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PERSONAL GROWTH AND SOCIETAL FUNCTIONING

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In an incredibly short span of time we have moved from a traditional, lineal, relatively static, preindustrial society through a series of technological and ideological holocausts. The personality of Western Man used to be conceived as a developmental unfolding within a closed system dependent upon determinism and to a lesser extent upon teleology. Such psychoanalytic beliefs were well suited to traditional civilizations in Europe and the United States. Suddenly, the new fact of existence was a perishable humanity encapsulated in a finite and diminishing universe of resources. Human beings were confronted with a kaleidoscope of change and a constant necessity for adaptation. The result has been a continuously modulated relationship between the person and a variety of environments.

Psychologists turned first to behavioristic attempts to control persons and environments by imposition of their technologies. Such behavioral innovations, however, are only effective while their rules and reinforcers are physically present. Ultimately, a responsible, internalized locus of control within the person is required to direct behavior. Some psychologists then rediscovered the environment and abandoned themselves to the idea that behavior (and personality) can be guided solely by the demand characteristics of the immediate situation. Generalization was not envisioned and fragmented parts of the person were deprived of any glue that would make an individual uniquely identifiable.

Other psychologists, however, were unable to accept the Newtonian view of science implied by either strict behaviorism or environmental determinism. A third force--humanistic theory<sup>14</sup>--perceived respect for the person as a survival quality necessitated by both the facts of social change and the rate of its occurrence. Humanistic theory emphasizes personal growth. Cognitive, affectual, and physical modes become alternatives in the quest for sufficient flexible control in order to adapt without losing human characteristics. A growth theme sustains an evolution of human beings in continuous self-renewal and self-discovery of the means by which to incorporate increasingly diverse, complex, and fragmented experiences. This paper will describe some taproots of a human growth ideology and present notions on the relatedness of personal growth to societal functioning.

A recent credo for providing clinical psychological services illustrates the consequences of focus on respect for the person<sup>3</sup>: accountability by means of contracted services, phenomenological equality of clinician and client, and an emphasis on client ownership of services--ultimately through education. Thus, the "something of value" potentially contained in clinical services is shared and understood as a catalyst for the personal growth of both clinician and client<sup>4</sup>.

Growth apparently comes about by enhanced self-awareness or self-consciousness. In Rogerian terms, organismic valuing process transmutes experience from the phenomenal field that we co-inhabit into an expanding consciousness of self. Such experience is motivating and directive. A first implication

thus, is that learning about the self--from whatever experiential source--is power to recreate the dimensions of experience, to re-interpret one's own locus in the phenomenal field that is the environmental circumstance.

The Jungian archetype self moves from arcane and unconscious sources to become a conscious and self-conscious balance system and the focus of personality. Similarly, Maslow's inner core<sup>12</sup>--the perdurable shared and unique fount of humanness--is discovered, created, and accepted by satisfaction of deficiency and Being needs. Hearing and responding to oneself or one's inner voices is a mark of authentic selfhood and part of the self-actualization experience. Assagioli<sup>1</sup> posits a center for inner self-control or "will power" in order to enable directional, means-end activity. Since the self, inner core, or center are ways of conceptualizing an internal process whose development coincides with the experiencing of the phenomenal field (or environment), a second implication concerns an ultimate personal responsibility for one's own growth.

Each of us presumes a lonely journey by means of an experienced internal process in which the flesh we cherish is only a symbol and a guide. A third implication is that there are substantial notions of how to further sign the self-expansion and self-exploration that I have preferred to call "humanization"<sup>5,6</sup>. For example, Erikson<sup>9</sup> provided such benchmarks in epigenetic format. We become what we will be from what we have been and how we live at the painful instant of the present. Identification of these inner foci (or virtues) as hope, will power, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, and wisdom provides an idiom for conceptualizing humanization.

This language is independent of the specific experiences that resonate across prototypical developmental crises.

A fourth implication sets limits upon individual human growth. Freedom to grow is limited by a matrix of external and internal constraints and by the state of consciousness at any time. We think of freedom and responsibility--especially responsibility before-the-act<sup>8</sup>--as being coupled to the existential condition of other persons both those we experience directly and those hidden from our direct regard but sharing our humanity.

A fifth implication is that growth is future-oriented. The concept of a future--personal and collective--is hinged to our freedom within these external constraints that are components of our personal well-being. We cannot grow without attending to the future, the reasonable and fantasy-tinged extrapolations of our ability to be subject and object simultaneously, to bind time, and to transmogrify the hypothetical by fusing the inner core with past experience.

A sixth implication is that growth occurs in the present. Essential to any apprehension of the future is attending to the present, being responsible for each decision as a consequence of personal meaning, being "fully functioning" in every feeling and every act, and living each minute as the only and ultimate expression of oneself. Sartre's anguish is a realization of the mutual dependency of freedom and responsibility in an equation of unknown parameters and acted upon in changing and often arbitrary circumstances. Because each human decision is a fulmination of where one has been, where one is going, and how one discovers

meaning in the present, it always involves transition from inertia to action.

Inherent in such transitions from mass to motion are several opportunities for crisis. Thus, the seventh implication is that growth is painful and exquisitely difficult to endure. These crisis occasions are to be protected or to grow, to be personalized or to be human, to be identified or to be anonymous<sup>7</sup>. Human growth is predicated upon clear awareness of personal reality, upon belief in one's own intactness, and upon sharing oneself and being oneself simultaneously. However, personal reality is often painful and this pain may be alleviated by private parables. Beliefs in one's intactness are fragile and sometimes distorted at the expense of others. Anonymity is conformity in the sense of surrendering human obligation.

Since there are at least these three ingredients in every human decision, risk is inevitable, crisis is unavoidable, hurt is omnipresent, and anguish is an immutable part of human experience. Under such conditions that we grow at all is a testimony to the strength of the inner human structure and the drive, or "will" that may be invoked for humanization.

An eighth implication concerns the mutual interdependence of growth experiences. As we grow--fitfully, intermittently, and for long periods seemingly not at all--we interface with the growth struggles of many other persons. We all contend with different facets of a common set of social structures--institutions that live by non-human rules for survival. We all compete for living space as though it were a commodity. Along with Dylan

Thomas<sup>17</sup>, we all "rage, rage, rage against the dying of the light", experiencing the violation of perishable time--more quickly consumed in happiness than despair. We are all caught in nets of instant compromise and unremitting folly. We flail and agonize and often cannot penetrate the mini-space and mini-time of personal circumstance. And we have no good nor ready words for our experiences of being. Encapsulated in our aging skins, we are surrounded by the phantasmagoric future shock of too much change, stimulation, and choice<sup>18</sup>. Seeking sensation when meaning is desired, we can become insensate and stultified by a rigor mortis inherent in our own experiences.

Such is the transition from some concomitants of the growth toward self-controlled selfhood to the larger social milieu in which we often feel acted-upon rather than actors, controlled rather than responsive, and conforming rather than free. If human institutions cannot be enjoyed as contexts for humanization, then we face an almost certain self-destruction.

Since growth is affected by the person's phenomenal field which includes society, the central societal issue for human beings is contained in the phrase "quality-of-life". Maslow believed in a psychology of how to make Good Persons in a Good Society<sup>13</sup>. Such persons may only flourish in societies that offer a high quality-of-life for all members.

Quality-of-life is a sensitizing concept relating to the intentions and awareness of human beings regarding their own social condition and their own capability for mustering environmental and personal resources toward the goals of satisfaction

and happiness. More specifically, Harland<sup>12</sup> has referred to quality-of-life as the state of satisfaction of essential social and human needs and wants represented by goods, services, situations, and states of affairs.

In an era when many Western societies are losing the capacity for Utopian thinking or leaving such fantasy to social philosophers, science fiction writers, and futurists, the idea of quality-of-life is worthy of reiteration in a context of personality. In this context, what is "good" for human beings becomes equated with what is required within a society in order to foster the most complete expression of the human potential, or the growth of human beings.

In order to experience high quality living conditions, it is necessary to have a master social plan and the machinery for monitoring salient social events and rendering them into data descriptive of the functioning adequacy of society. Such a master social plan has been envisioned in this country by governmental<sup>2</sup> and private groups (e.g., the Institute of the Future) and some relevant data has recently been published<sup>19</sup>. The Social Science Council of Canada and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development have prepared similar plans. We already have a nomenclature exemplified by social indicators, or measures of discrete aspects of quality-of-life, social reporting, or the summarization and reporting of such indicators, and social accounting, or the welfare balance sheets for large areas of society<sup>11</sup>. We lack consensus on specific indicators. This fact becomes one way of admitting that we do not know or agree upon what social conditions foster humanization. We do not have a political system



that can readily exchange economic for human goals even in the service of ultimate species survival. A responsible system for providing information, feedback, and self-conscious awareness by citizens would lead to more direct usages of political power in the interests of a more satisfactory life for all persons. However, the imposition of values as to what constitutes the "good" life is the most critical issue. Who is to do it? How is it to be done?

Etzioni<sup>10</sup> has provided one model for an active, or self-controlling society whose values can be mediated through social structures in order to permit authentic living by individuals. Authenticity implies a balanced relationship between commitment, awareness, and sharing societal power. Present, post-modern society is inauthentic in political processes and institutions and inherently unstable due to blocking of recognition and treatment of social problems. Human beings react by alienation, or feeling imprisoned and powerless, and by inauthenticity, or feeling cheated and manipulated. Etzioni<sup>10</sup> eloquently proffers a concentrated, time-limited act, a personal project that should be symbolic and collective to provide at least a new societal insight and at most a societal change:

"But there are moments...in which each man sees the roots of his uneasiness, the shadows of his captors, and the hands of his manipulators, and he, thus, has an irreducible element of freedom which he can extend by committing himself to a project (p. 648)".

Elaborating on Miller's theme<sup>15</sup> that we can give our science away, Smith<sup>16</sup> invokes new priorities for a humanized science that also may enhance individual freedom. Skinnerian technology is seen as a negation of human freedom and dignity while humanistic romanticism is no antidote for "strategies of disciplined inquiry". We need these human problem-solving strategies by applied reinforcement principles and we also need the belief in persons as responsible actors in a self-created world. Such union of head and heart means that a shared scientific enterprise can give something away that is worthwhile.

Now to return to the credo for providing clinical psychological services, an example that has been given substance by a discussion containing the following points of focus on the vital and awesome union of human and society:

1. Learning about the self is the source of expanding consciousness.
2. Growth is a personal responsibility.
3. There are external signs of internal self-development.
4. Freedom to grow is never absolute, but is limited by both external and internal constraints.
5. Growth is future-oriented.
6. Growth occurs in the present tense.
7. Growth is painful and always involves risk, crisis, hurt, and anguish.
8. Individual growth processes interface with those of other persons such that mutual interdependence is the human condition.
9. Growth is affected by the person's phenomenal field which includes society.

10. Societies as well as persons may be referred to as authentic, or fostering individual growth, or inauthentic, when individual growth is blocked or distorted.
11. The societal contribution to personal growth may be called the experienced quality-of-life.
12. High quality-of-life can only occur as an indirect individual consequence of a master social plan for a particular society.
13. Master social plans depend upon consensus regarding those conditions fostering humanization and a political climate that values human goals.
14. Interferences with individual growth as a result of societal restriction have been described as alienation or inauthenticity.
15. The recourse for the individual in the face of an inauthentic society is participation in order to nurture freedom by means of commitment.

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