

BOOK REVIEW

PSYCHOLOGY, MYSTICISM AND POLITICS - The books of Jane Roberts

I'd like to share with you some of the great benefits I've had through my reading of the works of Jane Roberts.

I'd been round Humanistic Psychology for years without getting anywhere and in 1981 following a severe illness I felt able and clear to try using Ms Roberts' ideas. The basic idea is that 'You create your own reality' through the beliefs you hold in your conscious mind and through the emotions and everyday imaginings that go with those beliefs. To change your reality (say, if it's sick or unhappy) you must change your beliefs first. This is done by allowing yourself to be spontaneous, by accepting your emotions and by following your impulses. What I find really amazing about her works is her integration of mind, body, emotion, psychic phenomena, relationship and everyday events.

She says that at any time in our lives, the whole fabric of what is going on is a picture of our conscious minds. You may have noticed that before any big change in your life, there was a build up of desire and emotional energy - this is the sort of thing she talks about. The point is that it is now possible to make this more conscious. Many people are not aware of their common thought patterns, and so things keep on 'happening to them'. Once you begin to take cognisance of your thoughts and feelings it is possible to see more clearly where you are going, and you feel less like a victim. This also increases your personal power.

In a way what her work is about is rediscovering the clarity of vision and personal power that we all had as children. I often notice that happy children have a greater personal authority and power than adults and I am sure this is because they use their minds and emotions far more fully than adults.

Children often experiment with their imaginations for they know that if they imagine enough, a version of the event will happen. It is possible to relearn how to use this faculty as adults. Say, you want a new mate. What you must do is spend a few minutes everyday strongly imagining what it would be like to have a new mate and also not focus mentally on the contrast between what you want and what you have. If you do this there will be new impulses, and it is up to you to follow those impulses in faith that a new mate will be found. The point is that if you are lonely (or sick or

poverty-stricken or unhappy) you have created those conditions through repeated thought and imagination. To change those conditions you must concentrate on your desire. There will probably be fear at times that you won't get what you want and also strong 'negative thoughts'. When this happens it is essential not to repress what's going on but to express the fear through the body (say by hunching shoulders) and also to allow the 'negative thoughts' to flow through your mind. If you do this, it will lead to a period of quiet and self-affirmation and you will feel able to concentrate on your desire again in a playful way. It is important to say that you mustn't overdo this. A few minutes a day concentration is enough. There is a rhythm to doing this and it is important to be gentle and loving and kindly to yourself.

One thing I've found is that it's not the big emotional 'discharges' that matter; what matters is the day to day willingness to accept all the little feelings and impulses that I've habitually ignored and also to accept doubt as a real feeling when it occurs and not to try to pretend it away. Another thing I try and do (a la Ms Roberts) is to do what's most fun in the moment - this could be being lazy, or saying something "unpleasant".

Let me give you an idea of how Ms Roberts' stuff works. Say someone is burgled. Why did the burglar choose this person and not that person? Maybe the person who is burgled believes everyone is out to get them; maybe she believes that his wealth and property makes him/her morally bankrupt and thus s/he deserves to be relieved of it; maybe the drama of the burglary expresses a cry for help, as once happened to me. The point is that the burglar and the burgled are in a relationship, and the burgled person must have been giving out certain "vibes" that attracted the burglar to him.

This sort of reasoning applies to finding friends, lovers, jobs, money and information. It also has great implications for social and political affairs. If I, as an individual believe in peace, I won't be involved in a war. Similarly, for a nation. If we really got rid of all our weapons, it would disrupt the belief systems and ideology of our "potential enemies" so much that we would remain at peace. Similarly, if a manager expects his workers to be uncooperative and unions believe that management is exploitative, you get bad industrial relations.

This may all sound unreal or tautological to you, and it is difficult to understand. The best way to understand it is to try it. Either try the exercise given earlier or for five minutes a day simply sit down and write down your thoughts as they come into your head -this will begin to tell you where you are going and open your awareness.

One way of explaining this is as follows: in a dream a thought is instantly materialised; if you think of danger you will immediately see a tiger, say,

running after you. In "reality" however things are slower and stickier. You will have to think that something bad is going to happen for quite some time before you become ill, say, or get run over. The same of course applies to happy thoughts.

We all know that this is a critical time for humanity and many of us sense that the common ideologies, religious, scientific or psychological, are not rich enough or broad enough to cope with world problems or with our everyday experience and problems of living in the 1980's. I find it quite embarrassing (i.e. fear) to say this, but I haven't found anything as intellectually rich and psychologically helpful as Jane Roberts' works. It is fun and good for me to write this down and if anyone else is "turned-on" by these books because of my initiative in writing now, that would make me very happy.

John Nygate

THE WAY OF TRANSFORMATION: Daily life as spiritual exercise
by Karlfried Graf von Durckheim. Unwin Paperbacks 1980.

This by the same man who wrote the book **Hara** which many people have read with interest, and really it says very little which was not in that earlier book.

It lays a great deal of stress upon correct posture as the way to Divine Being. But of course a book - even with illustrations, which this one does not have - can tell us very little without the physical presence of a teacher. We read things like this:

Thus the body, in its posture, its patterns of tension and relaxation, in the rhythm of its breathing and manner of its movement, is an infallible indication of the point at which any man has arrived on his way to becoming a Person. It may reveal how and where he has stuck fast in his ego and lost himself to the world, or alternatively to what extent he has remained open to his being and on the Way.

But we have no way of translating this into any particular things we should do for ourselves, or stop doing, or not do. It is rather like reading a book of recipes - no, not even that - more like reading a book of menus. Or even reading all about the Great Ingredient that makes all meals better.

If, for one moment, we forget Hara - whether it be in walking, standing or sitting - we cease at that moment to be fully and personally present . . . When all movement flows from this

relaxed, yet firm centre, all gestures, attitudes and postures - walking, standing, sitting - become, as it were, testimonies to true being.

I just don't know what to make of a book like this. It seems to me quite unusable unless you have already been through the physical discipline the author keeps on returning to; but then, of course, you wouldn't need the book.

Brian Rainbow

COPING WITH IMPRISONMENT. Edited by Nicolette Parisi. (Perspectives in Criminal Justice, 3.) Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982. 160 pages. £10 hardback, £4.95 paperback.

Prisoners come disproportionately from the poor, less educated, unemployed and otherwise handicapped. At the lowest estimate half of them have psychological problems, and a quarter have a psychiatric history. Prison adds to these stresses, and 'the scene at the reception room of a large city jail . . . is a mosaic of pain and confusion' (p.35). Lack of work or other activity is widespread. Stress is increased because many prisoners are not sent to prison for a determinate period, and sentencing is inconsistent.

In some prisons staff have 'withdrawn to the walls, leaving inmates to intimidate, rape, maim and kill each other with alarming frequency' (p.15). (But nothing is said about **why** guards have withdrawn. Presumably in some institutions they haven't: what differences are there in management or training?) Homosexual harassment is rife in American prisons: in one prison 65% of youthful white inmates had been targets of aggressive sexual approaches (p.53). How can we ensure that a similar situation does not develop in this country's prisons? 'The ultimate solution . . . is to alter the values of men who look upon others as objects of sexual exploitation' (p.62) - true, no doubt, but the book offers no guidance about achieving such a change of attitudes.

Prisoners are often ill-treated by those in authority, as well as each other; having no effective redress, they periodically erupt into violence. This may be precipitated by staff; in some cases, of which the Attica riot was the worst, staff kill prisoners. In the 1960s and 70s American courts began to uphold the human rights of prisoners, and to try to improve conditions, for example by deciding that the cumulative effect of poor and dehumanizing prison conditions constitutes cruel and unusual punishment (p.80). But they seem to be reverting to a 'hands-off' policy; and this book does not underline the basic fact that it is judges who create prison overcrowding by the

number and length of sentences which they impose. It is fair to add, though, that state legislatures sometimes tie their hands by setting minimum of fixed sentences (fortunately not a feature of the British scene) and by failing to provide adequate resources for non-custodial sanctions (all too familiar here).

The book is worth reading for information such as the foregoing in eight chapters by a young group of authors on how prisoners 'cope' - 'endure' or 'react' would be better words. Methods of survival include rioting, violence, joining a clique, getting moved, litigation, or retreating into segregation. One method is not described: the use of tranquillizing drugs, which many institutions issue ostensibly to help prisoners, at the cost of probable addiction, but also for the tranquillity of the institution and its staff. There is useful information about, for example, the extent of sexual harassment in American prisons, and some of the prisoners' rights cases. Some of the small-scale research findings presented here do not add much to our knowledge, for example that 'inmates serving determinate sentences were significantly more likely to perceive their release dates as predictable' (p.141). The conclusions point, though in an unemphatic way, to the futility of mere tinkering with a fundamentally flawed system.

What the book lacks is a strong sense of moral outrage that prisoners are treated in this way at all in a professedly civilized country which lectures other countries about values. To overstate a case is not usually a good tactic, but comments like 'A redirection of the penal system is called for' (p.68) are altogether too bland and vague.

Even accepting that the book's stance is to accept the status quo as a regrettable fact of life, the title might lead one to expect some description of, for example, the new grievance procedures based on mediation between staff and inmates, or some American counterparts of the Barlinnie special unit, Wormwood Scrubs annexe, Pentonville liaison unit, social skills training, and similar schemes for making prisons a little more constructive. But they are not included.

Martin Wright

NERVES by Ken Ellis. Innart Production 1979

Ken Ellis presents a new approach to this well documented difficult personal subject by addressing his writing to the sufferer rather than aiming it at the third person.

The book opens with a letter of advice to a young mother who was tormented by nerves for half a year before submitting herself to

the psychiatric profession. In reading this letter the tone of the book is set by the author assuming a narrative role..

The essence of this book is its sympathetic approach - Ellis does not just present nuances of sympathy but rather offers concrete advice and coping strategies to the reader. Interestingly the problem of 'nerves' is brought into proportion. The manifested symptoms which each of us considers unique to oneself are shown to be common to all of us. The book also has a welcoming soothing quality as Ellis encourages the reader to stop worrying and to allow oneself to BE (whether we be sick or well).

By using his own well-defined terminology Ken Ellis avoids the pitfalls of becoming part of the medical establishment 'them' and thus escapes placing the reader in the inferior role. His advice at the end of the book "Get out and live" he shows as the logical outcome of accepting ones problems and placing them in their correct proportion in relation to ones life. This is the exciting alternative to being crippled by the bind-weed of 'nerves'.

Susi Wilton-Davies

SOCIAL & SEXUAL REVOLUTION: Essays on Marx and Reich , by Bertell Ollman, 1979. Pluto Press, 228 pp £2.95

REASON & EROS: The Social Theory of Herbert Marcuse, by Vincent Geoghegan, 1981. Pluto Press, 122 pp £2.95

Bertell Ollman teaches Marxism at New York University, and his book describes in detail the twelve lectures which feature in his tutorial programme on Marx, while only one quarter of it deals with Reich. Marcuse, who became the student's guru of sexual politics, appears only to be mentioned once (and disparagingly) in Ollman's treatise, although as there was no subject index, I could not check on this. These indications as to the author's total commitment to Marxism are also reflected in the reasons he gives for undertaking his study: "if it was not the conditions which failed Marx, it could have only been the workers". So why have not workers in the advanced capitalist countries become class conscious? Without a lateral thought as to whether the invasions of Czechoslovakia and Hungary have pricked the bubble of faith in Communism (as it surely reduced the subscription rate to **The Daily Worker**), or whether Soviet authoritarianism and bureaucracy has become increasingly repellent to the young, Ollman prefers instead to list the "failures" of the working class. As a working class person, this made me furious, exemplifying the reductionist, labelling and dehumanizing Marxist approach to social relationships, which Marcuse tried hard to reform.

However, to be fair to Ollman, he himself admits to these contradictions within a communist philosophy seeking the good of all, and presents the Reichian solution as to why the masses haven't revolted in the numbers which Marx predicted. Reich, it is to be remembered, was eventually expelled from the Communist Party in 1933. Yet his theory of 'character structure' as the way in which people armour themselves against outside threats and internal loss of instinctual control shows, says Ollman, how sexual repression "paralyses the rebellious forces". While Reich's pioneering work uncovered useful insights into processes of sexual repression, empirical evidence can be found to support the opposing idea also; namely that sexual repression can motivate and empower rebellious forces! Inadequate attention is given to the connections and differences between such repression and sublimation, while the latter is carelessly dismissed, like religion, as being 'the opium of the people', despite the fact that much revolutionary activity in South Africa and Latin America has been fuelled by Christian resurgence.

Ollman is also in difficulties in accounting for the failure of contemporary youth to develop class consciousness, despite the fact that they are now liberated sexually. His answer is that present "pornography" and "orgies" are merely evidence of how sexually dissatisfied people are, a reasonable point, but irrelevant to the main reasons why class consciousness has become such an unattractive rather than prestigious attribute. Ollman is to be congratulated for attempting to deal with alienation, but it is the way in which Marxism itself alienates people that should be the prime concern of its theorists, for it has much still to teach us, and the poor of the world especially need its concern for social justice.

It was his concern to humanize Marxism that made Marcuse the idol of students internationally, and Vincent Geoghegan's short monograph describes the way in which the German Jewish exile in America tried to "authenticate existence for socialists". Marcuse courageously ventured into those provinces of Eros, such as the arts, to which he ascribed their own autonomy in creating values, rather than in just serving ideological expression, although he also warned that they could be used as "vehicles of adjustment".

Marcuse also brought students, artists and professionals into the same heroic grouping as the workers, showing how they could catalyse revolutionary activity, as in Paris in the Summer of 1968. Yet Marcuse sensed, and later saw for himself in the demise of student radicalism in the States, that such activity has its limitations. His own understanding of Freud was perhaps deeper than that of Reich, and he eventually concluded that "socialism does not and cannot liberate Eros from Thanatos", and that

neither political formulations nor practices could bring individuals or society fulfilment, although their perversions cast them into slavery.

For AHP readers these books may appear marginal. Yet we very much need to relate our beliefs in human potential to the body politic: we should be as concerned as the Marxists to raise social consciousness, to fight racism and exploitation, and to liberate those who starve and suffer in their millions.

Cresswell Conway

SEX AND THE NEED FOR 'ASK'

Great Britain has been described by one of the world's leading sexologists as "obsessed" with sex. The late Nat Wagner's comment was not ironic: the obsession may be seen as a symptom of adolescence in our society. This country is still in the process of moving from a guilty, secretive and repressive outlook on sexuality to one which is mature, factual and honest.

Just as the adolescent is fascinated but bewildered and fearful at the approach to adulthood, so our society is confused and obsessive about the changes which are taking place within it.

On one side commercial forces find titillation and scandal profitable. On the other, inhibited and repressive groups seek to push human sexuality back under wraps. Sexual law is still largely out of tune with modern insights while Government fears a backlash if it seems to endorse "permissiveness".

Small wonder, then, that ignorance and inhibition in sexual matters walk side by side with an increasing individual and social awareness of the part played by sexuality in all human considerations.

'ASK' is a non-profit making organisation set up to promote individual and social attitudes to sexuality which are based on fact and informed opinion rather than on ignorance, prejudice and inhibition, and to disseminate accurate information on human sexuality and sexual matters to the general public and, especially, those in public life, the caring professions and the media.

For more information about ASK's work write to ASK (Action for Sexual Knowledge) at 90 Uplands Road, London N8 9NJ.