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CREATIVE HELPING

Person and context.

The purpose, meaning and difficulties of personal existence are always imbedded in the culture of which the person is a member. Person and context are constantly interacting. Now one, now the other appears to dominate. Transcultural studies provide many examples of how individuals shape and reshape their context through ideas, inventions and even psychic processes which may be externalized and made into conventions or institutions of the culture. As Ruth Benedict once remarked, "Culture is personality writ large."

In turn, individuals are certainly influenced by various aspects of their cultural milieu such as customs, laws, institutions, organizations, and ideologies. It is important to remember that each aspect of culture originated as an invention or complex of inventions, or as a projection of cognitive or emotional aspect of personality. However, in due time these individually created contributions become legitimated themes, norms, rules or institutions of a society and exert varying degrees of influence on individual members of that society.

One very interesting example of how a psychic process can become a cultural institution and thus radically influence the behavior of individual members of the society is that of the Seneca tribe and the dream (Wallace, 1958). Modern psychology holds that a dream is an individual, subjective psychic phenomenon or process, albeit an important one. The dream is considered

by many to be a highly significant process somewhat on the order of the individual sending himself a message. If understood or interpreted properly the dream may have great importance in daily living or in self-understanding. The Seneca, however, went so far as to institutionalize the dream-to them it was a divine power. As such it exerted great influence over individuals, not as a psychological tool, but as a divine and prophetic institution. The Seneca tried to follow the divinatory message of the dream with exactitude. Understanding of the personality and personal behavior of an Iroquois would have required understanding his cultural context including the importance of the dream as an aspect of that context. From transcultural studies we may conclude that educational and therapeutic efforts to develop, correct or improve personality and personal existence must take into account both the uniqueness of the individual and his cultural context if they are to be successful (Kiev, 1972).

Technicized society.

The cultural context in which most of us live can be described as "technological" or "technicized." A central characteristic of this context is the "physical machine take-over of the destiny of people (Yablonsky, 1972, p. 6)." Technology aims at its own maximum efficiency and utilization. Choice becomes technical: i.e., automatic and based on efficient, precise, logical progression. The human agent with his ability to create and choose is not needed, nor even wanted. Technique itself chooses the proper means to be employed in order to achieve maximum progression and minimum cost and wastage. The cultural conversion from personal choice to technical choice leads to what Ellul (1967) has referred to as "automatism."

Robopathic man.

Automatism has been increasing since the beginning of the industrial revolution. In the last four decades it has accelerated greatly due to the advent of such technological institutions as nuclear energy, computerization, planetary television, jet travel, and destruction systems, as well as space travel and communications. The technicizing of Western society is now proceeding at a rate hardly calculable. Although subtle, automatism contributes steadily and ever-more swiftly to the reduction of personal significance and to what Morgan (1968) terms the "banishment of the person." Personal choice and values are replaced by technical logic.

A machine which acts like a person is called a robot. Conversely, a person who tries to act like a machine may be termed a robopath (Yablonsky, 1972). In a technicized society special, technical interests are separated and elevated above concern for the whole--either the whole man or the whole of mankind. The robopath is specialized and fragmented. His activities are atomized; a specific technical activity or a role is not considered in light of what it does to the remainder of his personal existence. His actions and his moral sense are split; he is "value-free." Doing is elevated over understanding and reason and emotion are regarded as mutually exclusive categories. "Divorced from nature and from other men, the (robopathic) individual is estranged and isolated--bereft, despite all activity, of what is essential to becoming and being a whole person (Morgan, 1968, p. 77)."

Anomie.

Individuals living in a technicized social order often exhibit a severe state of personal underdevelopment. Personal growth is seldom encouraged; rather

it is usually directly blocked, especially in work and family settings. Even in education the motto: "Full development of individual potential" is seldom more than a platitude. The personally underdeveloped individual is organized and centered around weakness, uncertainty, and emptiness, rather than around strength and significance. This is the existential state referred to as anomie (McClosky and Scharr, 1965). For the anomic, "everything is so uncertain," "things aren't like they used to be," "old friendships are gone," and "one just doesn't know how to act from one day to the next." The anomic believes the "no one knows what is right," but nonetheless thinks that other people are more likely to know what is right than he is. Fundamentally, the anomic has lost, or has never developed, either the ability to differ with others or the ability to create personal meaning and significance. The anomic suffers from a collapse of values and, we might say, has lost his way in the world.

Creative energies blocked.

Even though it is man's ability to imagine and create which has given rise to the societal conditions which now threaten to extinguish him, a compelling solution for anomie and blocked creativity is to re-establish contact with creative energies; for in each instance it is just this energy which is needed to invent new selves capable of surviving in a technicized society. Man invented machines. Unfortunately, after inventing them, he began to ape them. The more an individual's activities are modelled after the machine--standardized, automatic and repeatable--the more he loses his spontaneity and vital ability to create. Some years ago J.L. Moreno, father of psychodrama, pointed out that submission to technical processes and reliance on techniques always causes the individual "to neglect and abandon the genuine and outstanding creative process in him (Moreno, 1953, p. 598)."

A distinctive personality.

If the society of which we are members is indeed becoming rapidly more technicized, and if this produces conditions conducive to anomie and loss of creativity, then we need educational/therapeutic/personal growth strategies which will assist the individual to organize his life around a center of personal significance and to assist him to create that new self (or selves) capable of surviving in a technicized context. One way to proceed is to work for the release of creative energies which will make such inventions possible. Through bringing creative energies to bear on the activities of everyday existence, the re-integration of the fragmented self into a meaningful, distinctive personality becomes a real possibility. As Richard Schacht (1971) has shown, a distinctive personality is not simply a lofty ideal, but amounts to an existential imperative. Among researchers into alienation from Hegel down to the present, there is almost unanimous agreement that: "a person is not as he should be to the extent that he fails to develop a distinctive personality (Schacht, 1971, p. 272)." Without distinctiveness the individual attains only to pre-personality, or, even more unfortunate, de-personality.

Personality and creativity.

Nicholas Berdyaev (1952, 1955), the Russian existentialist and mystic has argued that the development of true personality and the expression of creativity are deeply intertwined:

The creative act is a free and independent force, immanently inherent only in a person, a personality. Only something arising in original substance and possessing the power to increase power in the world can be true creativity....Creativity is an original act of personalities in the world (Berdyaev, 1955, p. 135).

How ought we to regard personality? In Berdyaev's view not merely as a psychological or sociological entity but as something more--an ethical category. Personality is really a break with the world order. Through deciding, through acting, through creating, a person breaks the closed circle of the natural world. The person is a moral agent capable of self-affirmation through moral choice, acts of freedom and creative expression. Personality, elevated to its proper status as moral agent is not just an organism with intelligence, nor even just an individual; personality is freedom, is creativity, is spirit.

Man has the power to imagine, and with this he is able to break-in on causal chains, and to break-out of conditioning. At every moment, personality has the potential capacity to imagine, think, feel, and act in ways which cannot quite be explained on the basis of what has gone before. Man is constantly seeking novelty, yet this in itself does not set him apart from other organisms. What sets him apart and lifts him to the category of moral agent is that he can generate novelty. Personality as freedom, creativity and spirit transcends the limits of logical and biological necessity. In fact, through invention and creation, man transcends himself.

Carl Rogers has described certain inner conditions which he believes are characteristic of the creative or potentially creative personality. One is openness to experience:

To the degree that the individual is open to all aspects of his experience, and has available to his awareness all the varied sensings and perceivings which are going on within his organism, then the novel products of his interaction with this environment will tend to be constructive both for himself and for others (Rogers, 1962, p. 67).

A second important "inner" requirement for constructive creativity is that the individual has the feeling of being "me in action." Rogers refers to this as internal locus of evaluation. This suggests that the value of what the person is doing or is feeling is determined by himself more than by praise and criticism from others. This does not imply total lack of awareness of others' judgments or evaluations. What is important is that for the creative personality the primary site of evaluation is within. He is able to trust his body, his emotions, and his imagination. He is willing to risk being open to experiencing in all aspects of his organism and he is able to trust judgments formulated on the basis of his experiencing.

A third dimension of the creative personality is the ability to play spontaneously with ideas, relationships, and elements of the environment. Playfulness means being able to express the ridiculous, to be amazed, to see something from unbelievable angles. The creative personality toys with possibilities, is willing to try-out, and to "waste" time and effort. By playing around, the creative personality lets go; he permits his imagination and the world of practicality to test each other out. By playing, the creative person frees himself from conventions, habits and conditionings; thus he is able to let the New emerge.

Creative helping.

To facilitate the development of distinctive personality, to reduce anomie, and to release creative energy--these are the tasks to which Creative Helping sets itself. Creative Helping does not refer to a single method but to a learning/creating/helping/realizing/growing process--a synthesis of experiences through which a person may reintegrate himself with his world in such ways

that he makes himself whole, re-news himself through creative energy, and creates a more meaningful personal existence. The need for Creative Helping increases with the growth of technicized social orders which are inimical to personal development.

"Helping" refers to a range of activities including counselling, therapy, personal growth, and psychological education. "Creative" emphasizes attempts to vitalize individuals by engaging them in the creative arts. "Creative Helping" attempts to interfuse the discipline of helping with the disciplines of the arts. Creative Helping engages the individual in various modalities and expressive forms: sensory and body awareness; movement/dance; dramatic arts; music; writing and film; introverted and extraverted attention; talking and keeping silent; creative problem solving; and meditation.

Whether in the negative direction of de-personality or in the positive direction of a richer and more distinctive personality, personality change is constant. In order to state more specifically how Creative Helping gears into personality change, we follow, with some modifications, a model of personal growth as formulated by Rossi (1968, 1972).

Conditions inimical to personal growth.

To the extent that an individual's life is influenced by technicizing influences, at least the following conditions which are inimical to personality development can be defined:

- a. Channels for creative experience are lacking. Children have the universal channels of play and imagination for the expression and experience of creativity. However, in a technological culture with emphasis on precision, repeatability and practicality, adults have extremely impoverished channels for the expression of original, creative impulses and experience. The typical individual is not without creative potential; instead he has learned to deny or suppress

creative impulses in deference to conventional, standardized expectations of others: parents, teachers, peers, employers. A large number of contemporary adults can neither play nor imagine. Many have become afraid of their own inner life.

- b. Over-identification. In order to fit into technicized life, many persons over-identify with mechanistic aspects of society. This contributes to one's inability to recognize and contact creative impulses which present themselves from time to time. Unrecognized, they lose potency and the possibility for a new direction or action is lost.
- c. Over-reliance. Dependency on others is one of the most frightening aspects of technological living. The individual learns very well what others expect of him and may organize his whole life around finding out what others expect so that he can conform. Such an individual has a pathetic inner world; he lacks self awareness and self-orientation.
- d. Passivity toward the New is reinforced. One of the characteristics of the technicized organization is that most new ideas "die a-borning." The primary training ground for this passivity is the classroom where the teacher must "keep things under control," "cover the ground," and see that the "right answers" are memorized and repeated. Programming is not only for computers! By the time the individual has finished schooling he has learned to passively accept rather than risk. He is afraid of exploring the unknown and is unwilling to risk retaliation for differing from what is "right."
- e. Prosaic attitude. Life takes on a standardized, "average" quality. This is reflected in the "I'm just doing my job" attitude, or the "Thank God its Friday" lament of the teacher. The individual is merely a part of the social machine. Worse, he is an inter-changeable part.

Blocks to personal development.

As the individual tries to adapt to a context which is inimical to growth, he develops blocks to growth within himself. Such blocks do have a survival function but in a restrictive and defensive sense. They are formed to ward off hurts, threats and fears. While they enable the individual to survive in a de-personalizing context, they negate the individual's impulses to grow, create and transcend. Some of the more prominent blocks are:

- a. Lack of awareness. Limited awareness of self, others and environment means that large areas of experience are being denied or distorted.

- b. One-dimensional view of self. This self-view stresses literality, practicality, "I'm just doing my job." The one-dimensional person depends upon advice, rules and practical logic. He has no realization of himself as a being in depth. Emotion, imagination and inner life are negatively valued and suppressed.
- c. Feelings of inability or inadequacy. The individual experiences himself as just barely being able to cope and as not having the power to do much about his circumstances.
- d. Negativity to the new and novel. The individual cannot trust himself--especially his creative impulses or sensings of newness within himself. This lack of trust is usually projected as negativity to creativity in general. What is not "practical" is not appreciated.
- e. Tiredness, depression. The individual is often weighed down by his life--he yearns for a better life usually expressed: "If only..." Things are too much, he feels chronically tired and is unable to reach his own inner sources of renewal. "I feel so hopeless."
- f. Body blocks. These usually take the form of rigidity, tension or lack of body awareness. Muscular blocking is closely related to depression. The individual is out-of-touch with his bodily self. He may have no image of himself as an embodiment or have a partial and distorted sense of body. He feels "tense and tired." He experiences body pain which is not grounded in actual physical disorder. He has poor use of his body--weakness, rigidity, tension, immobility predominate. Muscle contractions are used to deny feelings and awareness.

Impulses to personal development.

Even though many persons suffer severe, personal underdevelopment and have acquired blocks to personal growth, nearly everyone at times exhibits what may be called "impulses" to growth. Each of the conditions listed below can be regarded as signs of troubles existence or as pathology. However, they may also be regarded as indicators of potential change. Each expresses a state of un-ease, of dis-satisfaction, and, as such, may symptomize an impulse to growth. Five such impulses are:

- a. Confusion. When experiencing mental and emotional confusion, an individual may become aware of possibilities for action which before had been denied or unnoticed. Confusion has positive as well as negative implications.

- b. Crisis. A crisis is an up-ending experience. What was working is not now working. Like confusion, crisis has a potential for growth. The impulse to growth may indeed throw the individual into turmoil such that his existence becomes crisis-ridden. In crises, the unbelievable is happening.
- c. Self-contradiction. Technological society tends to fragment the individual into many "parts" and roles. When the individual senses various aspects of his fractured personality as "conflicting" or contradicting each other, he experiences dissonance and self-contradiction. These experiences do not necessarily, but indeed may signal an impulse to growth and urge to integration.
- d. Rebelliousness. Rebelliousness represents, among other things, an impulse to struggle free from oppressive conditions.
- e. Tension. Tension is a signal that important inner-outer contradictions are being ignored or that the wisdom of the body is not being listened to. The tense person is living in such a way, that his body is "freezing." Tension may draw the attention of the individual to the fact that his existence is sickening, and thus start a process of positive change.
- f. Thoughts of differentness. Thoughts of doing something different or of being different are not always repressed. When such thoughts leak by the individual's censor, they are often accompanied by feelings of embarrassment, guilt, or self-consciousness. Again, while such events can be regarded as pathological, irrational and symptoms of disturbance, they can also be viewed as early signs of upending and the emergence of an impulse to grow.

Original, creative experiences.

Even though an individual may be deeply imbedded in a technicized environment which restricts and even opposes personality growth and the use of creative energy, and may have developed severe blocks to creativity and growth within himself, he will still experience the impulse to grow. Unfortunately these growth symptoms usually take in forms which are regarded as sick. By recognizing these symptoms as signs of potential development, the Creative Helper can take steps--therapeutic and educational--to assist the individual to recognize, verify, and use his own original experiencing toward the goal of constructive personality change and development. Examples of original experiencing which

may be contacted through expressive therapeutic and educational methods include:

- a. New and expanded awareness: the role of perceptual, cognitive, emotional and body awareness in creativity and personality growth can hardly be over-emphasized.
- b. Transformation: recognition of constant inward change--using the insights from dreams, hunches, intuitions as grounds for taking different life-action.
- c. Break-out: the moment or act of breaking with conditioned ideas, feelings, beliefs, values or behaviors which have suppressed creative energies and limited personal development.
- d. Original thinking: epitomized in personal reflections on the new and the different; ability to reformulate life plans and actions in the perspective of the New; permitting oneself to think "astonishing" ideas, to have insights, to be suprised, even amazed. Original thinking breaks with established, conditioned patterns and includes both intuition and vision.
- e. Excitement: the standardized quality of life is broken out of--the individual begins to experience excitement and feels vital rather than bored, passive, and tired. The body steadies, the mind wakes up, life takes on a distinctive quality.

Confirmation.

Experiencing oneself as having a creative center, as being able to respond spontaneously as well as habitually, as being alive and vital is an incredible experience. Our conception of the successful, enjoying, healthy personality is that of the organic whole, or Gestalt. The well-being of the person (ality) is dependent on the harmonious interplay and integration of the symbolic, affective, motor and visceral components of the individual into a total unity. Personality development is a totalization process. We think and imagine, we feel and express, we move and bodily experience. When these processes are fluidly interactive and attuned, free of blocks and denial, then we imagine deeply, we feel well, we think clearly, we move vitally--we are well.

To confirm the individual's contact with his own creative sources, and to encourage the building of a viable self, Creative Helping tries to facilitate:

- a. Experimenting with new awareness in various life situations.
- b. Integration of the new with the old; of inner and outer, of body and mind.
- c. Testing; identifying, practicing and trying out new behaviors, plans, ideas in the learning or therapeutic situation and in other real life situations.
- d. Appreciating the New--actively valuing and relating to novelty in self, in relationships, in tasks, in others.
- e. Allowing oneself to experience pleasure, happiness, playfulness.

By engaging the individual in symbolic, affective, motor and visceral spheres through a variety of expressive means, as well as silence and dialogal encounter, Creative Helping tries to guide and stimulate the creation of personality which trusts, and which has access to its own creative source. Much of the educational and therapeutic effort is aimed at removing the blocks to personal growth and creativity which have been built up in both the mind and the body. The individual is encouraged to use himself and the objects in his environment to formulate a stronger, more trustworthy personal identity; to build effective relationships and achievement; to become initiative, participative and involved; in short--to make of himself, in relation to his world, more than he has ever been or has ever been encouraged to be.

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