
LAY PSYCHOTHERAPY and MANIC AND DEPRESSIVE PSYCHOSES

by

Robert Gregory

As readers of Self and Society will be aware, next to the dementias and the schizophrenias, the several manic depressive psychoses can be, at times, massive and very debilitating mental states. And yet, they are so often associated with powerful and creative persons. For instance James Boswell, Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln, Robert Lowell, Florence Nightingale, Robert Schumann, William Wilberforce . . . a powerful gallery.

Such giants do not always walk tall and indeed may need to be hospitalised at various times and given protection against the apprehensions of the dark night.

Thankfully, nowadays there are helpful drugs. Lithium is usually prescribed as a prophylaxis against the bipolar extremes of mania and depression. Nowadays, there is certainly no need for the person with a diagnosis of manic depression to stay very long in hospital - though there may be repeated admissions.

But what is new are the facilities of the Manic Depression Fellowship.

Set up by, and operated primarily by, active sufferers of the illness (with some assistance from their friends, paramedicals and relatives), the Fellowship organises, sometimes in conjunction with other groups (such as Depressives Anonymous, **Continuum**, Analysands, and individual persons from Alcoholics Anonymous) towards the development of a **lay psychiatry** - some have said a "**lay clinical theology**". The Fellowship holds that manic depression, although a more discrete state than some other psychiatric conditions, is but one of the depressive illnesses and that common ground with other pathologies can be profitably shared.

Some quite extraordinarily vigorous and resilient therapy groups exist in some of these organisations. These often claim to be unstructured - at the conscious level - and leaderless (but with many able and self-abnegating leaders present). They profess no formal knowledge of group dynamics and defences, projections and transferences are obvious.

The groups strongly prize their independence, sometimes to the extreme of keeping their meetings secret. Whilst plenty of flak and abreaction can appear, there is generally little attempt to subvert or knock the medical establishment. There is some sniping - often justified.

Generally, sessions are characterised by a real commitment, open contract, vigorous and complex transference; the substitution of supports for defences and a strong sense of mutual caring.

Thus, often unstructured, and appearing to lack any extensive **intellectual** grasp of group psychodynamics, these groups are mercifully free of that castrating narcissism rising from formal analytic training.

Given that the illness can lead to suicide with a rate as high, some epidemiologists claim, as 20%, (which makes manic depression the suicidal illness), our first aim is to try to avoid that happening. Secondly, we seek to improve the quality of life for victims, their friends and relatives. Further, much of the group work is directly investigative. Topics in the groups move easily to existential questions and to family analytic territory. Arising from this, a **Bibliotherapy Group** is now forming in North London, to study, fortnightly both basic medical texts and related literature. These last include the Book of **Job**, Conrad, Dostoyevsky, Gurdjieff, and Jung.

We welcome support. The Manic Depression Fellowship is a Charitable Trust with membership open to anyone with the illness or having an interest.

Analysands, 69 Stockwell Road, SW9

Continuum, 69 Stockwell Road, SW9

Depressives Anonymous, 36 Chestnut Avenue, Beverley, Yorkshire

Manic Depressives Bibliotherapy Group, 44a Denning Road, Hampstead NW3

Manic Depression Fellowship, 51 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey

Copyright : Robert Gregory 1985
