

ADDRESS GIVEN TO AHPP AT THE FREUD MUSEUM

Gaie Houston, March 17th 2001

Some years ago in Vienna I looked for and found the Freud Museum there. Like this one, it is the place where Sigmund Freud lived and worked. It was a modest apartment, with a life-size photograph of the famous couch, placed along the wall of his consulting room. Round the edges of the room were many of his texts, manuscripts and letters, with English translations beside them. They were absorbing reading. What has stayed with me most was Freud's statement that when he wrote something that to him was facile or obvious, he was applauded by scientific critics; but when he laboured with great pain over an idea that was to him difficult and frightening but needing to be enunciated, he was reviled for being trivial or facile.

Part of the point of beginning with this anecdote is to confess a kind of superstitious awe I experienced when I left that room, looked at my watch, and realised that I had spent a precise fifty minutes there. Some of you will see that as a triumph of coincidence. Others may see it, as I am inclined to, as evidence of the power of the unaware, or as it is wrongly called, the unconscious mind. I let myself imagine an affinity with other people who had spent an absorbed fifty minutes there in his presence. If indeed Freud practised in that way at that time.

Now we have another fifty minutes, at least, in his other consulting room. I hope that one outcome from this time will be an acknowledgement of the

power of many of his speculations, a more generous acknowledgement than his Viennese contemporaries afforded him. We stand upon his shoulders in order to see a little further. It is his stature that gives us a longer view.

Accreditation was an unknown word in the sixties and seventies, the early days. A meeting in this building would have been remarkably unlikely. Times change and we are changed in them, and here we are in this apparently novel conjunction.

That turns my mind to evolution, revolution, pace of change, and how to keep oneself together when all seems in flux. It makes me think too of the tendency to integration that is around, and at the same time the apparent need to assert the small or smaller group. So that is what I hope to talk about for 20 or 30 minutes.

This meeting can be seen as indicating a concentric movement, a tendency to integration. AHPP and BAC have now a formal understanding, something new that we are here to celebrate. Here is this place, to many humanistic practitioners a perhaps uneasy symbol.

The insights of family therapy have been taken up enthusiastically in humanistic work, over the last decades. The need for empathy with the position of the parent or grandparent, and the ability to incorporate what they are seen to offer to this generation, is often, and to my mind rightly, a criterion of psychological growth or wellbeing. Freud is

our grandfather. Respect for what he achieved and what he was attempting, and empathy with, or forgiveness for, what may seem to some his shortcomings, seems to me a necessary part of our development as the grandchildren in the family of explorers of the human psyche. I shall come back to this with some diagrams later.

In times to come I suppose that we too shall be reviled or scorned by people who are angry that we were not perfect, that we did not have total insight or unifying theory or clarity about what therapy is right for whom, at what moment in their lives. None of us have absolute answers to these questions, if we are honest. Only the foolish suppose there are many or any absolute truths in our field, or that they are the keepers of them.

One reading of the present is of a huge struggle between, if you will excuse my using Gestalt terms again, identification and alienation. What is like us, what are we allied with, on the one hand, and what is alien, other, and to be kept at a distance? In Europe there is at the same time a movement towards the European Union, and the break up of Yugoslavia into its constituents, and of the United Kingdom to its separate nations. In counselling and psychotherapy there is a good deal of under-the-counter integration of methods, as well as overt teaching of integrative practice. Yet the history of UKCP shows great conflict between different brands, to the point of the breaking away of some. What is to be let in? What must be kept out if we, you, I, are to keep a sense of a

coherent professional self ?
Perls once said that all schools of psychotherapy are partly right: the problem is that they are also righteous.

As far as I can judge from his writings, Freud was not righteous. He careered from one conviction or hypothesis to another through his career. It is arguably his followers who have at times fossilised parts of his theory, to produce an orthodoxy. Freud's own track record indicates strongly that if he had gone on living, he would have gone on changing his assumptions and his practice. Within his life he changed his methods from surgical intervention on the nose in the name of psychotherapeutic treatment, to visiting patients in their bedrooms, through to the no eye contact style of sitting by the analytic couch that is generally associated with his name. Had he lived longer, had he not been ill, I would bet a good sum of money that he would have changed his methods and his underlying assumptions again. He, like many of us, was struggling towards an understanding of psychological distress and the most effective way of dealing with it.

Nietzsche said: *Truth is not something there, that might be found or discovered but something that must be created and that gives a name to a process, or rather to a will to overcome that has no end introducing truth is a process in infinitum, an active determining, not a becoming-conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined.* (Nietzsche F. [1982] *The Will to Power Trans.*

Kauffman W. Viking Penguin.)

Whether or not we agree with that statement in all instances, it serves as a reminder to me of the need for constant re-evaluation. Alongside this quotation I put one from Foucault: *We are all formed and dominated by the values underlying the structure of [our] societies. Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: that is, the general type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as truths. {We need also to notice} the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.* (Foucault. M. [1980] *Power/ Knowledge.* Gordon C. Ed. New York: Pantheon.)

As I say all this, the humanistic movement is in my mind, along with my anxiety that we do not fall into the same errors of rigidity that it is easy to accuse others of committing.

There is a diagram, as usual a set of circles, that I find helpful as a description of different psychological positions. I hope they are of use in suggesting the positions that can be taken up by and between groups, in this case perceiving humanistic practitioners as one group or as a federation or alliance of sub-groups.

In this model the self is imagined as an inner circle. Round it is put another line, to represent the contact boundary, the place of interaction.

- If the self is firmly defined, and the

contact boundary is open or openable, learning and change, health, in fact can be present.

- If the self is insecurely defined, and the contact boundary is open, the person or group is highly vulnerable and alarmed.
- If the self is ill-defined and the contact boundary is closed, there is something approaching madness.
- If the self is defined and the boundary is closed, there is an inaccessible righteousness which amounts to a clinical condition.

I find it useful to reflect on whether and when we have taken up these various positions as an organisation or school, in the face of other organisations or schools. It would be against human nature and against sound group theory that we had not taken up some of the less healthy positions some of the time in our history. Perhaps today we are celebrating among all else that we are in the first of these four positions.

What I trust is exciting and

inspirational for all of us here who are concerned with the psyche, with matters psychological, is the hope that we grope forward more often than sideways or backwards as we search for or come upon new insights, methods and scientific discoveries from neighbouring disciplines.

To mark what I see as a historic day, the coming together at some level at least of AHPP, BAC, and the Freudian tradition, I would like to finish this talk by putting forward a possible development from analytic thinking through humanistic perception to an evolution available to us all.

Neurosis is a term and category widely used by Freud, and sometimes taken up, sometimes reviled, by humanistic practitioners. To my mind it can be a useful descriptive shorthand. The idea that genetic predisposition and distressing experience combine to a sort of habit of unwanted perceptions and behaviour seems a likely one. But this is a description of malfunction, distress or pathology. What is missing is a term for the polar opposite. Genetic predisposition and beneficent experience fuse in almost everyone's life to produce some area of psychological robustness, of ability to withstand or even laugh off certain tribulations, or to find delight, to perceive value, to live richly if only for brief instants. It would to me be a wonderful memorial of this day if someone here would come up with a word for this opposite of neurosis. Social scientists point out that we only have words for what we give

importance to. [Only when I had a son-in-law did I realise that there was no direct word to describe my relationship to his parents. That's weird.] It is weirder to me that we are so unspecific in our concepts of psychological, the jargon word for spiritual, health.

So I hope that one of the many ways in which we in AHPP can contribute to creating effective practitioners, is by clarifying our own thinking, and that of all who have ears to hear, about manifestations of psychological wellbeing, which are, I suspect, more copious than those of psychological distress. That would be a memorial to an important moment in our history that showed us to be in the first of those four positions.

Gaie Houston, 2001