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# HUMANISTICALLY ORIENTED EDUCATION and COUNSELING PRACTICES

Position Paper Regarding The Controversy

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*... + Introduction Oct. 1982*

# HUMANISTICALLY ORIENTED EDUCATIONAL AND COUNSELING PRACTICES

POSITION PAPER REGARDING THE CONTROVERSY

Association for Humanistic Education and Development (AHEAD)

Religiously and politically conservative groups, the New Right, have created a climate of negativism toward humanistically-oriented helping professions, which is similar to the extreme conservatism of the fifties. The New Right has singled out secular humanism as it did communism in the 1950's as the threat to the American way of life. Secular Humanism, viewed as an anti-God religion and a corrupting influence on society, has been equated with humanistically-oriented educational and counseling practices. A humanistically-oriented philosophy has become an integral part of helping professions with a belief in the innate value of the individual—the right of each to exist, believe, and function as an autonomous human being. The Association for Humanistic Education and Development, a division of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, strongly opposes any infringement on the rights of helping professionals with regard to the use of ethically-sanctioned, humanistically-oriented materials, techniques, and practices.

Tactics of these groups have always included vociferous attacks but seldom have such groups had the resources or the strength to seriously threaten moderate or liberal institutions. The events of the "McCarthy Era" remain as examples of the capability of these groups when given sufficient resources and a strong power base. The failure of the extremist position in the fifties and its disarray in the sixties was due in large measure to poor financial support and a fragmented organizational structure. The Right Wing remained vocal and negative, but it could not enter the political arena and succeed. Its philosophical position was not only extreme but it was inflexible. For these reasons, with the exception of the "McCarthy Era," it was never taken very seriously by moderate and liberal institutions.

The New Right, however, is a force with which to be reckoned. Moderates and liberals alike are engaged in an ideological struggle with a political power that has become well financed and well organized. Perhaps the critical difference between the Old and the New Rights' positions is a new pragmatic approach. The toning down of its harsh rhetoric and its willingness to build single issue coalitions has enabled the New Right to gain respectability; and, with respectability, financial and political support.

The power base for the Right has evolved from the manipulation of issues which have a tendency to generate fear and anxiety. In the fifties, the source of

power was the fear developed from witch hunts and investigations to purge communism from this country. Any position or program that was counter to the conservative perspective was attacked as being communistic or sympathetic to communism. Many educators and helping professionals found their names on black lists or were slandered in the proceedings surrounding those times.

In one article, Skaife (1951) identified a representative sample of the charges leveled at "communistic teachers", or those who favored

- 1) eliminating scholastic competition,
- 2) abolishing grading,
- 3) subverting parental authority,
- 4) undermining parental influence,
- 5) aiding and abetting immoralities,
- 6) destroying patriotic attitudes, and
- 7) emphasizing techniques typically communistic.

Just as communism generated fear in the fifties, secular humanism seems to be eliciting a similar panic among many in this country today. Many current educators and helping professionals have been blacklisted and slandered within the past few years.

In a recent article, Robinson (1982) noted that "Humanistic Teaching" has been held responsible for

- 1) declining test scores,
- 2) abolition of grading systems,
- 3) lack of discipline,
- 4) undermining of parental rights,
- 5) lack of patriotism, and
- 6) promotion of Godless schools.

Apparently little has changed in the issues addressed by the Right Wing; only a period of 30 years separate the two controversies. In essence, secular humanism has supplanted communism as the focus of fear.

Secular humanism is seen by a variety of New Right groups as the cause of many of society's current ills. The following quotes, taken from the literature of several right wing groups, reflect the views that are prevalent on the Right regarding secular humanism.

"Humanism, rather than teaching children to be humane or to have human understanding, means promoting the principles of the religion of humanism."

"Humanists advocate sexual activity and promiscuity . . . free use of pornography and drugs and endorse prostitution, homosexuality, and abortion on demand in the name of human rights . . . and they are very hostile to Christianity and morality."

"Secular humanism is the underlying philosophy of all schools."

"There is no God, no creation, no sal-

vation, no damnation . . . no absolutes . . . sexual freedom, Internationalism should dominate the social studies."

These views by right wing groups, as they relate to education and helping professionals, are based largely on two criteria:

- 1) The Supreme Court in 1961 declared Secular Humanism to be a godless religion.
- 2) That Secular Humanism exists as a religion and has many adherents who dominate the public schools.

In the 1961 case, *Torcaso v. Watkins*, the court upheld a person's right to abstain from an oath declaring belief in God as a prerequisite to assuming the office of notary public. This oath, unconstitutionally invaded the freedom of belief and religion. Included in the lengthy decision statement is a sentence declaring that no government "can aid those religions based on a belief in the existence of God as against those religions founded on different beliefs." The term Secular Humanism is found in this footnote in reference to this statement: "Among religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God are Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular Humanism, and others." This footnote is also present in a 1970 Supreme Court case involving a conscientious objector.

"Guilt by association" is perhaps the only way to explain the second claim that educators who are in control of the schools are secular humanists. This is based on the assumption that individuals such as John Dewey, B.F. Skinner, and Albert Ellis are secular humanists because they either signed or are highly associated with statements made in the Humanist Manifesto I, II. Since these men are leaders in the helping professions, it is assumed that their followers are humanists in the same vein. One list which has been circulated through *The School Bell* newsletter identifies over 300 words, phrases, groups, and individuals that New Right critics have termed humanistic. These include role playing, decision making, problem solving, behavior modification, group dynamics, B.F. Skinner, Carl Rogers, Sid Simon, William Glasser, Thomas Gordon, Abraham Maslow, J.L. Moreno, Pavlov, and Gestalt.

In the words of one of the critics' most vocal leaders, "Most of the evils of today can be traced to humanism, which has taken over our government, the United Nations, education, television, and most of the influential things of life . . ." (Lamont, 1981, p. 19). Such statements imply a conspiratory role by a vast well-

organized and pervasive group. Little literature is found, however, on the religion of Secular Humanism as cited by the Supreme Court. Critics when discussing the term secular humanism focus on the writings and doctrines of the American Humanist Association with some 3,000 members. Another indication of this vast conspiracy is the Secular Humanist Declaration signed by 58 individuals (Ericson, 1981). Many of the statements the New Right makes regarding secular humanism as they relate to these small groups have in them a grain of truth but are often grossly distorted. Perhaps the point that has caused the most fervor is that of faith in a deity and intervenes in the lives of individuals. The position taken by those of the American Humanist Association and those signing such documents as the Humanist Manifesto I and II (Marshner, 1978) range from the atheistic to the agnostic to the deistic position when it comes to questions of religion and belief in God (Ericson, 1981; Goud, 1982; Robinson, 1982). Yet the literature of the New Right is replete with only one view, that being of an "Anti God" position (Chamber, 1977; Marshner, 1978; McGraw, 1976; Morris, 1980; PACT, 1979; Pro Family Forum, 1980).

Because many of the New Right critics seem to have difficulty tolerating the ambiguities generated by such complex issues as ERA, Sex Education, euthanasia, and decline of parental authority; they have a tendency to create simplistic or discrete categories. This tendency results in their making premature judgements about humanistically-oriented educational and counseling practices.

*In Onida, S.D.*, birth control information has been removed from the high school guidance office, and the word "evolution" is no longer uttered in advanced biology. "Brave New World" and "Catcher in the Rye" have been dropped from classes in literature. The award-winning children's book "Run Shelley, Run" has been banned from the library.

*In Plano, Tex.*, teachers no longer ask students their opinions because to do so, they have been told, is to deny absolute right and wrong.

*In Des Moines, Iowa*, a high school student production of "Grease," the hit Broadway musical was banned.

*In Mount Diablo, Calif.*, Ms. Magazine is off the school library shelves; it is available only with permission from both a parent and teacher." (Kleiman, 1981)

The American Library Association points out that the current rate of censorship activities is the highest in modern history, increasing five-fold since November 1980. Groups such as Research Analysts, Inc., Eagle Forum, The Barbara Moris Report, Movement to

Restore Decency, National Congress for Educational Excellence, the Pro Family Forum all cite humanism as the major problem Americans face today and all have been active in censorship activities (Jenkinson, 1979). These groups have different focuses including the family, education, equal rights for women, abortion, but all can find commonality in uniting against humanists. In truth their agendas exceed humanism; it becomes a convenient mask to use in meeting both their collective and individual goals.

Many helping professionals have been attacked by New Right groups even though they do not adhere to nor follow the principles of secular humanism. Many have been caught by the attack of the New Right in a gross generalization of terms. There has been no regard for clarifying or even sorting out the variety of meanings which do exist in an effort to truly understand the scope of that which they so forcefully declare against.

The definition of terms evolves and takes on particular meanings for certain groups of individuals. First, however, let us look at the generic definition of humanism given by Webster's *New World Dictionary*. "The quality of being human; human nature; any system or way of thought or action concerned with the interests and ideals of people; the study of the humanities; the study of Greek and Latin classics during the Middle Ages and was one of the factors giving rise to the Renaissance." By definition alone, it is easy to understand the basic alignment of the helping professions with the concept of humanism. As a profession we are engrossed in the study of human nature and concerned with the interests and ideals of people. The Controversy goes beyond this level to the interpretation of the term by specific groups of individuals.

New Right critics have accepted a particular definition and series of assumptions regarding humanism. However, individuals identified as humanists differ widely in their beliefs and philosophies. Some adhere to the theoretical position of rationality, reasoning, and scientific empirical methods while others place equal value on subjective, phenomenological, and experiential approaches (Goud, 1982). Humanists also vary with regard to their religious convictions. Their common base includes the premises that human life is precious and that dignity of the individual is a paramount concern; civil liberties are essential; (to enhance freedom and dignity) equality should be fostered for all individuals through the elimination of discrimination based on race, religion, sex, age, or national origin; precedence should be given human needs and development; service to people is a meaningful and important function; the individual with the gift of creativity and the power of thought

should be encouraged to develop these; and, perhaps most importantly, the tradition of freedom of thought in the Jeffersonian mode. "I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."

Humanism is born of the liberal tradition of Locke, Jefferson, Madison, Paine, and Lincoln. The New Right is born of the conservative tradition of Jonathan Edwards, William Jennings Bryan, Admiral Rickover, Richard Nixon, and John Birch. The New Right position against humanism is linked directly to their opposition to this liberal tradition. The liberalism herein identified is not that traditionally associated with the continuum line of politics. It is more appropriately the affirmation that human nature is a positive force in the world affirmed by the human capacity for self government and a belief in human freedom and progress.

The helping profession is steeped in a tradition of humanistic thought. Although it would be simple to perhaps avoid the use of the term humanism or humanistic and avoid some of the current controversy, the profession has a historical and philosophical base that is synonymous with the concepts of humanistic thought. A humanistic perspective as it has been embraced by the helping profession includes concepts of the innate value of the individual and the right of each person to exist, believe, and function as a human being. A humanistic perspective further advocates promotion of self understanding and acceptance as the cornerstone of growth and consideration of others in regard to self as a necessary antecedent to fulfillment. Developments of these positive attitudes toward self and others embrace the democratic society and are fostered through a diversity of processes in which all people are treated with respect and acceptance in an atmosphere of trust. Common to the theme of all these has been the notion that human potential is tapped through human interaction.

Helping professions have a unique heritage in fostering the notion that human potential is perhaps our greatest untapped resource. The goal of optimal human development is appropriate for the individual and the common good. To this end helping professionals have worked in schools, agencies, religious, and other settings to promote the growth of the person through individual, group, and systems approaches that typically stress an atmosphere characterized by the humanistic perspective described above. This heritage comes to the profession through example by the many leaders in the field that have pioneered theories, techniques, and research that have guided the profession. Such individuals as Arthur Combs, Dorothy Diamond, Albert Ellis, William Glasser,

Abraham Maslow, Anna Meeks, Fritz Perls, Carl Rogers, Martin Luther, Leona Tyler, Martin Luther King, E.C. Williamson, Gilbert Wrenn, and many others by example or intent provide this humanistic foundation. Although all individuals would not necessarily agree that a humanistic approach is the only or best approach to all situations, it is evident that humanistic principles are a widely accepted and important aspect of counseling and as such forms a major part of the foundation of the philosophical and historical perspectives of the helping profession.

Perhaps that which is least understood by New Right critics regards the position of those in the helping profession that embrace humanistic principles and the relationship of this to religion. Seeking a system of values and moral development which is central to understanding self in relation to others is a central theme of helping. The question of faith is an individual one. Much of the world's population including members of the helping professions have been aided and inspired by religious faith to great heights of personal achievement and happiness. Likewise, many who have not expressed a belief in the major religious sects have also lead equally productive lives. Secular connotes non-religious; humanistic is not synonymous with the word secular. Religious humanism as affirmed by such great religious figures as Martin Luther provides a tradition for those that are religious in this sense to embrace the principles of humanistic thought. Concern with the individual and the individual's world is the province of religion and humanistic thought. Concern with the individual's after life is not the focus of humanistic thought. Compatibility between religion and humanistic thought on those issues is attested to by clergy that practice humanistic techniques in religious settings.

Goud (1982) has pointed out that in addition to belief in God and religion, humanists differ on the basis of the search for truth and fulfillment. The humanistic tradition of the helping profession values reason, logic, the scientific method, and content that individuals have the power to shape the future. Agreement is also present that "a holistic approach, drawing on all the human resources is necessary for finding and creating paths to truth and fulfillment" (p. 12).

The current wave of attacks by the New Right on individuals and institutions have widespread implications for the helping professional. Although many individuals caught up in this movement are sincere in their concern they are

often motivated by fear. Charges that all humanistic thought is evil, that the goals of those classified, either accurately or not, as humanistic, and that there is a major conspiracy to undermine the American Way of Life are totally unfounded. Yet, the threat of such a conspiracy has produced attacks on members of the helping professions that sometimes go so far as to threaten the effectiveness of individuals' personal and professional lives. Often tactics used do not seek to explore truths or create more effective systems. Rather they seek to promote self interest. Such tactics represent not only an affront to our profession but to the liberal tradition. Therefore, the Association for Humanistic Education and Development continues to affirm the humanistic principles that have played an important role in the helping professions and that are based in a democratic way of life. Therefore:

With regard to the current climate emanating from the New Right's position on humanism, the Association for Humanistic Education and Development, is moved to state its position. The following statements are consistent with the Creed and Purposes of the Association for Humanistic Education and Development and the Code of Ethics of the American Personnel and Guidance Association.

The Association for Humanistic Education and Development, a division of the American Personnel and Guidance Association, strongly opposes:

Any infringement on the rights of counselors, teachers, and other helping professionals with regard to the selection of materials for which duly established procedural and ethical considerations have been maintained.

Any infringement on the rights of counselors, teachers, and other helping professionals engaged in roles for which they are appropriately trained, credentialed, and endorsed by individuals or institutions for whom they work.

Any infringement on the rights of counselors, teachers, and other helping professionals with regard to research and publication for which duly established procedural and ethical considerations have been maintained.

The Association for Humanistic Education and Development abhors the frequent use of such tactics as fear, negativism, innuendo, and personal slander currently employed by individuals and groups associated with the extreme right.

Further, the Association for Humanistic Education and Development finds the use of the aforementioned tactics and infringements intolerable in so much as they are used to promote humanistic principles as a scapegoat for personal and political gain.

The Association for Humanistic Education and Development acknowledges and encourages the right of all individuals and groups to judiciously critique humanistically oriented practices.

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