

John Rowan

BIOENERGY: REALITY OR DELUSION

by Adrian Zakrzewski

A REPLY

This document raises some interesting points, which I should like to answer. Before doing so, however, it should be pointed out that this is not Adrian's first contribution to **Self and Society**: he wrote a piece which appeared in the Sept/Oct issue for 1979, objecting to the over-emphasis on emotions and feelings in an **Introduction to Humanistic Psychology** event held in July of that year.

In the present piece it appears that, after seeing a demonstration of bioenergetic work (in another one-day "taster" event) he faked his own responses so as to appear to be going through something similar, when in reality he was not doing so. He then generalises from this to an assertion that this must be so for everyone; and then this is generalised from bioenergetics to the whole growth movement.

Let us look at each of the specific points he raises. There may be something in them, even if the place they are coming from seems to be suspect.

1. People can be phony in groups. This is a very ambiguous area. In co-counselling it is common for people to be asked to "act into" an emotion, so that it is phony at first, but often it then turns into something quite genuine. In gestalt therapy, people often complain that talking to cushions is artificial, but Fritz Perls' answer to this was to say - "Do this phony thing and see what happens" - and very often it became not only real, but very important. Quite often people say - "When I did that piece of work, I wasn't sure at the time whether it was real or not, but now three months later my life seems to have changed in that area, so it must have been all right". There is an "as if" quality even about Rogerian therapy, which is one of the least game-playing approaches of the lot. And of course Winnicott has written brilliantly about the relationship between playing and reality in therapy. So I think the line is not as easy to draw as Adrian makes out; and certainly in behaviour therapy, which he seems to favour, imagination and imagery plays a very important role, as Singer's book on imagery makes clear.

2. Bioenergetics represents a total delusion syndrome. Some of the people in the field would claim that **bio-energy** is in fact a real and testable phenomenon. My own view is that this is not necessary; all that is necessary is to say - "I find this concept to be a useful one in my work", without claiming any ontological status for it. But in either case, to use terms like "total delusion syndrome" seems far too sweeping. All Adrian has to do is to read some back issues of **Energy & Character** to see that the bio-energy people are extremely conscientious and precise in their use of terms, and very much aware of questions of evidence and logic. The essence of a delusion is that it doesn't work when checked against the real world. But bioenergetic therapy does work, as those who have experienced it and stayed with it know very well. The idea that it is all just a total mistake from start to finish is not on.

3. There are many human activities and interactions where people deceive themselves. Of course this is true, and no one would deny it. Yet most of Adrian's references to books merely back up this rather obvious point.

4. Seemingly complex patterns of behaviour can be explained in far more concrete down-to-earth terms. The references here are mostly to behaviour therapy, except for two references to Karl Marx. To do away with bioenergetics in favour of behaviour therapy seems a classic case of the cure being worse than the disease. Whatever criticisms one may have of bioenergetics, it is at least better than behaviour therapy. The whole behaviourist enterprise is philosophically hopeless and practically very limited indeed. To look for "the truth" in this direction is a desperate expedient.

5. LSD trips are great fun but distant from reality. Read Stan Grof's book **Realms of the human unconscious**, or his more recent one, **LSD psychotherapy**, or Frank Lake's **Clinical theology**.

6. Truth must be testable and quantifiable. The point about testability is fine with me, though it is not necessarily the case that definite and clear answers come out of the tests. We have gone into this whole question in some detail in **Human inquiry**. But the idea that everything is quantifiable is just nonsense. A very absurd proposition may be very precise, for instance $2+2=7$; and a very certain proposition may have no numbers in it at all, for instance we shall all die.

7. The growth movement is far too entrenched in middle-class values. It seems fairly obvious that the growth movement questions middle-class values rather radically, particularly such values as ambition,

status outlook, worldly asceticism, control, respect for property, etc. It questions working-class values much less. I have said something about this in **Ordinary ecstasy** (Chap. 14) and also in **The Structured Crowd**. It seems quite absurd to accuse a movement which has fostered co-counselling and self-help groups, together with Carl Rogers' extraordinary experiments with very large groups, and phenomena like the Delancey Street Foundation, of being subservient to middle-class **anything**. The fact that humanistic practitioners often choose to have good incomes and live in nice places merely indicates that we practice what we preach - doing what you really want, instead of submitting to oppression.

Books referred to

- Peter Reason & John Rowan (eds) **Human inquiry: A sourcebook of new paradigm research** John Wiley & Sons 1981.
Jerome L. Singer **Imagery and daydream methods in psychotherapy and behaviour modification** Academic Press 1974.

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