

# Intimacy: Humanism With A Human Face: Notes For A Humanist Psychologist}12

**Howard B. Radest**

## **Reflections**

WALKINGTHEPATHSf a forest or seated at the ocean's shore, alone in the silences, I reflect on what it means to me to be a Humanist. The noise of the city, Humanism's natural habitation and mine, is stilled. In such moments, I dwell on people, not ideas. I remember names and stories. I turn to the things that happened and the things we did with each other. I laugh quietly once again or else imagine what might have been". When I am with other Humanists, sharing a meal or over a drink, we tell stories to each other, recall fond or less than fond memories, recall moments of humor or sadness. We talk of friends we knew who did this or that, said this or that. From those endless meetings we are addicted to, the things that finally remain with me are not the issues that once seemed so urgent but the images of those who were there.

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<sup>2</sup> This essay is a sequel to other papers prepared for the Humanist Institute's Faculty Colloquium and published, as noted below, in *Humanism Today* 1988, 1989 and in the *Journal of Humanism and Ethical Culture*, 1989. It follows too on my more extended essay, *The Devil and Secular Humanism* (New York, Praeger, 1990) which grew from those inquiries and which roots Humanism in the Enlightenment.

And, in more somber moments, I still hear the voices and see the faces of those who are no longer living. I remember when we met and when we parted.

Yet, when I speak of my Humanism, I lose my way and forget what I learned in the silences. I elaborate philosophic ideas, political positions, or ideological claims. I construct an argument and not a story, not a confession, not a meditation, not a dialogue. My style, my language and my temperament are very much at home with such abstract activities. To be sure, I enjoy them much as the player enjoys the game but they are more important than a mere game, or is it only that I want to think so. So it is that Humanism appears, particularly for those who do not know it, as a text or a platform or a debate. The living stuff of Humanism hides beneath a skilled - or not so skilled - playing of words. And even I, self deluded, come to believe in the symbol and not the reality. I dwell in the battle over which symbol ought to be used and which not.<sup>3</sup> I find myself, strange indeed, more Jesuit or Talmudist than Humanist. I become, thus, a living satire. The result is that I fail to communicate what my Humanism really is for me, what gives vitality to my ideas, and what keeps me loyal to them. In short, my Humanism is the source of the richest meanings in my experience but I am dumb - despite a torrent of words - when it comes to conveying that richness.

Consequently, strangers who observe me and my companions complain that we are "too intellectual," "lacking in warmth," inhospitable. They tell me that Humanism may capture the truth of the matter but that it does not sing its truth, that it does not speak to the pains and joys, the sufferings and celebrations which justify the energies committed in the struggle for truth. They notice, too, that Humanism does not try very hard to speak to the daily events of living, minor though they may be in some grand scheme of things. Very often, these strangers report their disappointment sadly. They had come to find a home with us but are not able to be at home with Humanism so conveyed. I am thus made aware of a kind of Humanist schizophrenia, the suppression of the personal for the sake of the universal. So, it is a commonplace to find us debating about fine points of the law and it is rare indeed to

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the "game of either/or" see Howard B. Radest, "Companionship (A Metaphor for Humanism)," *Humanism Today*, No.4, 1988, pp.61.77.

find self reference and self exposure. Symptomatically, Humanists stay away from biography and autobiography. Characteristically, we speak in the "third person" - of it or they - and are uncomfortable with the "first person singular."

Ironically, the center of Humanism, the person, becomes an abstraction. So, I speak of the dignity of human beings but fail to attach dignity to personal feelings and relations, making it instead a central term of legalist ethics. Or I speak of human potentiality without reference to its roots in human potency which is in turn without reference to actually potent human beings. I am thus removed from the heart of the matter so that even the claim of the uniqueness of each human being becomes an abstraction. I do not connect up claim and reference to this particular bit of flesh and blood, to my own story. I am thus convicted of schizophrenia in yet another way, separating myself from my experience.

Now, I am no Whitman celebrating myself, able to celebrate myself, as a great poet does. And too, there is a certain arrogance in the celebration that is alien to my temperament. Yet, it is myself that I need to celebrate if Humanism's achievement is to be understood and enjoyed. When instead, as is my Humanist habit, I address *the* self and *the* world in some doomed Hegelian search for things as they really are, I am arid and both my cosmology and my psychology become arid. My commitment loses its richness and ultimately its truthfulness. I am become dishonest. I forget that hidden in the illusion of objectivity is always my personal history, my scarcely confessed dreams and angers. I delude myself, thinking to be an outsider to myself where there is no outside and no inside. It is, after all, with my own eyes that I see, my own mind that I think, my own biography that I interpret. I am present to my subject matter...all my subject matters. Reason itself is my reasoning, the act of reasoning itself a token of my passionate devotion to reason.<sup>4</sup>

My presence is nowhere more obvious than in my inquiry into myself and nowhere more quickly denied. This denial has its reasons too, even good reasons. I know how easily I can

<sup>4</sup> I hope I am not mis-understood when I identify the essential subjectivity of experience. Perhaps the point becomes clearer when I suggest that it is Kantian and not Dionysian. For further notes on the role of the subject when seen through Kantian eyes, see, Howard B. Radest, "The Humanist Imagination: From Ethics to Aesthetics." *Journal of Humanism and Ethical Religion*. Volume 2, No.1. Fall 1989, pp. 39-58.

confound my desires with reality and so I think to protect my knowledge from the temptation to wishful thinking. This is surely admirable and I would not want the confession of my ubiquitous presence to diminish that effort. I know how much my hidden angers frighten me and so I defend myself against myself. And I know that what is myself is never only what I am but what we are, we imagine, we create. I am populated by others living and dead.<sup>5</sup> Other voices are blended into mine so that when I think I speak most clearly in my own voice, I am speaking in the plural without realizing it. I am never only myself by myself but this admission is two edged..I enjoy your presence; I fear your invasion. So there are many reasons for me to run to some ghostly outside and away from some ghostly inside. This illusion of inside and outside can even be elevated to principle and to science but is at heart both a defense and a mistake.

A Humanist psychology that accepts this principle is doubly faulty...mistaken in its epistemology and traitorous in its philosophy. If Humanism has any claim on me, it is because unlike the dualisms of human history, say Platonism or Christianity or Bhuddism, it puts together into one space my self and my world and denies that we are strangers to each other. It is this unification of my experience and my place that holds for me the special appeal and the special terror of Humanism. Above all, it is in this unification that I discover my purposes and enjoy my achievements. I need not wait upon eternity nor need I look elsewhere and elsewhen. But this worldliness is not in the first place a matter of argument, a Humanist's excursion into theological discourse, but a primitive and rooted experience, my experience. Yet, I have trouble speaking of it directly for a Humanist lacks a vocabulary of intimacy, a po-

<sup>5</sup> The late Abraham Maslow struggled with this theme and assimilated it to his exploration of transcendence. In unpublished notes, he wrote,

This kind of transcendence of time is also true in another sense, namely that I can feel friendly, in a very personal and affectionate way, with Spinoza, Abraham Lincoln Jefferson, William James, Whitehead, etc., as if they still lived. Which is to say that in specific ways they do still live. This would be in the sense that I would like to retain the names on the Board of Editors of *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology* of those former editors who had died. In the sense that they still inspire, they live and they belong in the roster of editors. I, myself, would be sentimental enough to add to the Board of Editors Socrates, Spinoza, Bergson, Whitehead, James, etc."

Abraham H. Maslow, "Various Meanings of Transcendence," 1968, p.2 (for publication in Donald Cutler, Editor, *The Religious Situation*, Boston, Beacon, 1969),

etry, and so the meanings which Humanism actually offers to my life and living is masked in yet another abstraction.

Thus far, my preliminary reflections. They lead me to try to give voice to a Humanist's experience in the having and to the effort to understand why it is so difficult a task to find a voice for myself and for us. I know that Humanism does in fact offer me the chance of a meaning-rich personal life and not just in its epic moments or at times of high culture as in Pericles' Athens or Leonardo's Europe or Diderot's France or Jefferson's America. At the same time, I convey Humanism's energies and its promise so poorly that all too many miss the opportunity to enjoy its benefit, misled by my compulsive attention to issues and ideas. But that too has its roots and reasons and grasping them may help to clear away the debris. More affirmatively, for all the rationality that is central to a Humanist's agenda, there is in it an equally significant romantic and sentimental strain which is too often ignored. We know our Kant but forget our Emerson, celebrate our Newton but ignore our James. It is the latter theme - perhaps in a wayan American theme<sup>6</sup> - so much a part of the genius of Humanism and so much neglected, that I would explore as the place of intimacy in the life of a Humanist.

### **We Are Better Than We Say**

There are many moments when Humanism reaches into the deeper places of my experience. I have, as an Ethical Culture Leader, celebrated hundreds of weddings often with families that had no connection to Humanism; often, too, with families still attached to traditional faiths. I have listened to other Ethical Culture Leaders, Humanist Counselors, Humanist Unitarian/Universalist Ministers, Humanist Rabbis and they report the same thing. I have heard the wedding guests and they report it too. In the marriage ceremony, although our words may differ and the settings vary, we succeed in speaking directly to the joyous, and fearful experience of love. What-

<sup>6</sup> As I reflected on our neglect of Emerson and William James - which is only partially corrected by the attention John Dewey receives in Humanist circles - I was struck by the thought that American Humanisms differ from their European and British counterparts by picking up this romantic strain. Often this is put as the distinction between a "religious" and "secular" Humanism but the matter is more complicated than that. An inquiry into the history of American contributions to post-Enlightenment Humanist development particularly in the 19th century still needs to be undertaken from this point of view.

ever may be the path a marriage so initiated may take, in that moment of exposure and risk, Humanists touch upon the reality of what is experienced. The message of the celebration is oddly enough common and coherent no matter who the celebrants may be or what their roots and sources and this is strange indeed for we Humanists claim that we do not have a single canon or rite. Yet, common themes appear: of mutual support and respect, of marriage as a development and not a sacrament, of equality in the partnership, of responsibility that is both intimate and communal, and of the nurture of the one and the other. As it were, these arise unbidden from the reality of Humanism and the commonality that Humanists share. Suspended in that moment of celebration are those endless disputations about what Humanism stands for and in their place is an experience of what Humanism is.<sup>7</sup>

I can report in the same way about memorials and funerals. The occasion is different and yet the same threads of human connection appear. The emphasis changes. In the presence of death I realize my loneliness and feel broken away, broken apart. My need is not for some never-never land and false promises but for the actually present connection, the touch of a hand, sound of a voice, glance of an eye that pulls me back from loneliness and begins to heal the brokenness. I am recalled in memory to what was and who was and out of that memory helped to move again forward into living my life. Here again, the Humanist demonstrates the ability to care and to support. Often, I have experienced this sense of things in my own life and heard it reported by strangers. Even more striking is a common note in their response and my own - that it was good and comforting to deal and be dealt with honestly and that this built strength when strength was needed and gave comfort when comfort was needed. Humanists thus succeed in reaching to the other side of temporality, of evanescence - to what follows when I confess that this moment is all I have and all I ever shall have.

<sup>7</sup> For illustrations of this point, see: Khoren Arslan, *The New Wedding*, New York, Vintage, 1973; Algernon D. Black, *Without Burnt Offerings*, New York, Viking, 1974; Arthur Dobrin and Kenneth Briss, *Getting Married The Way You Want*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1974; Robert E. Greeley, Editor, *The Best of Humanism*, Buffalo, New York, Prometheus, 1988; Corliss Lamont, *A Humanist Funeral Service*, Buffalo, New York, American Humanist Association, 1987; Sherwin T. Wine, *Celebration*, Buffalo, New York, Prometheus, 1988. See also, "The Aesthetics of Humanism," *Humanism Today*, Volume Two, 1986.

There are, too, those moments of larger crisis when we need each other. I can recall even now nearly 30 years later the Kennedy assassination and the urgency we all felt for being present with and for each other. I still see children and teachers in our Schools joining in support and celebration when the hostages returned from Iran in 1980. I have known the strength of Humanism when counseling with others at times of personal crisis - an illness, the loss of a child, the break-up of a marriage. In such intimate moments, whether there are only two of us or hundreds of us, I am aware of my availability and my vulnerability. I am recalled to the essential Humanist theme, being a person for another person, and in those moments I am not simply celebrant or counselor and the other person is not simply audience or client. I become more than friend and less than professional and in that middle state catch what a Humanist is and transcend what a Humanist says.

I know that I cannot live out my Humanism from crisis to crisis. My time is not spent only in ceremonies. I am not a priest although I understand the humanity that is captured in the priestly tradition. At the same time, in what we succeed in doing and being at times of crisis there is a clue to my permanent Humanism, something more on-going and more satisfying and more effective than the Humanism of debate and argument. Reflecting on the experience, I catch on to what it means to be with a Humanist community. I understand that, for Humanists, it flickers in and out, coming into being and subsiding, feeling now connected now disconnected. I realize too that this sense of the community as happening is fitting, that it coheres with my need to be free and to choose which ties shall bind and where and for how long. In that, I grasp the existential difference between my community and the traditional communities that I have left behind and I feel relief from the omnipresent oppressiveness of tribal life. Of course, I pay the price of worldliness and freedom. But then, every loyalty has its price and Humanism is no exception. However, in order to avoid moral slavery, I do not need to pay the exorbitant price of utter disconnection. I am not nor need I be the radically isolated individual pictured in the Humanism of the Enlightenment.

My Humanism thus calls forth its special kind of intimacy - that is another way of speaking to the flickering quality of

community, now more closely drawn, now drawing away. In this dynamic play of connections, Humanism shows itself at its best, as personal, direct, and felt. By contrast, the Humanism that evokes accusations of intellectualism and abstractness is only a shadow of my experience. It is not who I am and cannot really represent my commitment. That, at least, is what I sense in remembering and reflecting on those occasions when on all sides I hear appreciative response to the Humanist's acts and through those acts to the Humanist's voice.

### The Marxist and The Mystic

Because I am attentive to the personal and existential, the having, the doing and the being of Humanism, I would not want to be understood to have surrendered rationality. That would be to carry poetry, which captures intimacy, beyond what is truthful and beyond what is needful.<sup>8</sup> It would turn sentiment into sentimentality and romance into romanticism. So, I am reminded that it is experience that gives birth to ideas and in turn that ideas - as felt and not simply as manipulated - return me to a richer experience. Indeed, I can only have ideas within the passion of commitments and the excitement of risk and failure and success. Underneath my articulated Humanism there is a more primitive naturalism. I'm not sure how it got there, how it gets there, but I sense its presence. Nor am I unique and alone in responding directly to sea and sky and stars, to the feel and smell of earth, to the lines and shadows of a human face. I am, in other words, an aesthetic being long before I speak to matters of feeling evocation, taste, and beauty. Indeed, were this primitive naturalism

<sup>8</sup> Walt Whitman illustrates both a valid existential insight and a dangerous extreme when, typically, he writes:

When I heard the learn'd astronomer;  
 When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me;  
 When I was shown the charts and the alagrams, to add, divide,  
 and measure them;  
 When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he lectured with much  
 applause  
 In the lecture-room,  
 How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;  
 Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,  
 In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
 Look'd up In perfect silence at the stars.

("When I Heard The Learn'd Astronomer," first published in *Drum Taps*, 1965; *Leaves of Grass*, Philadelphia, David McKay, 1900, p.34 l.)

absent, then there could be no content for feeling and taste and beauty and my ideas would not simply be abstract but empty.

In that primitive naturalism I detect a more pervasive and underlying theme. This place and space is my home in all its loveliness and fascination. It is all I have or need to have and I enjoy it, am awed by it, fear it, am playful within it, am alternately serious and foolish about it. Beneath the grandeur of the sciences and of the arts there is this essential connectedness to and appreciation of the world and the worldly, a connection shown bare and naked in moments of crisis and celebration. Because I have this sense of things, I am insulted by those who tell me I am only "passing through" or that I am "in the world but not of it." If I dare to name a Humanist heresy, it would be that disdainful dismissal of my place and space, of our place and space. And this is first my feeling, and much much later an argument about cosmology.

If I read the book of Humanism from out of my own experience, I am not without clues in the experiences of others. I am not the only one to have caught this real and elusive center of the Humanist's art. I find other voices in the expected places of course, in the poetry and song of Humanism's dreams and achievements. But, then I find my theme everywhere when I look, although hidden and scarcely articulated. I find an intimate Humanism and in the strangest places too, surprising myself. I test its presence by reflecting anew on the so-called objective political economy of Karl Marx or on the so-called other-worldliness of the mystic. Since these draw the most extreme of boundaries, the discovery of a Humanist's intimacy in them is all the more revealing. Superficially, Marxism and mysticism appear to range from the deepest immersion in the affairs of this world to the deepest rejection of the affairs of this world. Yet they begin together in a personal criticism: that the experience of men and women is all too often broken away from the very things that help them become best what they can become. And both propose personal strategies of transcendence, the former by an act of revolution, the latter by an act of reconciliation.

I turn thus to the passionate criticism of alienation that appears in the earlier formulations of socialist ideas and that remains as a sub-text beneath the abstractions of class war-

fare and capitalist exploitation.<sup>9</sup> Unlike the Marxist, I am not convinced that it is only a capitalist society that separates person from person, person from world and person from self. But I am convinced that these separations are real enough in my experience and real enough in the experience of my fellow human beings. *Mter* all, I live in a world of things, many many things, and I am encouraged in the illusion that their acquisition is all that ultimately matters. And I live in a world which tempts me more and more to respond to persons as things. to use them, own them. literally to objectify them. And, as the world grows more crowded and as my skill as manipulator improves, it is likely indeed that I will treat all but myself as objects. And finally, this habit of perception and action overwhelms me and I come to treat even myself as a thing.

At the same time, I would not merely sneer at things. I was always Archimedes discovering a lever to move the universe and DaVinci in love with the tension and release of muscle and sinew and bone. I was Franklin flying a kite and Roebing building a bridge. But as I grew more perfect in a technology that began in the cave, I could more and more easily forget those mundane and primitive roots in human needs and human productivity, fail to return my abstract skills to the person that was their source. Soon, all too soon, I could even objectify myself in the varied roles I played, understand myself through a script I did not author and that finally had no author. I lost not only others and world but myself; I was genuinely and finally an alien.

<sup>9</sup> For example, consider the following passage from Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844),

That which exists for me through the medium of *money*, that which I can pay for...that *I am*...My own power is as /I"eat as the power of money. The properties of money are my own...properfles and faculties. What *I am* and *can* do is therefore, not at all determined by my Individuality. *I am* ugly, but I can buy the *most beautiful* woman for myself. Consequently, I am not *ugly* for the effect of ugliness...is annulled by money. As an Individual, I am *lame*, but money provides me with twenty-four legs. Therefore I am not lame. I am a detestable, dishonorable, unscrupulous and stupid man but money is honored and so also is its possessor. Money is the highest good, and so its possessor is good. Besides, money saves me the trouole of feeling dishonest; therefore I am presumed honest. I am *stupid* but since money is the *real* mInd of things, how should Its possessor be stupid? Moreover, he can buy talented people for himself, and is not he who has power over the talented more talented than they? I who can have, through the power of money, *everything* for which the human heart 10nJ!s, do I not possess all human abilities? Does not money, therefore, transform all my incapacities into their opposites?

Translated and edited by T. B. Bottomore, In Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, New York, Ungar, 1961, pp. 165-166.

In a way not all that different from this Marxist diagnosis, the mystic is an alien too and reports a radical criticism of the world as it is had and prescribes a radical form of re-connection to the world as it can be had. He or she tells me of a way to be one with the world as it really is. And yet, the alienating forces of the world continue to oppress and so the mystic is driven to find unity apart from earth and sky and fellow beings. Paradoxically, mysticism claims to sacrifice the world in order to gain the world, accepts alienation from what is in order to leap beyond the shadows to what really is. Thus, the mystic lonely and disheveled, ecstatic and wild-eyed, saying by his or her being and behavior that the world and the worldly are deliberately to be put away, pushed away. The disciplines of mysticism are perfected - mortification and starvation and isolation - helping to aim us elsewhere by turning away from here and now. And yet, extreme though it may be, the mystic exhibits our power of overcoming the press of things, tells us that we are able to transcend the powers of things and with powers uniquely our own to find ourselves in connection with others. 10

To be sure, the language of mysticism is embedded in another world, reporting the experience as one of departure from here and arrival elsewhere. I am likely, therefore, to reject the report because it adopts symbols that are not my own. I find myself estranged from the experience with its allusion to

10 Abraham Maslow struggled with this double edged feature of mysticism and wrote,

But on the other wing, the mystical (or experiential) also has its traps which I have not stressed sufficiently. As the more Apollonian type can veer toward the extreme of being reduced to the merely behavioral, so does the mystical type run the risk of being reduced to the merely experiential. Out of the joy and wonder of his ecstasies and peak-experiences, he may be tempted to seek them *ad hoc* and to value them exclusively as the only, or at least the highest goods of life, ~~~~~ up other criteria of right and wrong. Focussed on these wonderful subjective experiences, he may run the danger of turning away from the world and from other people. In his search for triggers to peak experiences, *any* triggers. In a word, instead of being temporarily self-absorbed and inwardly searching, he may become simply a selfish person, seeking his own personal salvation; trying to get into "heaven" even if other people can't, and finally even perhaps *using* other people as triggers, as means to his sole end of his/her states of consciousness. In a word, he may become not only selfish but also evil. My impression, from the history of mysticism, is that this trend can sometimes wind up in meanness, nastiness, loss of compassion, or even in the extreme of sadism.

From an unpublished draft (1969, pp. 2-3) of the "Introduction" to a new edition of *Religion, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, New York, Viking, 1970. The modern *locus classicus* of a naturalistic discussion of mysticism is, of course, William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York, MacMillan, 1961.

some vast and indescribable Other and its confession of my human inadequacy and weakness. I am likely, too, to reject the mystic's insight because so often associated with the bizarre and the extreme. As a Humanist, however, I am also committed to searching out the possibilities made visible in human beings, digging beneath the symbols we use and the appearances we present to the experiences we have. So, I think it not unfair to read the mystic's transcendence with a naturalist's eye, to grasp in the mystic the ability we have to convert ordinary relations which invite alienation into personal relations which overcome it, and above all to celebrate my senses and the sensual as priorities of experience.

I am led to a double vision. There are moments in my Humanism when I transcend its prosaic style and experience connection with others and the world. This I find in the temporary community of crisis and celebration as in the primitive naturalism that undergirds my life as an aesthetic being. And there are cues in my Humanism, in its naturalism and indeed in its very worldliness to invite us to experiment beyond crisis, to turn what I learn from the moment of crisis toward the needs of daily living. I understand, too, the difficulty of it all, the difficulty posed by my own history and the difficulty posed by the modern world of busy busy things. Yet, I am encouraged because I and you have shown that we can overcome these difficulties.

### **Clearing The Debris**

I am a creature of history and, in particular, of Humanist history which is another way of saying of modern history. I was born in a revolutionary politics and science some 200 years ago, a revolution in the name of the "rights of man" and under the banner of "natural philosophy." Tutored by the Enlightenment, I am accustomed to battle with the forces of darkness who come at me in the guise of powers that over and over again seek to repress and suppress me and mine. I am used to seeing the world as a place dangerous to my freedom, demanding vigilance and continuing struggle. I learned, too, the habits of moral division, of seeing some of my fellows as the enemy and others as the ally. Because my revolution was in its very character built on claims of truth and good, and be-

cause language was for it as potent a tool as cannon, I am also accustomed to treating words as weapons.

My enemy had a long and successful history too and successful revolution did not erase his impact upon me. Generation after generation, he - and it was most often he - took my experience away from me. So even my intimate self, my soul as he put it, fell victim to his monopoly of power which was in fact more political than theological. In defense I developed yet other habits, and in particular the habit of hiding myself away as do all repressed peoples with their intimate codes and languages. Even a Catholic's confession was turned into a cultural artifact by centuries of practice. Supposed to stand naked before the universe and its God, he or she was instead objectified and ritualized, uttering not a cry of the heart but performing a sacred script. Released by revolution, I was still a creature of history, still retained my traditional habits of defense, keeping who and what I was hidden from all but a very few lest it be taken away from me. In short, my story led me to play roles out there in the world and to keep for myself alone the person I really was. And if at moments of self revelation I allowed another a glimpse of my soul, I quickly became suspicious and afraid and as quickly hid myself again.

Out of this embedded habit of concealment, thousands of years in the making with its understandable reasons and causes, grew a style of living, peculiarly modern and peculiarly my own. My need for self defense was, with everything else, moved over into a secular world and was elevated to a principle of self interest and in turn to a destructive egoism. I am not sure whether it was a "market economy" that invited selfishness or whether selfishness generated that economy...the truth is probably somewhere between them. However it happened, the habit of concealment was not eliminated from a secular world and indeed was made legitimate in a dualist psychology of in-here and out-there and in a political economy of free individuals in a free market. But without the sanction of the supernatural, the constant reminder that the soul was unique and precious to the universe itself, the personal self deteriorated into the merely private self. The moral rule of this destructive duality was enrich yourself above all and if need be at the expense of others. Thus, only partially successful in re-taking my soul from the priests and kings, victory turned nasty and ultimately self defeating. My hidden self

now reduced to the merely private self of give and get became the only self that counted. For the rest, I simply did what was necessary and gave the appearance of what was necessary to serve its even more successfully hidden needs and desires. <sup>11</sup>

Yet other habits of being emerged over these 200 years and the conflict between the modern and the ancient worlds. Rightly suspicious of the very notion of the soul, I directed myself outward to the world and to society. From one side, my self always sequestered, hidden, was now protected in its hiddenness by the revolutionary idea of a right to privacy, of the right to be myself as I chose and away from the intrusions of others. From the other side, however, I came to believe that the important matters of living were public and political, that the important efforts of living were exerted out there where results were tangible, even measurable. My energies were given over to changing the world whether as entrepreneur or reformer. I, however, remained aloof from change, occupying the privileged position of untouchability.

That was by no means an unimportant achievement after thousands of years of actual and psychological slavery. But it had a negative side as well growing out of a mistaken psychology and a superficial politics. By a strange turn of logic, if what was important and reasonable was to be found out in the world, then what was left over had therefore to be unimportant and unreasonable. Slowly, the now protected and liberated self was resigned to triviality. Hidden away, it was left untended and because unreasonable; it was convicted of wildness. With that shift in attention from soul to society, all those

<sup>11</sup> In another connection on the same point, I noted the following,

...the public bias of the ethics of Humanism sets the intimate aside, reduces it to the "private" and protects it as nearly untouchable. So, as it were, it excludes intimacy from the moral scrutiny of others, who on Humanist grounds, are strangers. Ironically, even as the "private" becomes a legal category as in "a man's home is his castle," or as in the laws attending marriage, the obligations of parenthood, the notion of "private" property, and the like. Humanist ethics then has trouble dealing with the personal and the intimate which are only hinted at in the notion of privacy. By contrast...Marxists distinguish personal from private property. The former is not alienated and cannot be socialized since it carries the authentic stamp of identification with the self and biography. Private property, on the other hand, is available for political economic analysis and for expropriation. But Humanism has not worked out such distinctions for itself. Its legalist bias not only forces an inordinate attention to analysis and language itself but makes it difficult for Humanism to account for more intuitive and experience-based moral categories like love, concern, care, and sacrifice.

Howard B. Radest, "Doing Good: Humanism and The Liberal Temptation," *Humanism Today*, Volume 5, 1989, pp.28-29.

connections of the soul to family and community which were suspect because of their traditional history were likewise put to one side and likewise left untended. We became effective and frustrated all at the same time. Our sciences might try to speak of the soul but could not succeed for their language was unsuited to the experiences of intimacy. Yet, the languages of the sciences were the only languages we accepted as legitimate and truthful. So we grew frantically dumb.

Our institutions became only social instruments, tools of practical expression for meeting personal needs in non-personal ways. Trying to serve the soul and its relationships, to serve family and community, they came instead to meet the needs of clients and not of persons. So, we developed analytic and social instruments and yet the more skilled we became the less able we were to serve and the more unhappy the outcome. In short, we lost our voices when it came to tenderness and love and the connections which found these for us.

Our image of persons changed too and with that our self image as well. Of course, we were children of particular fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers. Still we grew and grew up with brothers and sisters, friends and relatives and in specific places. Yet, with liberation grew the ideal of the cosmopolitan, the person ideally unconnected to place and time. That became our vision of the future; actual connections were at best a necessity and at worst a prison; the moral imperative was separation. The revolutionary ideal of the moral equivalence of all human beings evolved into a specious individualism where equality was collapsed into sameness and the ability to fill roles and act the part was equated with freedom of choice. Abstract descriptions - the citizen, the worker, the father, the mother - replaced personal history. Over the generations the ties of community and family had been used to overpower persons, so we threw them away in a burst of cosmopolitan energy. And with that rejection - again understandable - we pushed intimacy away from our reality, and as it were quite literally gave up and gave up on ourselves.<sup>12</sup>

12. In *Individualism Old and New*, (1929-1930, New York, Capricorn, 1962) John Dewey undertakes a critical analysis of the causes and consequences of this specious individualism. He notes,

The "isolating" habit of the average American, and his excessive sociability, may well have an explanation like that of conformity. They, too, testify to nature's abhorrence of the vacuum which the passing of the older Individual-

## The Passionate Democrat

We are still children of the Enlightenment. We can still tell its many stories. We need reminding, however, that men and women risked life itself for the sake of Humanist revolution and in some places around the globe still do. But, we do not risk our lives for an abstraction. So, I suspect that the habits of today's Humanism, the loss of *elan*, the rejection of the intimate and the abstracted reality of role and quantity do not do justice to what was genuinely revolutionary. And if our modern symbols, images and practices are inadequate, then this tells us that we have lost our ties to the dreams that gave us birth and that gave Humanism birth.

Our story has grown pale in the telling. In its original, revolution and freedom were not abstractions at all even if declarations and manifestoes seemed to put words in place of realities. Revolution was, no doubt, a public act but it was personally felt or it would not have happened.<sup>13</sup> The "rights of man" became a legalist proclamation but before that it was a passionate commitment. Privacy was a constitutional presumption but its motive was protection against genuine and

alism has produced. We should not be so averse to solitude if we had, when we were alone, the companionship of communal thought built into our mental habits. In the absence of this communion, there is the need for reinforcement by external contact. Our sociability is largely an effort to find substitutes for that normal consciousness of connection and union that proceeds from being a sustained and sustaining member of a social whole.  
pp.87-88.

13 Again, I turn to Walt Whitman to catch this sense of public reform personally felt  
I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all  
oppression and shame:  
I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men, at anguish with  
themselves, remorseful after deeds done;  
I see, in low life, the mother misused by her children, dying, neglected,  
J!aunt, desperate;  
r see the wife misused by her husband - I see the treacherous seducer  
of younJ!: women;  
I mark the ranklinS!S of jealousy and unrequited love, attempted to be  
hid - I see these sTJ!hts on the earth;  
I see the workings or battle, pestilence, tyranny - I see martyrs and  
risoners;  
I observe a famine at sea - I observe sailors casUng lots who shall be  
kU!d, to preserve the lives of the rest;  
I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant persons upon  
laborers, the poor, and upon ne-roes and the like;  
All these - An the meanness ana agony without end. I sitting look out  
upon.  
See, hear. and am silent.

"1 Sit And Look Out" (1860). *Leaves of Grass. op. clt.*, pp. 179-180.

felt invasion. Individuality was not mere idiosyncrasy but a deep and abiding experience of the uniquely different and diverse character of human beings one from the other; more directly of what I know of myself and what I know of you.

Nothing more clearly illustrates the move away from our roots in the mesh of public and personal, law and passion that was the Humanist revolution, than the notion of democracy itself which was its central theme. Once, not so long ago, democracy was our cause and not a tired political slogan. I am reminded of its vigor in those all too rare moments when it again lives, when I am caught in the struggle for justice or when I resist the violation of conscience. I am reminded too when I hear the democrat's song in Russian or Polish or Swahili or Chinese. However, I have become jaded, turning democratic participation all too often into blind ritualism and the struggle for justice into mere lobbying and financing. Now grown mechanistic and routine, I easily forget that democracy was once the new way - new in all of human history - for persons to be with each other and with the world, the new way for persons to pay attention to each other and to the world. There had been brief moments, to be sure, when it had flared and vanished but Athenian democracy was fatally flawed by its ethno-centrism and elitism and sexism and Protestant Reform was fatally flawed by its other-worldliness and authoritarianism. With the Enlightenment, for the first time ever, all persons were invited to the feast and all persons could contribute to the feast. That double message of participation - to partake and to give - had never been heard before. We children of the Enlightenment would seem to have a right to be proud and hopeful.

And with it, came other themes as well whose words we remember but whose tunes we now seem unable to sing. A democratic politics invited me to change my world and my abilities qualified me to do so. A democratic schooling would nurture these powers and not simply turn me into a mirror, an echo, of the powers of others better and brighter than I. A democratic science would expand and organize my knowledge about my world and so was as much personal and appreciative as pragmatic.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the pragmatic spirit itself was a

<sup>14</sup> A broader and more generous view of the sciences as a human activity is evident in the actual activities of scientists. For a Humanist, John Dewey catches the spirit of the enterprise when, typically, he writes,

testimony to the democratic passion and not merely another name for acquisitive practicalism. Discovery and truth were, by a pragmatist's light, to be available to all who wanted them and would make the effort to get at them. Truth was no longer the possession of a privileged class of knowers, of priests and clerks and magicians. Revolutionary institutions in other words were not external to me but actual outcomes in the world and with others expressive of my native resources for developing myself and others. And all of this was here and now for the doing and the taking.

How strange, almost quaint and dated, these thoughts sound even to me. Somehow I have lost my way and so I retreat to a so-called realism about democracy. It becomes merely a political organization. But on self examination, I understand that I am become not so much a realist as a cynic, surrendering hope and despairing of confidence. I seem unable to trust in others and ultimately in myself. And that is my confession, the betrayal of the democrat who reduces democracy to political economic arrangements. In that, Humanism loses not only its center - the moral and pervasive nature of democracy was its motive, its life - but the passion which shapes a uniquely Humanist life.

I return for a moment now to those celebrations and ceremonies where we Humanists do better than we say. I am recalled by them to the democracy we find in the lived experience of flickering Humanist communities. the moments of coming together and moving apart when I am with others in an essential equality of being at times of love and death. The directness of my communication in the face of crisis rests upon confidence in my own honesty and confidence in yours and on our ability to deal with matters honestly. Then too, I can rely

Because the free working of mind is one of the greatest joys open to men, the scientific attitude, incorporated in individual mind, is something which adds enormously to one's enjoyment of existence. The delights of thinking, of inquiry, are not widely enjoyed at the present time. But the few who experience them would hardly exchange them for other pleasures. Yet, they are not as restricted in quality as they are in the number of those who share them. That is to say, as long as "scientific" thinking confines itself to technical fields, it lacks full scope and varied material. Its subject-matter is technical to the degree in which application in human life is shut out. The mind that is hampered by fear lest something old and precious be destroyed is the mind that experiences fear of science. He who has this fear cannot find reward and peace in the discovery of new truths and the projection of new ideals. He does not walk the earth freely, because he is obsessed by the need of protecting some private possession of belief and taste. For the love of private possessions is not confined to material goods.

*Individualism Old and New, op.cit.* pp. 161-162.

upon you as you can rely upon me and I need not turn elsewhere for my hope and my strength. If you will, that is a form of felt democracy for which the declarations and manifestoes are only additions after the fact. And, that is what connects the aesthetic, the responsive and the ceremonial to the public and the revolutionary. The Humanist shifts the intimate from another world to this one and out of sacramental tradition into natural experience.<sup>15</sup>

But the days of glory fade. We have forgotten that revolution was a public act personally felt and all that follows from the integration of self and other and world. Humanists like the prisoners in Plato's cave, replace realities with shadows. Humanism loses its distinctive hold on democracy as a pervasive way of living and with that loss comes to lack the excitement of reaching into the intimate from out of the public and the values of personal feeling for the public life. At the same time, intimacy is isolated, put away, and so the unique and revolutionary orchestration of personal and public, individual and community, is once again split into dualities that remind me of nothing so much as the traditions I have left behind.

Still held to Humanism by its roots in a truthful story, a uniquely modern story, I nevertheless sense the loss of excitement and with that I learn that I have lost my way. And I am not alone. How easy it is, these days, for us to offer substitutes for Humanism in the name of Humanism. We flirt with

<sup>15</sup> Erich Fromm, by way of example, describes the naturalization of conscience as follows,

Humanistic conscience is not the internalized voice of an authority whom we are eager to please and afraid of displeasing. It is our own voice, present in every human being; and independent of external sanctions and rewards. What is the nature of that voice? Why do we hear it and why can we become deaf to it?

Humanistic conscience is the reaction of our total personality to its proper functioning and dysfunctioning; not a reaction to the functioning of this or that capacity but to the totality of capacities which constitute our human and our individual existence. Conscience judges our functioning as human being: it is...knowledge within oneself, knowledge of our respective success, or failure in the art of living. But although conscience is knowledge, it is more than mere knowledge in the realm of abstract thought. It has an affective quality, for it is the reaction of our total personality and not only the reaction of our mind. In fact, we need not be aware of what our conscience says in order to be influenced by it...

It is the voice of our true selves which summons us back to our selves, to live productively, to develop fully and harmoniously - that is, to become what we potentially are...If love can be defined as the affirmation of the potentialities and the care for, and the respect of, the uniqueness of the loved person, humanistic conscience can be justly called the voice of our loving care for ourselves.

*Man For Himself*, New York Rinehart, 1947. pp. 158-159.

spirituality which elevates the dualism of in-here and out-there to a final personal and metaphysical principle. We regress to a Humanist fundamentalism as if by telling and re-telling yesterday's story in yesterday's words we can retake its reality today. We retreat to isolation in a communitarianism that betrays the truth hidden in the dream of cosmopolitanism, the truth of our connection to each other as a species. And we are entrapped in a ritualism exhibited by nothing so much as the way our very arguments are predictable much as the saying of the Mass or the recitation of the Creed is predictable. In all of this - and more - we demonstrate our loss of that passionate democracy which did not separate flesh and spirit, world and self.

### Diagnosis

Feeling that Humanist loss, I am tempted by my all too readily available habits of attack and defense. I regress again into combat but, no longer a revolutionary, I find that my enemies are myself. Alternatively, in an ultimate despair at Humanism, I suspect - but will not admit - that it has run its brief course and that having done its work should vanish graciously from the scene. But I am not ready to choose between pointless battle and demoralizing surrender. My history and my faith<sup>16</sup> demands otherwise. Once upon a time, we told the Humanist story through the themes of social justice and in acts of revolution and reform. Now, it is more apt to tell that same story from out of the depths of intimacy. Thereby, I think we can reintroduce the personal and the public to each other and not, as is all too easy, elevate one or the other to a sole interest and act as if we must choose between them. I do not, indeed as a Humanist cannot, leave the world behind. I can, however, retake the world by entering it at a different point.

<sup>16</sup> I use the word "faith" with some hesitation because it stirs unwanted and unnecessary associations with traditional religious vocabularies. Yet, I know of no more adequate term for describing the attitude, stance, and confidence of a person toward the world in which he/she lives, the position taken, as it were, toward the as yet - and always - invisible future. For useful and important discussions of this term and its relationship to Humanism, see, Beverley M. Earles, *The Faith Dimension Of Humanism*, a doctoral dissertation at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand, 1989, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton, 1979.

The arid versions of Humanism, spirituality, fundamentalism, communitarianism, and ritualism break Humanists apart from each other and mislead those who are searching for us. In these versions, we simply echo the habits of an alienated world and alienated people. We become mere fragments, angry at ourselves and uninteresting to others. But this is to take these flirtations as legitimate developments of Humanist history and as genuine philosophic positions and choices. A tell-tale of this continuing confusion between symptom and idea is the nasty dogmatism with which they are held. Contradicting the essential hospitality of Humanism, I seek to impose one or another of them as the only and truthful way of things for Humanism and for Humanists. Thus arise those endless, ugly and esoteric arguments among us which interest hardly anyone in the fate of Humanism and enlist hardly anyone in its cause. Indeed, even as I engage in them I am myself repetitious, uninterested and uninteresting.

Yet, for all the pointlessness of these recurrent rehearsals, I cannot ignore them either. The passions they stir in me, the walls they erect between us, my compulsive return to them over and over again, suggest that they are serious indeed for the children of the Enlightenment - but not as philosophic developments and not as legitimate historic outcomes. Instead, they are symptoms begging for a diagnosis and so call attention to the work I must do, the work to be done. Briefly put, as I flirt with spirituality - and which of us has not - I announce my longing for love and care. I cry out for help in dealing with the fears and doubts and anxieties that always attended my life but that today seem to grow even more oppressive. When I turn backward, almost in relief, to a time when Humanism seemed so bright and clear, I confess my need for its truthfulness and my need for reliable truths to live by and with. At the same time, I recognize how blurred and ambiguous both it and they have become. In my vague romance with community, I seek for those connections that demonstrate my need for them precisely by the rarity of their occurrence. Reminded from time to time that connections do happen, I am all the more oppressed by their infrequency. And in the ritual arguments that seem more choreographed than dialectic, I find a substitute for those home-like behaviors that tell me I am on familiar ground and in the presence of familiar faces. I

want to be recognized and to recognize others - that is the achievement of ritual - but instead am often driven away.

In short, my behaviors tell me that I am in need of that Humanist inspiration which once turned revolution, idea and argument into personal experiences and personal experience into revolution and reform. My behaviors tell me that I have put apart what is together, self and world, self and other, in-here and out-there. This would seem to call then for a Humanist "cure of souls," a normal therapy for Humanists.

### **A Humanist Therapy**

I understand the dangers of using the language of therapy. Yet, I know of no better way of grasping our present situation than by this shift of entry-point from ideology to concern. Not the least of the dangers, already visible in those who give a psychological turn to their Humanism, is its reduction to inter-personal relationships and an invitation to authoritarianism and dependency. Nor am I unmindful of the fact that the language of therapy invites my enemy to accuse me of sickness.

At the same time, I know that my enemy has his/her own illness and exploits the dis-connections of modern living by inviting me to surrender the world itself. And out of my loneliness, I accept the invitation. How else to explain the manifest popularity of those esoteric cults which encourage separation and those fundamentalist movements which turn attention to another world. Sadly, it is precisely among cultist and fundamentalist that we find the greatest success in reaching to our need of connection. And with this success comes the surrender of much that is good and hopeful in the last two centuries of human development. Slavery and exploitation wearing familiar and not so familiar costume rise again. So it is urgent, and not just for myself, to pay attention to what is loosely called the "human condition" and to draw upon the passionate democracy of the Humanist for a secular and modern "cure of souls."

The seeds of a modern therapy exist among us, not simply in the primitive naturalism that unites us with our world but in the very themes we carryover from the Enlightenment. Rationality was itself a celebration, announcing reliable ways of expressing the qualities of our passionate attachment to the

world, an attachment deeply rooted in our desire to know, and with it to do. The less than personal languages of science and technology miss out on their human connection and so miss the opportunity to connect us back to our roots and forward to our hopes. Revolution and reform celebrated our ability to enter the world as participants and not simply as victims. But these today seem to take us away from where we are as persons and instead begin and end in the laboratory and in the legislature. So we must learn anew the realities for which laboratory and legislature are only a surface. Once upon a time our struggle led us to radical free inquiry and to storm the barricades; today our struggle is to re-capture the passion of participation that was our energy for doing these things. Never deserting worldly activity, we must pick it up at a different point. This calls for attending to the intimacy that has been separated from activity. A normal therapy is still guided by the unity of self and world, passion and action, attachment and participation.

To avoid mere formula, I need an active pedagogy, a way of living and learning in and through the ordinary course of my day. I initiate this pedagogy - over and over again - by engaging myself in acts that make me ready for others, by disciplines that make me accessible to others. This calls for a large dose of silence and out of the silences the practice of listening to the voices of others and of the world. <sup>17</sup> I resist my habit of

<sup>17</sup> AJ:ain, I know the risk of addressInJ!: themes like "silence" and "meditation" that for Humanists carry the burden of desfructive and oppressive associations. Nevertheless, I am not content to permit the capture of human values or of valuable human capacities by traditionalists. So, I am reminded of Emerson's comments on "solitude,"

To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds will separate between him and what he touches. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. seen in the streets of the cities, how great they are! If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night they come out, these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile. ...but all natural objects make a kindred Impression, when the mind is open to their influence. Nature never wears a mean appearance. Neither does the wisest man extort her secret, and lose his curiosity by finding out all her perfection. Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit. The flowers, the animals, the mountains reflect the wisdom of his best hour, as much as they had delighted the simplicity of his childhood. When we speak of nature in this manner, we have a distinct but most poetical sense of mind...

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature" (1836), In *Selected Essays*, Larzer Ziff, Editor. New York. Penguin, 1982, p. 37.

speaking out at any provocation and deliberately hold back from intruding with my own voice, my own acts, my own views. So, I make spaces for others. With this activity - and it is an activity calling for effort and energy as anyone who has held back can report - I announce my welcome. I invite, as it were, others into my world so that it becomes our world. I seek their invitation as well. I resist the temptation to argue and so to escape into words that take us away from each other. I am, for a time at least, simply present. Strangely, as I listen and grow silent, I invite not only others but myself. I became newly accessible to myself.

Of course, there is more and the activity of silence by itself could easily deteriorate into mere withdrawal. I also put myself, deliberately, into places and spaces that evoke my response. I not only listen but appreciate. And in this, I grasp the riches of the world's offerings. I leave the busy places in order to remind myself of the world, seeking moments of loneliness precisely to prepare myself to be with others again. Or I treat my associations in work and play as possible communities, seeking to move away from taking others merely as their roles, or the services they provide, the functions they perform. I look to find persons within their roles confident that although hidden they are there. So, I penetrate the habits of society in order to break the chains of interchangeability which a collection of roles imposes upon me. I replace ritual greetings with conversation, routine acknowledgement with recognition. In short, I put myself in the position of being a person in the presence of other persons and I begin my therapy by working out the changes this demands of me. Not least of all, I believe in the possibility of finding persons, of being a person.

Such a pedagogy entails its own politics and so the activities of intimacy push me toward reform, perhaps even revolution. The world around me must be shaped to permit, even encourage, a pedagogy of intimacy. So, it is no mere luxury to seek an environment of beautiful objects and of open spaces. Nor is it only a matter of social justice to struggle for the widest distribution of the time and wealth that are prerequisite to my ability to be with others. The barriers of geography and language that close us off from each other call for a reformed schooling that equips us to enjoy the riches of a plu-

ralist and diverse world. As with any pedagogy there are skills to be learned and powers to be shared.

With these suggestions for a pedagogy of intimacy, I can capture what I learn from the experience of intimacy with which I began, the manifest effectiveness of Humanist celebration. No longer moved to community by birth or only in crisis, a pedagogy of intimacy provides me with abilities that need not wait for the accidents of event. I am put into a position of shaping my biography. Of course, it would be arrogant and false to claim absolute powers. Accident will always attend me and surprise will always await me. But even here a pedagogy of intimacy readies me to respond, prepares me for happenings. I can be better placed than I am, better equipped than I am. As a Humanist, I still retain that confidence in my self, in others, and in the world. I turn away from the allure of another place and from the habits of abstraction. I return to the essential genius of Humanism, an intimate politics and a politics of intimacy, an intimate schooling and a schooling of intimacy. I grasp, finally, the coherence which a passionate democracy gives to the Humanism we found in the Enlightenment and to the Humanism we have yet to re-create in today's world of disconnections.