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WHAT IS HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY?

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SUMMARY:

Humanistic Psychology tends to be forward-looking rather than past-focused, but in order to understand and locate its current state and future possibilities, it is important to connect with our roots and examine the historical trajectory of the humanistic project within psychology and the psychological therapies. In this article, respected elders of Britain's Humanistic Psychology movement **JOHN ROWAN** and **DINA (ZOHAR) GLOUBERMAN** pose the fundamental question 'What is Humanistic Psychology', casting light on some of the core principles and values underpinning psychology's 'Third Force', and exploring the historical background and some of the key events associated with the evolution of the humanistic approach.

Humanistic Psychology is a psychological perspective which rose to prominence in the mid-20th century partly as a response to the limitations of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and B. F. Skinner's behaviorism. Considered a 'third force', this approach emphasized individuals' inherent drive towards self-actualization, the process of realizing and expressing one's own capabilities and creativity. It moved away from a medical model to a democratic and holistic one, based on fostering communication, creativity, and personal development throughout life for everyone.

Some of the underlying assumptions were that we are constantly evolving beings, that we need to take a holistic approach to being human which is an integration of the physical, the mental, the emotional and the spiritual, that self-exploration, creativity, free will, authenticity, and positive human potential were important for everyone, and that self-development could be done in an essentially democratic way through self-exploration and group work as much as through professional consultation.

Humanistic Psychology was an important part of a world-wide surge of interest in what human beings could be and could become, which started in the 1940s, grew slowly in the 1950s, grew much faster in the 60s and finally reached its full flowering in the 1970s. Today it is consolidating itself, and becoming much more widely accepted.

In the process of change and development, a number of different names and titles have been used for this humanistic approach. Sometimes it has been called 'third force psychology'; sometimes the 'self-awareness movement' (because awareness seemed to be quite a key word); sometimes the 'human potential movement' (because of its insistence that the average

and the normal are actually less than average and less than normal); and sometimes just 'personal growth', because of its belief that people could continue to grow beyond their usual limits, if they were allowed to. Today it is less of a movement and more of a tendency or approach within the whole field of self- development. The full story can be followed in books such as de Carvalho (1991), Moss (1999), Rowan (2001) and Whitton (2003).

In the early days, one man was the pioneer of this way of looking at the world: Abraham Maslow. He was an academic psychologist who later became president of the American Psychological Association. He put forward the key idea of self-actualization: the idea that our purpose in life is to go on with a process of development which starts out in early life but which often gets blocked later (Maslow 1987). He was joined by others such as Carl Rogers (another president of the APA), Charlotte Buhler, Roberto Assagioli, Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir, Kurt Goldstein, Sidney Jourard, Rollo May, Clark Moustakas, Ira Progoff, Jean Houston, Alvin Mahrer and others. Although Humanistic Psychology is sometimes seen as synonymous with the work of Maslow and Rogers, all of these thinkers and clinicians contributed to the full development of the humanistic approach.

One of the most characteristic features of this approach is that it lays a great deal of stress upon personal experience: it is not enough to read about it in books. This personal experience did not need to happen in a professional setting of the therapist/patient relationship, but rather could happen in groups and communities which were essentially democratic and where people could be authentically themselves.

To this end, a number of different methods emerged including Psychodrama, Gestalt, Encounter, Breathwork and Dance Therapy, which helped people in a group or community become intimate and open with each other quickly, and to explore issues in more dramatic ways. These methods tended to utilise movement, drama, imagination, and other verbal and non-verbal ways to open up, shed light upon, and often resolve issues that had not responded to highly professionalized and verbally based therapies like psychoanalysis.

Open and honest communication was considered key to creating honest, loving and essentially democratic groups that could be a crucible for healthy personal development and transformation. And so this movement produced a unique kind of institution which had never existed before – the growth centre. A growth centre is a place where you can go and be encouraged to meet other people and meet yourself. This idea of meeting yourself is unique. No one had ever talked about that before, except in a rather forbidding way connected with illness or personal problems, or perhaps as part of a religious group.

But the growth centre is for everyone who feels that there is more - there doesn't have to be anything wrong with them. And there they find an encouraging atmosphere. If you go to one, you will find yourself in an atmosphere which enables you to open up and trust the situation enough so that you can move forward – maybe even sometimes leap forward – in self-understanding and human relationships. It is open to all – you don't have to be sick or troubled in order to go. In the USA the Esalen Institute (www.esalen.org) and the New York Open Center (www.opencentre.org) among others are still going, and so is the Open Centre (www.opencentre.com) in England and the Skyros Centre (www.skyros.com) in Greece.

In the year 2000 there was a big humanistic conference, called Old Saybrook 2, and this led to a bursting forth of new books and new thinking about the humanistic approach. The *Handbook of Humanistic Psychology* (2nd edition 2015) put together 800 pages of new thinking covering vast ranges of the psychological landscape; the *Handbook of Action Research* (2001) is not entirely humanistic, but does include important humanistic and transpersonal material; *Humanistic Psychotherapies* (2002) comprised another 700 pages of research and practice.

THEORY IN HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

Because all the pioneers of Humanistic Psychology were very individual people, there is no one single accepted theory which we can lay out and say – this is it. But there are some very consistent themes running through all the material put forward by the people mentioned above.

The first is that, deep down underneath it all where it really counts, you are OK. This goes against many other and much older theories which say that people are fundamentally bad, selfish, narrow and nasty. By saying that people are fundamentally OK, we do not at all mean that people are not sometimes destructive, or that there is no evil in the world. What we mean is that if someone will agree to work with us on his or her destructive actions or evil wishes, in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance, that person will discover that the evil and destructiveness are just as phony and just as forgettable as the false niceness of other people, which apparently causes no problems.

In other words, we believe that personal nastiness and personal niceness are most often, in both cases, masks and illusions, put on for reasons which seemed good at the time, but which have now become stuck and rigid, and out of our control. In that sense, if you want to use labels, we are all neurotic. By working on ourselves to unstick the rigidities and loosen the masks, we can eventually learn how to live without needing masks at all – though it may be still be useful to put one on occasionally, as we might have a dress suit or an evening gown.

So when we talk about self-actualization, about getting in touch with what is the deepest truth within us, and allowing that to come out, we are not saying something fearful or dangerous. People do often say – ‘How do I know I won’t hate my deepest self when I come across it?’. But this is an unrealistic fear, and it is up to the therapist, group leader, or guide to represent the trust we have that our deepest truth is ultimately life enhancing.

The second thread which runs all through Humanistic Psychology is an emphasis on the whole person. If we say that human beings exist on at least five levels – body, feelings, intellect, soul and spirit – then we have to do justice to all five of those levels in all our efforts at realising human potential. Ken Wilber (2000) spells out all the implications of this more clearly than anyone else. If I want to be that self which I truly am, then I have to be it on all five of those levels – I must not leave any of them out. Any theory, any therapy, which leaves out one or more of these must be inadequate to deal with the full human being who has to be

met and responded to. It was Maslow who taught us to think in terms of levels, and to ignore all this is to live in Flatland.

Now today there is much more interest in the body – diet, exercise and so on – but much of that interest seems to us very external. It is as if we were supposed to be somewhere outside our bodies, disciplining them and making them do things, sometimes under protest. But the humanistic approach is to say that I *am* my body. If you touch my hand, you are touching *me*. So I am just as responsible for my body as I am for my thoughts, feelings, mental pictures or whatever – it is me doing it. This total responsibility for our own bodies, feelings, ideas and intuitions is very characteristic of Humanistic Psychology, and theoreticians like Mahrer (1989) and Schutz (1979) have made it clear exactly how this works.

This means that we are interested in integration. By integration we mean that the splits in the person can be healed, and that the holes in the personality can be filled. The various parts of the person can get to know each other better, accept each other more, and change in that process. This is not a process of subordinating all the various tendencies in the person to one overall control, like some kind of totalitarian ego – it is more like a harmony of contrasts. (Rowan 2010).

The third thread we can follow all through the humanistic approach is the emphasis on change and development. Human beings are seen not as static victims or villains, but as people in a process of growth, which is natural and needful. All through our infancy, childhood and adolescence we are going through very substantial changes, involving our most basic attitudes and how we see ourselves. Maslow said that we grow through six main levels of development. His rather speculative theory has now been researched by people like Lawrence Kohlberg (1981), Clay Alderfer (1972) and Jane Loevinger (1976) in many different countries of the world.

However, the implications of having a ‘ladder’ approach, with its implicit hierarchy needs a great deal more thought. This is particularly so because much of the theory and research ends by favouring the middle-class urban male. (Glouberman, 1977)

While levels are a useful concept, it is best if they don’t categorise a person but rather a state of being. It is important to note that at any point, people are operating on many different levels. This becomes clear, for example, when you work with imagery and dreams, and it turns out that an image may have a meaning on a physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual level. Which level comes to the fore can vary from time to time. Similarly, a dream may represent the unconscious or the superconscious. (Glouberman, 2010, 2014)

In this sense, much development is about getting glimpses of another level, and eventually more and more valuing and living at that level, eventually following its lead, while maintaining one’s connections with past and future levels. We begin to put the higher or deeper levels in charge, rather than the child’s emotions or the mind’s control mechanisms. As Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese Zen Monk, put it in one of his talks, ‘We are all part time Buddhas’.

This process of evolution can continue, if we let it, in adulthood, too. What Humanistic Psychology says is that we could all continue to grow if we did not limit ourselves and sell ourselves short. All the humanistic methods are designed to enable us to take off our self-imposed limitations, and continue to grow into our full potential as human beings.

Indeed, when we are on an evolutionary path of personal development, we cannot simply rest on our laurels because we are constantly changing. If we stop ourselves from listening to our real self because our old identity is tied up in attitudes and actions that are no longer healthy for us, we can become emotionally disturbed, burnt out, even physically ill. This can happen at work, in relationships, or in any other aspect of life. Thus one could argue that personal growth should carry a health warning: Keep listening to your real self, keep evolving, keep opening to your new possibilities. Getting stuck is dangerous for your health (Glouberman, 2007).

One more idea which is important in Humanistic Psychology is abundance motivation. Most other psychology says that our actions are basically motivated by deficiency – that is, a lack of something. We may lack food and look for it, or lack safety and look for it, or lack company and look for it. This is to treat human beings as if they were basically something like a thermostat, only acting when something moves them outside their proper limits. But human beings also have an achievement motivation, and a need for varied experience, and an enormous curiosity, which takes them out of this deficiency-oriented realm into an abundance-oriented world of experience. So when we seek to realise our potential, we are not repairing some deficiency, we are entering a world where being can sometimes be more important than having or doing.

Most of us normally think that if we have enough worldly goods, then we can do what we want to do, and then we can be happy. The sequence is HAVE – DO – BE. But what we in Humanistic Psychology say is that it is exactly the other way round. If we can be who we really are, we will find ourselves doing things which genuinely satisfy us and give us enjoyment, and then we shall have all we really want. The sequence for us is BE – DO – HAVE.

This begins to sound religious or spiritual, and it is one of the characteristics of Humanistic Psychology, which distinguishes it very sharply from secular humanism, that it has a place for the spiritual though not usually conventional religion. Maslow always laid great stress on the importance of peak experiences and the experience of transcendence.

So when we say that Humanistic Psychology is concerned with the whole person, we really do mean it in a very particular way. We have developed a number of direct and effective ways of working, most particularly those labelled as humanistic or existential (Schneider & Krug 2010). We assume that people are whole, and we treat them as if they are whole, and we encourage them to act as if they are whole.

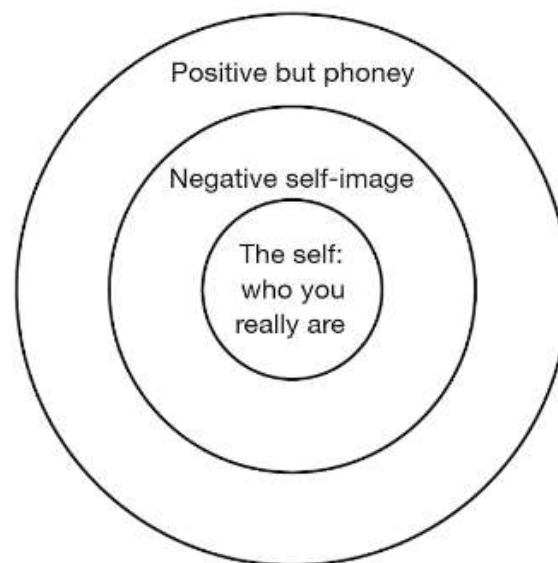
THE REAL SELF

The notion of the real self is one of the most characteristic of humanistic concepts. But it is not unique to us. The chart which follows demonstrates that numerous writers have expressed some version of this idea.

	Central	Peripheral
C.G. Jung	Self	Persona
A. Adler	Creative self	Guiding fiction
P. Federn	Id	Ego-states
F.S. Perls	Self	Self-image
R. Assagioli	I	Subpersonalities
D. Winnicott	True self	False self
H. Guntrip	Primary libidinal ego	Internal objects
R.D. Laing	Real self	False self
A. Janov	Real self	Unreal self
J. Love	Primal intent	Conscious will
R.E. Johnson	Real self	Symbolic self
P. Koestenbaum	Transcendental ego	Empirical ego

What all these investigators are saying is that the ordinary ego which is presented to the world, and which other people know us by, is false. It is a made-up thing, a mask, a fiction. We may have spent many years building it up, and have invested a lot of energy in it, but it is unreal. Benson (1974) calls it the Public Relations Personality, and emphasises how desperately it depends upon other people's opinions. It essentially arises out of an attempt to protect the real self from pain. It puts up boundaries and walls between the various parts of ourselves, so that pain will not be felt, or so that familiar pains are held on to lest they turn into something worse. A common way of representing this is by way of the concentric ring diagram (see Figure 1). This diagram can be made much more complex. Lowen has one with four rings, Perls one with five, and Elliott has one with ten, but the basic principle can be well illustrated with these three.

Figure 1: Circles of the Self



Most of us are quite conscious, as soon as it is pointed out, that our positive self-image is an illusion, but our next thought is that underneath this we are bad. Each person has a different notion of what this badness is, but the three most common feelings about this are:

- a) If they knew how nasty (evil, bad, horrible, hating) I really am, they would all hate me;
- b) If they knew how inadequate (weak, worthless, inept) I really am, they would all reject me;
- c) If they knew how needy (insatiable, sucking in and then destroying, attracting and then devouring) I really am, they would all avoid me.

In extreme cases, we may even believe all three of these things at the same time! All three of them pertain to the false self and its definitions of the world.

It is because we believe (perhaps vividly, perhaps only vaguely) that we are bad or pathetic behind our facade of goodness, that we resist therapy. The discoveries we might make, once we start questioning our false front, might be too terrible to bear. The false self defends itself against such discoveries. And so people put off therapy like they put off going to the dentist – until the pain gets to be too much to bear.

But Humanistic Psychology says that underneath all this positive and negative stuff there is the real self, which is perfectly OK. We will have to work through the good and bad stuff to get there, but this will be all right, because the bad stuff is just as illusory as the good stuff. It, too, was just a story we made up and lived out for neurotic reasons. It is no more fundamental, no more basic, than the positive self-image which it balances.

Our primary aim, then, in humanistic psychotherapy, is to enable the person to get in touch with their real self – to gain an actual experience of the real self. And so we encourage clients all the time to question all – all, without exception – of the taken-for-granted images of themselves, having only quite a limited degree of respect for their defences.

Defences

This question of defences is one of the key areas where Humanistic Psychology differs from psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis, as put forward by Freud, has no notion of the real self. (Though this is not true of some of the later people such as Horney (1950) and Winnicott.) Consequently it takes the negative self-image as being the basic truth about the person, and sees the person as a permanent battleground for good and evil. The good Ego must be strengthened and buttressed against the evil Id. Certainly the way of doing this is not a blind suppression, but a much more sophisticated 'know your enemy' investigative weakening process which involves getting to know the Id much better; but still defences are going to be necessary, only perhaps healthy ones like sublimation or suppression rather than unhealthy ones, like projection and repression.

However, we don't have any need for defences in the humanistic system, because the person would only be defending themselves against their own real self – and there is obviously no point in that. So our policy in regard to defences is continually to chip away at them, in a manner and at a speed which is only limited by the need to maintain rapport between therapist and client. We obviously don't want to be hurtful to the point where the client breaks off therapy. And in this respect we are exactly like the psychoanalysts: we pay a lot of attention to the quality of the relationship. I suspect that the same is true of a good behaviourally oriented or cognitive psychotherapist, and nowadays many of these practitioners and theorists are acknowledging it. For example: 'ACT therapists assume that it is neither possible nor healthy to attempt to rescue clients from the difficulty and challenge of growth.' (Hayes 2004, p. 651) However, the humanistic attitude is not the same as acceptance. Humanistic psychotherapy is a process of questioning all that is false in the person, and its object in doing that is to lay bare what is true in the person, in the confidence that what is true in the person is always OK.

The real self

To understand the real self it is necessary to revisit the concept of levels. As already mentioned, Maslow introduced the idea of levels of development. The idea is that we are all on a path of psychospiritual development, whether we know it or not and whether we like it or not. And this path has certain well-defined way-stations, which Maslow named and described. One of these is called self-actualisation. The self-actualised person has finally discovered and owned his or her own real self. Later, however, Ken Wilber expanded the notion of levels by referring to the great spiritual traditions of the world. In a striking piece of research (Wilber 2000) he showed that the Maslow levels were only the lower rungs on a much longer ladder which includes the transpersonal.

So what is this real self, and what does it feel like to open it up? Broughton (1975) in his research found that this stage was one where 'mind and body are both experiences of an integrated self'. And Wilber (1980) who calls this the 'centaur level' says: 'This integrated self, wherein mind and body are harmoniously one, we call the "centaur". The centaur: the great mythological being with animal body and human mind existing in a perfect state of at-one-ment.' (p. 45)

What this achievement of integration brings with it is a great sense of what the existentialists have called 'authenticity'. And indeed the existentialist thinkers have done a great deal to outline this stage in some detail. According to general existential thought, when an individual's self is taken fully as autonomous, he or she can assume responsibility for being-in-the-world. And if we do this we can, as Sartre put it, choose ourselves. Here are some other existentialist texts to give the flavour:

The 'I' casts off its shells, which it finds untrue, in order to gain the deeper and authentic, infinite, true self. (Jaspers 1931, p. 198)

Before his death, Rabbi Zusya said: 'In the coming world, they will not ask me: 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me: 'Why were you not Zusya?'' (Buber 1975, p. 251)

Free and alone, without assistance and without excuse. (Sartre 1959, p. 275)

Rogers is one of the great fathers of Humanistic Psychology, and he certainly saw the matter in this way, as can be seen in all his writings. Here is a passage in which he is most explicit about this:

I have been astonished to find how accurately the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard pictured the dilemma of the individual more than a century ago, with keen psychological insight. He points out that the most common despair is to be in despair at not choosing, or willing, to be one's self; but that the deepest form of despair is to choose 'to be another than himself'. On the other hand 'to will to be that self which one truly is, is indeed the opposite of despair', and this choice is the deepest responsibility of man. (Rogers 1961, p. 110).

Wilber argues that Humanistic Psychology and existentialism belong to the same level, the centaur. There is a set of concepts which goes with this; Authenticity, or knowing who you really are (Bugental 1981); Seeing through your own eyes, rather than through the eyes of others; Autonomy, or self responsibility; Intentionality, or being in charge of our own lives; Choice, the inevitability and necessity of choice as a human being. That is why humanistic psychologists refuse to talk about human behaviour, and insist on talking about human action. The term 'action' implies responsibility in a way that 'behaviour' does not. If we do not take responsibility for our own actions, we are not living a fully human life.

The real self which we are aiming at in humanistic psychotherapy is not something very abstract and hard to pin down – it is situated very concretely both in the empirical realm of psychological research and in the conceptual realm of philosophy. It is contrasted very sharply and clearly with the aims of other forms of therapy, though it is closest to existential psychotherapy, as described by Friedenberg (1973):

The purpose of therapeutic intervention is to support and re-establish a sense of self and personal authenticity. Not mastery of the objective environment; not effective functioning within social institutions; not freedom from the suffering caused by anxiety – though any or all of these may be concomitant outcomes of successful therapy – but personal awareness, depth of real feeling, and,

above all, the conviction that one can use one's full powers, that one has the courage to be and use all one's essence in the praxis of being. (p. 94)

And this means that there are certain things which the real self certainly is not. It is not the transpersonal self, the higher self described by Assagioli (1975) and others. It is not the ultimate all-embracing God of Christianity, Judaism or Islam. It is not the ultimate formless void of Eastern mysticism and the perennial philosophy. It is simply the real self – that which was buried and put away as being too weak and too vulnerable for everyday life, as Winnicott (1975) well described. We put it away – very often in a moment of panic or terror because that seemed the only way to survive. We developed enormously effective systems of blocking it off and pretending it was not there. But at certain moments – often called peak experiences – we get back that freshness of experience, that marvellous sensitivity to the world.

When we get close to the real self in therapy it feels awfully dangerous to go any further. This is for two different reasons: first, the way in lies through all our most negative self-images, which have been experienced as painful and shocking, and so we are scared of meeting even more, even dirtier secrets as we dig down further; and second, there seems to be something 'ultimate' about the real self, so that when we get to it, it seems like a breakthrough into a whole different world. We are promised that this different world will be better, but it is the difference which appals us. It seems that we almost have to die to get there. In fact, Alvin Mahrer (1996) has been quite explicit about this.

Getting close to the real self, then, almost inevitably brings with it feelings which have to do with extreme good and extreme evil, with Heaven and Hell, with death and destruction as well as with life and growth. And in fact, contact with the real self is often experienced as a breakthrough. Finding suddenly that we are able to let go of all those false pictures of ourselves which the mental ego took for granted, can bring feelings of bliss or ecstasy. An example from an anonymous group member:

Then one cold Saturday in February we had an all-day [primal] marathon and I had the most profound experience of my life. On that day I fell in love for the first time. It was the first time because my head, heart and body were involved. I was no longer stone cold rigid and unavailable. I experienced my own beauty that day, as a woman, as a person. I really felt it on the inside. I loved everyone as they were. With each person and with each moment I was different. I saw their perfection and I also saw their limits. I was not judging. I was just appreciating. I went through a door to a place I could only call whole, clear vision. A sight that sees all undisturbedly. The endless self judgements had quieted. I was. I felt very young, open, vulnerable, not afraid and at peace.

It doesn't have to happen that way, but we have seen this sort of thing happen many times in therapy, and it is genuinely impressive when it does take place.

The earlier experiences of the real self -which tend to last for short periods only, which is why they are called peak experiences – are often more ecstatic; the later experiences of the real self become more ordinary, partly because ecstasy becomes more ordinary, and partly because we are getting ready for our next breakthrough.

IS THERE A REAL SELF?

There is a question which Humanistic Psychology has to answer. It has to do with the challenge of social constructivism, social constructionism, deconstruction and postmodernism. Its most acute point, it seems to us, is at the question of the self. All of these challenges say in their different ways that there is no 'real self' in the sense usually proposed by humanistic psychologists. Therefore there is no such thing as being authentic (true to oneself) or autonomous (taking charge of one's life) or self-actualization (being all that one has in oneself to be). If this is true, then Humanistic Psychology is obsolete, overtaken by a postmodern wave which has passed it by.

Ernesto Spinelli, the eminent existential thinker, has a problem with the humanistic idea of the real self:

I would argue that humanistic theory's greatest weakness (and, significantly, its major divergence with existential-phenomenological theory) lies precisely in its somewhat unquestioning and advocacy of a Western notion of a singular, intrapsychic, real self that can be distinguished from any number of 'false selves'. I would further suggest that it is this adherence to such a notion that provoked the solipsistic excesses of the 1960s and 1970s to which Rowan refers and that continues to maintain an isolationist divide between 'self and other' as understood and practised by humanistic therapists. (Spinelli 2001, pp. 469–70)

Of course the notion of a real self is not unique to Humanistic Psychology. It is quite common, particularly in psychotherapy, for theorists to distinguish between a centre and the periphery of the person. None of these, are guilty of solipsistic excesses, even though they hold to this distinction.

Coming back to specifically humanistic theory, however, the idea of a real self seems necessary to any valid notion of authenticity, choice and responsibility. These concepts are central to the humanistic outlook, and I should have thought to the existential standpoint, too. It would be a strange existentialism which abandoned such central concepts.

At a certain point in psychospiritual development the person has to take responsibility for his or her own growth, and cannot rely on the pressure of society to carry them on. In that sense it must be an individual journey. But to assume that the real self is a solipsistic self is a misunderstanding of the nature of being human.

The fact that the individual has to make the choice does not mean that it is taken in isolation. In fact, the more we are in touch with our real self, the less likely we are to engage in neurotic, driven, competitive, power hungry or co-dependent relationships, and the more authentically loving we can be.

The real self is also a loving self, and a social self. Development takes place in a social context which includes a wide variety of relationships to other people and to the society. This is why growth groups and communities became such an important part of Humanistic Psychology, as did movement toward social change. It was always understood in most

humanistic circles and publications that we needed to find ourselves, but we also needed to find the other, and that to do this, we needed to create a healthy, loving, and honest world.

THE TRANSPERSONAL

How does all this relate to the transpersonal? There is a very close connection between the humanistic and the transpersonal; it was Maslow who was the prime mover in initiating Humanistic Psychology, and it was Maslow who was the prime mover in initiating transpersonal psychology. And at present there is a very close relationship between the Association for Humanistic Psychology and the Association for Transpersonal Psychology.

Transpersonal psychology is now a well-defined field in its own right, with two international journals and a multitude of excellent texts. But it need not be seen as a school of counselling with a separate identity but rather as a dimension of all counselling which can be given a chance or ignored. It is a human dimension available to all, which most of us have come across in one way or another. In this sense, it is not something strange or marginal, but a readily available resource.

Petruska Clarkson (2003) showed that the transpersonal relationship has its place alongside the working alliance, the transference-countertransference relationship, the authentic relationship and the developmentally needed relationship. It needs just as much attention, just as much respect, as any of these other and more widely accepted relationships.

Many of the people who are reading this, for example, will probably have had what Maslow (1973) calls a peak experience. One's reactions while watching a beautiful sunset or listening to an especially moving piece of music, for example, can lead to peak experiences. Tanzer (1967) found that childbirth could be a potent source of peak experiences, if the mother (in suitable circumstances) allowed it to be, and ways were found of teaching mothers how to have such experiences. Instead of having a painful and distressing time, these mothers often had 'a great and mystical experience, a religious experience if you wish – an illumination, a revelation, an insight.' (Maslow 1973, p. 183)

According to the classic psychological account from the work of Abraham Maslow, peak experiences tend to be triggered by intense, inspiring occurrences. 'It looks as if any experience of real excellence, or real perfection... tends to produce a peak experience' (Maslow 1973, p. 175). The lives of most people are filled with long periods of relative inattentiveness, lack of involvement or even boredom. In contrast, in their broadest sense, peak experiences are those moments when we become deeply involved in, excited by and absorbed in the world.

The most powerful peak experiences are relatively rare. For Maslow, the highest peaks include

feelings of limitless horizons opening to the vision, the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of great ecstasy and wonder and awe, the loss of placing in time and space... (Maslow 1970, p. 164)

This now ties in with our understanding of the transpersonal. We can say that a peak experience of this latter kind may give us a glimpse at least of the transpersonal realm. And such glimpses can be genuinely helpful, as Anthony & Ecker (1987) make clear.

Ken Wilber (1983) noted that in the process of psychospiritual development there are three broad phases: the prepersonal, where we have not yet achieved full rationality; the personal, where we have been fully initiated into language, and mathematics, and science; and the transpersonal, where we go beyond the conventional bounds of time and space and do not find ordinary notions of rationality enough to encompass our experience. To put it another way, there is the personal unconscious as described by Freud and others; there is the conscious and the preconscious, which are much more accessible and familiar; and there is the superconscious, as described in psychosynthesis (Assagioli 1991), as well as the collective unconscious, as described by Jung (1968). The transpersonal is the realm of the superconscious.

Wilber (1997) also points to four great divisions within the realm of the transpersonal: the Centaur (the first level of the transpersonal, still partly in the personal, but characterised by a mystical experience called the discovery of the real self, as we have seen above); the Psychic/Subtle or the Subtle (the great realm of symbols and images and archetypes and big dreams and deity figures described by people like Jung, Hillman and Cortright); the Causal (the deep water of spirituality, where all the symbols disappear, and we are alone with the infinite divine); and the Nondual, where all categories disappear, and the self too – the ultimate mystical experience.

If we accept this broad schema, it becomes clear that Humanistic Psychology has taken possession of the Centaur stage, because all of the therapies described as humanistic believe in the real self, and in the kind of ecstasy which can be described as a peak experience. This is perhaps only the foothills of mysticism, but it does have a place for the kind of experience which James Horne (1978) describes as ‘casual extraverted mysticism’. Gestalt therapy talks about the ‘mini-satori’, psychodrama talks about the ‘cathartic breakthrough’, primal integration talks about ‘personal transformation’, person-centred therapy talks about ‘becoming real’, humanistic-existential therapy talks about ‘being authentic’, and so forth. But this is all on the edges of the transpersonal proper, because it still retains the ‘skin-encapsulated ego’ described by Alan Watts and referred to by Joanna Macy (1991).

If we want to go to the heartland of the transpersonal as it reveals itself in therapy, we have to move on to the Subtle level. It is here that we find the phenomena which truly go beyond the personal. It is here we find what Henri Corbin (1969) has called the ‘imaginal world’, what Schwartz-Salant (1986) has called ‘the subtle body’, what Whitmont (1987) has called ‘the guidance self’, what Assagioli (1975) has called ‘the higher self’, what Hillman (1997) has called ‘the soul’, what Jung (1968) has called ‘the high archetypes’, what Buddhists (Govinda 1973) have called ‘the sambhogakaya’, and what more recently Cortright (2007) has described as ‘the antaratman’.

If we visualise the Real Self as previously discussed as the centre of a series of concentric circles, comprising the various false selves in daily use, all we then need to do is to visualise the Subtle self as inside that, and the Causal self as inside that again. (See Figure 2)

Figure 2: Deeper Circles of the Self



Thus experiencing the real self can be seen as a possible springboard towards further levels of the transpersonal self and ultimately the Nondual where the self itself disappears.

IS HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY STILL NEEDED?

In many ways, Humanistic Psychology is now part of the mainstream, rather than being something new and unfamiliar. It is no longer unfashionable to admit that you are interested in understanding yourself and what you might be or become. In fact the 'new' positive psychology movement (Snyder & Lopez 2002) has much in common with Humanistic Psychology, and the 'new' approaches to coaching (Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck 2010) have taken much from the humanistic tradition, particularly when working with organizations.

Today there are fewer growth centres than there were partly because the approach has been adopted much more widely. Certainly, most courses which are concerned with training people to deal with others now include some emphasis on understanding yourself, and they use humanistic thinking and humanistic methods - often unacknowledged. They have to, because any attempt to understand or work with others on any kind of emotional level has to involve some self-understanding, some self-awareness. And this is the heartland of Humanistic Psychology.

But the decline in growth centres can also be related to the increase in professionalization and of teaching people how to fit better into the status quo. Thus while much has been absorbed into the mainstream from Humanistic Psychology, many of the more radical assumptions of Humanistic Psychology have been left behind. Humanistic notions such as the importance of

self-development for its own sake, of evolution throughout life, of the wholeness of the individual, of creating democratic groups and communities with open and honest communication, indeed of the idea that authenticity and the real self matter more than success have in many cases fallen by the wayside.

It more therefore be more necessary than ever that Humanistic Psychology become the standard bearer for a radical vision of what it means to be human.

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