpful methods and techniques, like CBT or coaching or tapping, that can help people handle their lives – sometimes as an adjunct to their therapy. I have found that they can be very valuable for young people to help ease anxiety – as can choosing a special stone to keep and hold. The world of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter can be such a hazard for them. I am just expressing

my belief that only Holistic work can bring about real transformation.

It worries me that since the Pandemic, many therapists have got so accustomed to working on Zoom that they are choosing to continue this limited form of contact and exchange. So convenient that it has become a preference. Wonderful as an expansion of inter-connection on a national or global level, or with family and friends who live at a distance, and utterly invaluable to the actualisation of saving our planet – but limiting and detrimental if used *instead of* actual physical connection and full presence with others. Many of us shrank, more than we realised, to fit the confines of lockdowns, or adapted so well that we lost the urge or felt no need to expand again.

I fear that we have adjusted to *having* to let go of such deeply natural and essential aspects of what it is to be a human being that we are disorientated and not quite sure how to reclaim ourselves. How to become whole again – drawing on all the variety and richness of our joint humanity as well as the fullness of the unique human being that we each are. It couldn't be a more pertinent but a more difficult time to rebirth a holistic society. May we face the challenges together, encourage each other as we journey forwards. And we need to remind each other, at the same time, that Holism involves appreciation of our differences without foregoing our principles.

This will also be an essential factor of worldwide involvement and co-operation in actualising climate change, drawing on a vast range of different contributions from a multitude of different cultures, and keeping our focus fixed on a common aim. Bypassing our differences wherever necessary and getting excited along with those we have considered enemies and vilified in the past. What an opportune moment for the James Webb telescope to come on to the scene. A wondrous revealer of the operations of the entire universe with its ever-elusive moment of coming into being as also of its ending, while inspiring us to make sure to keep our green planet green.

## About the contributor



**Jill Hall** was born in South Africa into an environment of extreme inequality and oppression, and cannot remember a time when she was not disturbed, puzzled and fascinated about what it means to be a human being. Jill moved to London in her late teens, working as an actress until becoming a

mother and philosophy student. Attracted to the arena of self-development in the early days of Humanistic Psychology, she later became a tutor at the Institute of Biodynamic Psychology. She now runs weekend residential groups and has been a guest lecturer for various professional bodies and universities. She is the author of the book *The Reluctant Adult*.