

## NARCISSISTS (INCORPORATED): A REPLY TO MORRIS

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### Abstract

It is usually assumed that the human condition can be improved in at least two ways; by developing an individual's potential for behaviour that is both prosocial and personally satisfying, and by bringing about social changes which might be expected to lead to the same goal. The two major industrialized nations have chosen one, but not the other, of the two paths. It is argued that the Human Potential Movement is preferred in the North American continent because it does not endanger the power by means of which the ruling élites manipulate the beliefs, values and self-concepts of the common run of men.

### Résumé

D'habitude, on présume qu'on peut améliorer la condition humaine d'au moins deux façons: en développant chez un individu son potentiel pour un agir à la fois prosocial et satisfaisant personnellement, et en créant des changements sociaux aptes à nous acheminer vers le même but. Les deux grandes nations industrielles ont choisi l'une, mais non l'autre, de ces deux voies. On affirme qu'on préfère le Human Potential Movement en Amérique de Nord car il ne met pas en péril les mécanismes par lesquels l'élite dirigeante manipule les croyances, les valeurs et les concepts de soi du commun du peuple.

The thesis is probably correct that totalitarian regimes, which are intolerant of ideologies (ideas of a political, economic and cultural sort) at odds with their own, will prohibit the establishment in their terrain of a "Human Potential Movement" described by Morris. However this would also have been true of the previous regimes from which the current totalitarian ones sprang. Tsarist Russia, to the religious fanaticism of which Solzhenitsyn, a favourite author of Morris, would like the Russian people to return, also debarred "inner directed", "authentic" and "creative" writers from publishing. The situation of the intellectual in Tsarist Russia has been described by McLeish (1975). "It was possible to be sentenced to death for writing . . . Many scientists were under routine police surveillance. Their journals or books, even private correspondence, were subject to seizure and censorship" (p. 26-27). In 1883, the coffin of Turgenev, an eminent writer with no obvious political preoccupations, was brought from Paris to St. Petersburg in conditions of the greatest secrecy so that uprisings by students would be prevented (Berlin, 1973). Even as late as Easter, 1917, a few months before he was ousted and murdered, the Tsar was still trying to censor abstracts of papers to be presented to the first All-Russia Congress of Physiology (McLeish, 1975). Morris is unwise to enlist Solzhenitsyn on his side.

A second criticism of Morris is the fact that contemporary political regimes dislike *political* dissidents who voice their discontent with a state which prohibits free speech about the possibility of a changed or alternative form of government. The most notable example is the Russian physicist Sakharov (1974) who moved from worrying about nuclear weapons being in the hands of Soviet bureaucrats, heady with the idea of negotiating from military strength, to the incarceration of political prisoners and the denial of such "basic human rights" as free speech and publication, freedom to move about the world and so on. Such men are equally dangerous in the United States which has been characterized almost from its beginning as a country with what Hofstadter (1965) has labelled the "paranoid style in American politics". This is the fear, often of a phantastic nature, of radical political activity designed to redistribute political power and income more equitably in that country. The list of repressive Acts (the first was passed in 1798 to keep the fledgling country safe from ideas emanating from the French Revolution), unconstitutional harrassments and loyalty oaths, is embarrassingly long (Alexander, 1976).

In 1917-1918, "fear of Bolshevism" led to the passage of Acts which allowed pacifists to be jailed, and allegedly "seditious" pamphlets to be banned from

the mails. In the unconstitutional "Palmer raids" people with radical views were arrested, hastily persecuted and deported *en masse*. After the Second World War and the "loss of China," the "Communist menace" surfaced again, together with the usual retinue of loyalty oaths and unconstitutional harrassments, one of which is especially relevant to the "Human Potential Movement." In 1938, the notorious House Committee on un-American Activities (HUAC) was established, ostensibly to deal with salient bands of Fascists and Nazis making occasional appearances in rural America. After 1945, it began elaborate investigations of a variety of writers, professional people and teachers, two of whom from California — the home of the Human Potential Movement — were accused of "subversive activities." In Alexander's (1976) words, "These two teachers were accused of subversive activities because they tried to get students to look into, and think about, and discuss, current controversial issues, and because they brought into the classroom, materials such as those published by UNESCO" (pp. 17-18). The two teachers, after losing their jobs, took their case all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court and every verdict went against them. Not a squeak about this has ever been heard from Carl Rogers.

The remaining repressive events and agencies — the McCarthy episode, the degrading treatment of nonviolent blacks and whites in the 1950s during drives to register black voters, the imprisonment of anti-war leaders in the 1960s, the continuing lawlessness of the CIA and FBI — can be left to historians (Commager, 1976), although it should be remembered that the initial militancy of (largely) white students in the 1960s began in May 1960 when HUAC swept into San Francisco to intimidate further a random batch of Californian teachers, most of whom were young and on probation. The ensuing riot was filmed by the FBI and labelled "Communist-inspired and Communist-led" (Horowitz, 1962, p. 83), much to the annoyance of all sorts of religious leaders in the Bay Area. Horowitz (1962) provides a better explanation, "You couldn't tell (young students) one day that they lived in the greatest political democracy on earth, and then face them the next with widespread fear among their fellows of expressing political beliefs, and not get a reaction" (p. 83).

But you can tell, if you are dealing with the spokesmen and condottieri of the Human Potential Movement who are usually busy inspecting their psyche and attending to more polite events, such as, whether they have realized their potential for behavior that is somehow more prosocial and personally satisfying than at present. It appears therefore that the superior quality of American over Russian repressive forces is the willingness of the

former to tolerate the appearance of dissident ideas, usually of a psychological and non-political sort, which are harmless, partly because they are known to only a few people who dislike the barren, microscopic enquiries of conventional social science, and partly because, in the worst and rarest eventuality, they can be assimilated in various ways by the economic and social system. Exponents of these ideas may be attacked and derided verbally — see Hofstadter's (1965) *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* for many examples — but they are rarely jailed, tortured, beaten, treated as insane and so on, provided they are certifiably as harmless as the Human Potential Movement.

To explain and clarify this point, a brief return to elementary history is necessary. The young American Republic was "liberal" in the sense that it was cut off from any feudal past and its founders and constitution-makers drew their inspiration from Locke and Adam Smith who welcomed "... the society and politics of choice, the society and politics of competition, the society and politics of the market ... Individuals were free to chose their religion, their pattern of life, their marriage partners, their occupations. They were free to make the best arrangements ... in everything that affected their living" (Macpherson, 1965, p. 6). In America, the inevitable inequality associated with this freedom appeared to be discounted by the presence of an open frontier which abounded in resources of all kinds, ready to be exploited by technological developments in communications, agriculture and industry. By the 1840s the country could boast 39 millionaires (Mills, 1959).

The most successful of these "free" men at acquiring wealth and property, the so-called "captains of industry," gradually recognized that the business of acquiring more material advantages could be accomplished most efficiently by exercising control — control of competition by organizing price-fixing monopolies in every industry, control of politicians by patronage and corruption (the "spoils system"), and control of dissident political factions by the use of violence which became more necessary in the last decades of the nineteenth century when the system of monopolies created cycles of unemployment and economic stagnation (Baran and Sweezy, 1966, p. 82).

The result of all this free exploitation of land and people has been described by Hofstadter (1963):

... the cities that grew with American industry were themselves industrial wastelands — centers of vice and poverty, ugly, full of crowded slums, badly administered ... Big business choked free competition and concentrated political power in a few hands ... business, great

and small, had debased politics: working with powerful bosses in city, state and nation, it had won favors and privileges in return for its subsidies to corrupt machines. Domination of affairs by political bosses and business organizations was now seen to be a threat to democracy itself. (p.2)

An unpleasant picture (it still is) but help appeared to be at hand in the shape of the first salient "Potential" man, John Dewey, Professor of Philosophy, Psychology and Pedagogy and director of the laboratory school at the University of Chicago from 1894 to 1904. In 1897 he wrote *My Pedagogic Creed* which contained high-flown sentiments such as "Education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform," and every teacher should think of himself as "... a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the right social life" (Dewey, 1897, p. 17). This notion appeared very abstractly in Dewey's 1916 *magnum opus*, *Democracy and Education*: "... it is the business of the school environment to eliminate ... the unworthy features of the existing environment from influence on mental habitudes" (Dewey, 1916, p. 24).

This is another example of the redefinition of reality to encourage and boost self-congratulation. Of all the socializing agencies that might influence social change, the schools were the weakest. Teachers, paid from the public purse, were in no position to carry out the functions arrogated to them by Dewey: they were lowly-esteemed and underpaid, came from the culturally-restricted homes of the lower classes (upper stratum) and often had to supplement their income moonlighting during vacations. The schools themselves, particularly in ghetto areas, showed debilitating features such as broken-down buildings, inadequate facilities and an emphasis on athletics rather than on academic work and gifted children (Hofstadter, 1966, p. 300).

Why did Dewey influence anybody? According to Cohen (1954), the answer lies in his optimism about the future, an optimism which is reflected in his idea that the aim of education was to promote "growth" in a communal setting, an idea which the innocent Dewey thought that Jefferson preached. "In place of a school set apart from life as a place for learnings we have a miniature social group in which study and growth are incidents of present shared experience" (Dewey, 1916, p. 416). Hofstadter (1966) is understandably irritated by the use of such a botanical metaphor. Plant "growth" is determined by material conditions whereas psycho-educational growth is a matter of choice, value-judgements and the power of other models against which the teacher competed on the most unfavourable terms. Hofstadter fails to understand that "growth" must be understood

connotationally. Left undefined, it has the attractive feeling-meaning exercised by its descendants like "potential", "creativity", "identity" and "self-actualization". Who would be so cruel as to kill such beautiful words by asking for a definition for their place in a nomothetic network and, above all, for their measurement?

Rogers was one of Dewey's students at Teachers' College, Columbia (Dewey had left Chicago after a fight with the President who wanted to get rid of the experimental school). After spending the Depression years quietly as a clinician in Rochester, Rogers (1961) produced a psychological translation of Dewey's conception of human nature and a therapy based on Dewey's view of teaching. Both the teacher (Dewey) and the therapist (Rogers) are concerned about "growth" (Dewey) "actualizing potentialities" (Rogers); their function is to provide the right kind of nonpunitive (child-centred, client-centred) conditions in which the child can "grow" ("actualizing his potential"). This release of the hypothetical inner and latent resources of the individual is "revolutionary", according to Rogers, but it is clearly a modern version of Dewey (1916). "One of the most revolutionary concepts to grow out of our clinical experience is the growing recognition that the innermost core of man's nature, the deepest layers of his personality, the base of his 'animal' nature ... is basically socialized, forward-moving, rational and realistic" (Rogers, 1961, pp. 350-351). Like Dewey (1916), Rogers believes, somewhat less explicitly, that this "self-actualized person" or "authentic self" will alter the nastier features of the existing order or society, but does not specify how this improvement will be brought about.

The remaining "Potential" people — and Morris forgets to include Wilhelm Reich, Paul Goodman, R. D. Laing, Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire — assume, like Rogers and Dewey, that the ills of any society, most obviously of the liberal-democratic ones in which they live, can be cured (or at least made tolerable) by changing people in the only domains in which thinking with impunity is apparently allowed, i.e., in some kinds of psychology and education. The slide of the human race into oblivion via nuclear wars or famines could be arrested with a little bit more of love in home, school and encounter groups (Rogers, 1970). Even Fromm, an original member of the Frankfort School (Jay, 1973) whose members combined Marx and Freud in an attempt to explain why Western society did not disintegrate after the First World War, has come to believe this nonsense. As Jacoby (1975) acidly remarks in his dismissal of *The Art of Loving* as a wishy-washy potboiler, "Love and Happiness are repairs for the do-it-yourselfer" (p. 37).

Apart from the fact that it is not supported by evidence, the "Human Potential Movement" suffers

from three more debilitating defects:

(a) The serious and troublesome mundane affairs, with which the individual has to cope, are rarely mentioned. While boasting of his 46 years in clinical work, Rogers (1974) fails to describe a variety of events and experiences that alarmed less sensitive people: the Depression years, when he was fortunate enough to have a job; the McCarthy era and loyalty oaths; the Kennedy-Khrushchev confrontation and the fear of nuclear weapons; the black struggles during the 1950's, the Vietnam war and the Watergate scandals. One can only assume that Rogers agrees with Perls (1976, 1973), another of Morris' favourite authors, who writes about the predicament of modern man. "His world offers him vast opportunities for enrichment and enjoyment . . . He does not approach the adventure of living with either excitement or zest" (p. XI). Anyone or any member of the Human Potential Movement who writes like this is a friend of the established social order in the United States where 20 per cent of families have a near poverty income (Heilbroner, 1976, pp. 37-38).

(b) Records of past history show that "conceptual change," or the sort sponsored by Dewey, Rogers and their associates, may follow violent political and economic change but never precede it. Indeed the chief revolutionaries (Cromwell, Lenin, Castro and Mao) call for order and restraint, particularly sexual restraint. "Such revolutionary leaders see sexual freedom as . . . a sign of decadent weakness and a dangerous and reactionary concern with private happiness at the expense of public duty" (Hitchcock, 1969, p. 5).

(c) This is the nub of the matter; Morris' "new concept of psychological health" amounts to self-centredness, living for the moment, narcissism, and psychological poison. People are confused and afraid of events and changes over which they have no control: the perception of an increasingly hostile environment which they cannot place in any historical context; an incomprehensible, apparently-sophisticated society (Hapgood, 1974) and the sudden realization that the material advantages of the past three decades will dwindle as a bleaker future approaches. The appropriate narcissistic response is one of self-fulfillment as self-survival, of an anarchic thirst for immediate pleasure, and a dislike of anyone, particularly children, who lay claim to adult attention, time and resources which could be much better spent on present hedonism (Lasch, 1976).

At best, self-fulfillment counsellors have been unable to diminish these responses; at worst — and this seems to be the case — they create them (Andreski, 1974).

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