

Against Humanism

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SUMMARY: The counselling movement is bedevilled by a conservative and problematic humanist underpinning that legitimises oppressive practices and elides tensions between the personal, the political and the social. Recognising the difficulty of identifying 'good' outcomes in counselling practice is critical for developing a more radical and political counselling movement that is a driver for social change and genuine diversity. Counsellors must systematically depower themselves.

KEY WORDS: Counselling, Humanism, Post-Modernity

We do not believe that sustaining and expanding the business of counselling and psychology as currently constituted will play a tangible role in the achievement of social justice or the construction of peace and social justice either locally or globally. (Sloan & Toporek, 2007:1).

It may be time for a more ruthless examination of the role of humanism in the counselling movement. While talking over our troubles with practically anyone is nearly always soothing, the effectiveness of professional counselling is unclear and disputed. Despite counselling and psychotherapy operating on an industrial scale in the developed west it has not prevented the relentless rise in distress. Counselling rarely engages with the crises of values and meaning that are often the causes of distress, nor with its societal roots. The counselling movement may even be a contributory factor to that distress.

'Some practices associated with counseling and psychology are worse than ineffective and are, in fact, either part of the problem or do direct harm' (Sloan & Toporek, 2007, p1) but despite this, the literature on the damaging effects of