

ON HUMANISTIC PRINCIPLES
IN PSYCHOTHERAPY AND GROUPLEADING

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Practitioners in the field of human relations work within frameworks of different philosophies and principles. Within this framework they use modifications adapted to specific situations. It is important to differentiate between changes of general philosophy or necessary specific adaptations. This is essential not only for the sake of scientific clarity but for possible dangerous confusions resulting from inaccuracies. I painfully remember C. G. Jung's articles on "Aryan versus Jewish Philosophies" (meaning Jung warns Freud) in the *Zuercher Zeitung* (the Swiss "Times") in 1934. This differentiation provided a convenient tool for the pseudo-scientific excuse of Nazi Psychology. All conceptual approaches which lend themselves to creating a "we-they" philosophy of psychotherapy therefore deserve careful scrutiny.

While I appreciate and, on the whole, agree with Lapkin's way of working with ghetto youth, I oppose the appearance of restricting his modifications to a special group. It appears to me that Lapkin has changed his theoretical framework from an early psychoanalytic toward a modern humanistic approach. The principles he uses with his work with ghetto youth have been stated by existentialists and humanists—Binswanger, Boss, Heidigger, Malone, Maslow, Mullan, Rogers, Satir, Warkentin, Whitaker, and scores of others.

Lapkin states that traditional psychological techniques are not useful for black, underprivileged and radical students, "we try to impose our attitude of adjusting to soci-

ety and our belief that change will come about if we overcome transference relationships with our parents. This situation of completely divergent value systems contributes to making us ineffective with the new generation of radicals." Lapkin offers, as alternative for working with ghetto youth, learning versus curative approaches. "In working with blacks I prefer to see myself as a stranger in a foreign land. I come with a desire to learn about my new surroundings. I must leave behind my sense of security that I know the way things are."

Such wonderment rather than knowing, such using myself with all my perceptions, feelings, thoughts, receiving the other as a new person rather than as a computable and processable entity has been the welcome change from an "objective" medical to a "subjective" humanistic psychological model. I use myself and whatever I know—ever knew—with every patient, student or group. I do not change this approach, this directive, while working with various individuals or populations; I maintain flexibility, openness, response-ability as the main directive of all my work.

If sharing of myself is valid for young, poor, black students, it is also valid for old, rich, white businessmen. Yet my sharing will be adapted to each individual and sub-group with "selective authenticity." I will choose, consciously and intuitively, which personal approach and technical means may best correspond to my partners' receptivity; I will be autonomously not autistically authentic in each professional encounter.

Similarly: laws of growth and environment are universal; their occurrence in each individual or group is unique. The juxtaposition of middle class white children becoming sick through their negative parent-introjects, while black underprivileged ones suffer from societal pressures can only be seen as a surface phenomenon.

A response to Benjamin Lapkin's "Modification of the Psychotherapeutic Approach to the Needs of the Ghetto Youth," this journal, May 1970. Here, Ruth Cohn, Director of the Institute for Living-Learning, sees Lapkin's statement as another expression of humanistic Psychology. See Vol. 1, No. 3. HAROLD H. GOLDBERG, Editor

All children experience society through parents or other elders they are fated to be born or raised by. All children relate to their parents through the environment they live in and are conditioned by. The experiential aspect of this dualistic phenomenon varies, but not its general principle. (Other factors of healthy and pathogenic importance are, of course, biological and terrestrial givens.) Of course the way individuals and sub-groups are affected by parents and society varies and may mean happy or painful experiences, depending on the vicissitudes of how, where and with whom a child's living-learning occurs.

Whenever justice is forsaken, the upper scale is as far away from the lower one as the horizontal balance. As peace is indivisible, so is justice.

Lapkin's decision to approach black ghetto youth as a stranger coming to learn from them has validity for all psychotherapeutic and community endeavors. Yet strangers are never all strange, because all strangers have their humanness in common. The stranger who is a professional has learned to recognize and to respond to specifics; he has trained perceptivity, empathy, intuition, courage in his responsiveness with people. His struggle has been for self-actualization and finding tools to help others to struggle for their own.

Lapkin deplores that psychologists have forgotten to ask questions (which I understand to mean not being receptive and open). The art of stimulating meaningful communication is, to a great extent, my ability to be open and to state myself rather than to expect the other one to answer questions. "Interviewing" is tactless, as well as non-productive. The freedom to be myself is contagious.

Being authentic—the key word of humanistic philosophy—is the finest vehicle for communication between all people (regardless of sex, age, race and creed); it succeeds when observations, generalizations and interpretations fail.

The need to be aware and to be recognized as individuals is growing fast in this world of mass populations. The Movement of Interpersonal Growth Facilitation is international. I spoke with students from West Berlin who had experimented with peer groups for mental health and study problems. They discovered that this was not sufficient; their group improved with professional consultants.

Credo: The more I as a person respect myself as a societal partner of all people; the more I am aware of my personal givens and the environmental reality; the more I as a psychologist perceive of my job as an aid to the self-realization of others—the less will I stumble into false claims of expertise or of ignorance.

In my search for authenticity, I am aware that I do not come to my job with groups of black students for the purpose of learning from them—although I also do—and I do not come as an expert on blackness or on psychodynamics of a specific individual—but I do come as an expert on how I can stimulate individuals' and groups' self-actualization.

Psychologists striving for self-awareness and other-relatedness come to share the art of being a stranger who helps other strangers towards self-actualization. This art includes respectful gauging of appropriate closeness and distance, tactful timing and direct confrontation—for me and the other, whether we are black, white, rich, poor, old, young, women, men —