

Book Review

Jerome Liss *Free to Feel*, Wildwood House, £3.75

Tolstoi said that all happy families are happy in the same way; unhappy families are unhappy in their own way. This is echoed in Jerome Liss's approach to therapy. Everyone is unhappy in his own way. 'Respect your neighbour - with his differences' he quotes - emphasizing that the new therapies support the individual against his society, and against his family.

His own approach to therapy is clear and imaginative. His emphasis is on the integrity and individuality of the patient. 'I am not responsible for my patient, nor are they responsible for me. I do not take care of my patients, though I care for them. I am responsible for myself and my actions, and my patients are responsible for themselves and their actions.' He uses body oriented methods, holding, massaging, working on physical expression of emotion. But he has a respect for verbal psycho-therapy. There is perhaps a tendency in the Humanistic Psychology Movement to decry verbal work and concentrate entirely on non-verbal modes of behaviour and expression. Liss is quite clear about this. 'Verbal psycho-therapy can allow us to carry out our impulse for spontaneous talk . . . to talk freely to someone you can trust allows the time spent between thoughts and spoken words to diminish until they both happen at the same time. Then, too, the words may come out before the thought and you are surprised to hear your own words.'

Interestingly enough, in view of the current antipathy of body therapy practitioners to Freudian verbal therapies, Liss points out that Freud himself started his earliest explorations on the body. In the case of Elizabeth von R. he reported an association between body pains and aroused memories. 'If I called up a memory, a sensation of pain . . . usually so sharp that the patient would give a start and put her hand to the painful spot.'

Liss also reports some relevant cases where the use of fantasy revealed a link between an emotional memory and a physical symptom. 'One person who felt tension in his belly imagined doubling up and being cradled by his mother. Another person felt jaw tension and imagined biting his father's scalp until drawing blood . . . One woman felt a tension in her lower abdomen. She imagined standing belly to belly with her father. The tension melted into a warm feeling that shot into her genitals. Her mind immediately turned off the fantasy because of its sexual meaning. With that she lost all feeling in her lower belly and genitals.'

Liss sums up the new approach very clearly. 'The psychotherapies have a two fold function: to arouse stuck reactions and to help them subside. There are a number of pathways open: think of painful memories, free-associate to dreams or preoccupying thoughts, fantasize; of deep-breathe, enliven the body through movement, re-enact painful situations from the past, scream out the pain. Again the New Therapies start with the body.'

Getting in touch with ones own feelings is an important part of the new therapies. Blocking, suppression by comforting, 'stiff upper lip' are all out. Instead the patient/client/helper is encouraged to stay with his feelings, fully experience them, go through them and come out freer and released from them.

The objections often voiced that screaming and letting go is all very well in private but cannot have any part in ordinary life is answered very p'tly. 'Does that mean New Therapy patients are going to go around screaming their heads off and bashing up the place? His answer is no. Not unless they want to. Emotional capacity means the ability to exercise restraint. Feelings will make more sense because increased emotional tolerance means a person knows what's happening on the spot . . . What one is *supposed* to feel is replaced by what one *does* feel. Held back feelings tend to build upon themselves. Feelings released by awareness and aided by expression are 'discharged out'. Much of this approach is built on Wilhelm Reich's novel of 'body armouring'.

Leading practitioner of neo-Reichian therapies is Alexander Lowen, author of *Betrayal of the Body* and director of the New York Institute of Bioenergetic Analysis. He uses deep breathing, muscle strain exercises and encourages the working out emotions and offers physical and emotional comfort and support. One case is described in detail - a girl who was frightened and in despair and out of touch with her own body. Gradually through the treatment her frozen defences began to thaw.' In the midst of her crying she began to have a sensation in her vagina that was like a 'bud opening into flower.' This is followed by warmth and a feeling of well being. This pattern is seen frequently - numbness in parts of the body followed by active discomfort followed by dissolving warm sensations.

Starting from the premise that the individual is of value, it is not surprising that the new therapies have given rise to a number of self-help techniques and philosophies. In the drug field, Synanon, operating with non-medically-qualified leaders in responsibility-sharing communes has a success rate with addicts estimated at twenty times as much as with orthodox medical approaches. The peer-counselling network, originating with Harvey Jackins'.

Re-evaluation Co-counseling organisation in Seattle is now world-wide and independent groups are being formed in Holland, Great Britain, Australia and elsewhere. Peer counseling is the ultimate in reciprocal self-help where two people take it in turns to be patient and therapist. And the ultimate in *self* self help is Gestalt Therapy as originally developed by Perls, Hefferline and Goodman. Here the individual alone can develop his own awareness of his environment and of his own body sensations and needs. A kind of somatic meditation can produce insight into buried traumas and into self defeating behaviour. This in fact was my own means of release, a dramatic and exciting turning point in my life.

Liss has a refreshingly undogmatic approach to the new therapies. He insists that not all the new therapies are suitable for all patients. Nor of course are all orthodox therapies. Some therapies, old and new, can help some patients. The important thing is to keep an open mind and be prepared to experiment - without blaming the therapy if it

doesn't work. Or without blaming oneself.

Throughout this long - 265 pages - book - Liss breathes a welcome air of humanity and understanding. And an encyclopaedic knowledge of the psychology of people and the innumerable ways in which they can interfere with their own happiness, and a host of ways, old and new, in which they can be helped. If asked to suggest one single book to cover the very wide and many-faceted subject of Humanistic Psychology, I would at the moment have no hesitation suggesting FREE TO FEEL.