

In Memoriam of *Self & Society* – A Humanistic Light Goes out in the UK as Darkness Fast Approaches?¹

Paul & Sinziana Barber

Come back to square one, just the minimum bare bones. Relaxing with the present moment, relaxing with hopelessness; relaxing with death, not resisting the fact that things end, that things pass, that things have no lasting substance, that everything is changing all the time – that is the basic message. (Pema Chodron)

The Legacy of *Self & Society*

Self & Society, an established 50-plus year-old influencer that raised our spirits while drip-feeding aspects of super-health and value into society, is now dead. I'm angry about this [Paul]. Its loss is gravely concerning, as we saw it as a thermometer of individual and societal well-being. But maybe we deserve what we get?

Self & Society fed me [Paul] as a youth during my psychiatric nurse training, inspired me as an academic and kept me upon the straight and narrow as a therapist. I associate it with my earliest colleagues and mentors, Joe May, John Heron, John Rowan, James Kilty, Gaie Houston and Peter Reason – I guess the original life blood and moral incentive that supported *Self & Society* has slowed somewhat since then?

As humanism is also in most quarters all but forgotten in modern life, who or what will now shake us up and stand up for humanistic thinking and values that are so needed in

therapy, coaching, education and life in general? Too many contemporary folk have come to identify with narrow professional or state-sanctioned notions of health, to believe in the expedient morals of politics and have long forgotten what it is, or could be, to be self-actualised! We aim to correct this a little here.

Indeed, do you, dear reader, yet remember what our humanistic commandments are? Here's a reminder:

- Thou shalt strive to promote the greater good of humanity before all selfish desires.
- Thou shalt be curious, for asking questions is the only way to find answers.
- Harm to your fellow human is harm to humanity, therefore thou shalt not victimise anyone.
- Thou shalt treat all humans as equals, regardless of race, gender, age, creed, identity, orientation, physical ability or status.
- Thou shalt use reason as your guide, knowledge, observation, rational analysis, & heart-felt intuition are the best ways to

determine any course of action.

- Thou shalt not force your beliefs on to others, nor insist that yours be the only & correct way to live happily.
 - If thou dost govern, thou shalt govern with reason & compassion, not with a need directed by personal gain & power.
 - Thou shalt act for the betterment of your fellow humans, & be, whenever possible, altruistic in your deeds.
 - Thou shalt be good to the Earth & its bounties, for without it, humankind is lost.
 - Thou shalt impart thy knowledge & wisdom gained in your lifetime to the next generation, so that hopefully with each passing century, humanity will grow wiser & more humane.
- (After Hagen, 2013.)

The last commandment rankles me [Paul] most in terms of *Self & Society*. Such values as these offer a potent antidote to the dog-eat-dog competitiveness of commerce, & power imposition of statehood. They keep democracy alive and must be passed onwards!

What better ethics than these? – don't they make all other personal and professional codes appear superfluous and trite? Spell out power and sexual abuse as immoral in professional relationships by all means, hang those who murder; but such would never happen in a cultural climate truly attentive to and policing of humanistic principles. They also enshrine a practical Christianity worthy of emulation.

The above commandments, plus the additions of 'love and interest in people' along with 'a sense of humour', are, for us, essentials of our personal morals and professional practice.

But what does all this soul-enhancing humanism mean in hands-on practice? Well, when you have absorbed sufficient humanism

that it flows out from your pores, skills become less important than *presence*. As we hope you can appreciate from the example of humanism in action below – for it's not who you are (*a therapist*), but what you are (*a fellow traveller*) that really counts:

So, one day, I [Sinziana] asked my client if he trusted me, at which moment his tears came through. No more answer needed. I then asked him to undergo together one little exercise, which Buddhist monks practise together, in pairs of trusted friends, in their monasteries. I was to ask him the one question & he would answer with anything that came to mind, then I would repeat the question. 'WHO ARE YOU?'

He eventually said after a long opening silence:

- 'I do not know precisely.'
- 'Holes through my stomach.'
- 'A person who is changing right now.'

Long silence [...]

- 'I do not know precisely but I feel a pressure in my lower left side of the belly.'
- 'A Joker's face!'
- 'I don't know, I am everything, everything!'
- 'I feel very good, very strong.'
- 'A victim.'
- 'Sometimes I am myself, I am myself here.'
- 'I'm a child when I'm not in role as me.'

Long silence [...]

- 'I'm a pure energy.'
- 'I'm like a ball of energy which I have to share equally & still have it as a whole, in the end. I share it with other balls, much smaller, so that I could connect with

them.’

‘I don’t know, something very big.’

‘I have the impression that very high on the left side there is a very big sun, & I am like a big circle, like a portal of some kind.’

‘I do not know; I think I am a human being.’

‘It feels as if I had gathered more things, water, air, light, & I stored these inside.’

‘I am made of various essences, some good some bad, one good, one bad.’

Long silence [...]

‘It’s all right everywhere.’

That is what the ex-drug addict cum drug dealer had become. He once used to ‘walk on hell, gazing at flowers’; but now, he had completely stopped taking any questionable substance for over half a year. He had even got rid of the merchandise. He had stopped driving without a licence & started walking or biking through Bucharest. He left his old gang. He even left his flat which he was sharing with his brother & a common friend, & moved closer to the forest. As he found his own real nature he drew closer to Nature.

Such are the fruits of a solid humanistic presence attentive to equality, authenticity and phenomenological inquiry when you have characterised the same – for humanism is an attitude, not a theory! With the loss of *Self & Society*, robust humanistic dialogue and presence such as this is diminished on the wider scale – and by God, Society sorely needs it!

Self-realisation is effortless.

(Anon)

Another Safeguard against the Shadow Has Fallen

Without an inherent sense of humanism, humanity and society, and indeed ourselves,

can so readily degenerate into monsters overtaken by darker forces run by the baser in us, viz. fear, power, ego and greed.

Remember the spiritual superior tone of the Nazi Party, the mass executions of Pol Pot, the many who went missing under Stalin, the numerous politically and commercially inspired wars that litter recent history, the societal rupture sanctioned by Covid. No influence of humanism penetrated here!

Taking Covid as an example, perhaps humanism in the UK deserved to die, when so few of us spoke out against the State’s rape of democracy and decency, and stood idly by to let the interests of Big Pharma and an experiment in mass deception and public control unfold to embarrass humanistic values (see Barber & Barber, 2022 & 2023a)? I [Paul] was deeply ashamed of the humanistic community then – which portrayed a Sunday afternoon humanism without teeth! Luckily, the editor of *S&S* was alert and awake, unlike most of the humanistic flock, and we got our heavily researched articles published, at a time when the press was gagged, and mainstream journals were covered by government pressure. Sadly, recent medical research in Canada is now suggesting that the triple vaccinated are developing Aids – something we were warned about by such prestigious journals as the *Lancet* and *Science* early on in 2020! But who will serve a whistle-blowing role in future and forestall such catastrophes with a government-controlled press? A government that’s scared to death of legally imposed damages as are being currently brought in America! With youth so ardently attuned to their I-phones and slaves of such media candy as Facebook, government with its tentacles of influence can now ever so readily manipulate future mass opinion and truth ever more through their

established politics of fear.

Down through the years, *Self & Society* acted as a sounding-board and influencer of our higher qualities. It has now withered and died – is this indicative of a new dark age fast approaching? Or has UK humanism just grown senile? And what did *Self & Society* and its particular brand of humanism really stand for, in a practical sense? That humans cannot be viewed or reduced to their functions or parts (*for robots we are not*); that we exist in a unique human context and cosmic ecology (*for our co-created field is unique to us*); that we are conscious and aware of our conscious awareness (*we are sentinel alert beings*); that we are responsible because of our ability to choose (*authors of our life*); that we hunt for meaning and place great value on creativity (*we search for understanding and for personal expression*); that we intentionally seek goals, & manipulate future events and outcomes (*strive for fulfilment and self-actualisation*); that we endeavour to meet physical, social and mental needs along with transpersonal aspirations (*we are holistic beings with spiritual longings*). Do you see the ghosts of Maslow's hierarchy of needs rising up to haunt us here? Not to mention self-actualisation as a quality of super health?

Had I not known I was already dead I
might have mourned my own passing.
(Ota Dokan 1432–86)

So What Price Self-Actualisation Now in this Day and Age?

When Maslow first proffered his theory of self-actualisation in 1943, he stated that higher needs generally won't be pursued until lower needs were met, but he later changed

his tune, reframing his belief that a physiological, safety or psychological need does not have to be completely satisfied for acquisition of self-actualisation. He realised, belatedly, that many put their creative pursuits before their survival needs. Perhaps we have a soul after all?

To Maslow, self-actualisation is the ability to become the best version of oneself, a desire to become more & more of what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming. In his later thoughts, Maslow identified the highest, most inclusive holistic level of human consciousness, beyond self-actualisation, as Self-Transcendence! But perhaps society and its current offspring have grown tired of personal growth? And like flies are now well and truly glued to our hedonistic commercial-cum-cultural fly-paper supported by political speak? After all, self-actualisers are very dangerous people – they think for themselves!

Maslow further proposed that the people who successfully self-actualise share certain common health-promoting characteristics. An ability to achieve peak experiences, to be highly creative, autonomous, objective, concerned about humanity, more accepting of themselves and others. More humanistic, even? Self-actualising people were also seen as more efficient at perceiving reality, and more comfortable with '*reality as it is*'. They were also better at detecting what is phony or dishonest, and what really exists. Their perception was not so distorted by their needs, whether these needs were imagined or actual. In accepting themselves, others and nature, they were also not ashamed or guilty about being human, nor over-fussed with their own shortcomings, imperfections, frailties and weaknesses. But neither were they critical of

the same in others. In humanistic fashion, they respected and esteemed both themselves and others. These qualities, pinnacles of personal development, *Self & Society* stood for.

So, the demise of *Self & Society* also puts another nail in the coffin of personal and social actualisation, along with public and political decency – isn't this all a very sad sign of our jaundiced times?

We seek it but cannot see it;
We call it 'subtle'.
We listen to it but cannot hear it;
We call it essential.
We reach for it but cannot grasp it;
We call it 'serene'.

Lao-Tzu

Note

1 Any comments on this article, please feel free to contact us on gestaltinaction@msn.com or sinzina@gmail.com.

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Life is a balance of holding on & letting go!
Anon

About the contributors



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Sinziana Barber(MSc., BA): I am a published and awarded poet, a clinical psychologist and Integrative Psychotherapist who is also trained in Recall Healing, well versed in Quantum Physics and modern and ancient philosophy. My therapeutic style is eclectic, heavily Jungian and challenging in the 1960s style of radical humanism.

Paul and Sinziana run international Integrative Therapy workshops, team-building and consultancy on-line, which incorporate Recall Healing, Psychogeniology, Group Analysis, Phenomenological inquiry, Zen and Gestalt Psychotherapy, with a very large dollop of humanism flavouring each strand!

Heaven and earth and I are of the same
root,
The ten-thousand things and I are of one
substance.

Sojo, 384–414 AD