

BOOK REVIEWS

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION by Andrew Stanway. Arrow Books 1987.

This is a book that has a lot of the answers to most of the questions about depression. What is it? 'An emotional state of dejection and sadness, ranging from mild discouragement to feelings of utter hopelessness'. How common is it? Very - there are up to 15 million sufferers in America. In the UK a survey of 10,000 young women found 8,000 of them were suffering from, or had been suffering from depression.

What are the causes? Many. Inheritance, early bereavement, stressful experiences in later life, personality, hormone imbalance, food allergies and faulty diet, dealing with children, social failure, social success, pre-menstrual tension etc.

What are the signs and symptoms? Sadness, tearfulness, insomnia, lack of appetite both for food and sex, general lack of interest, self neglect, fear, loss of self-esteem, anxiety, poor judgment, agitation, poor concentration and memory, hypochondria, fatigue, delusions.

This is a truly encyclopaedic approach and would be invaluable for anyone close to, or responsible for someone who is depressed. Particularly as Dr. Stanway gives specific suggestions as to how to deal with each symptom. And in spite of our general feeling that the holistic approach is usually the right one, this symptomatic approach is probably more useful at giving practical and sensible suggestions. And although the holistic approach is also treated very comprehensively later in the book, the success rate for professional intervention is not very impressive.

Dr. Stanway mentions loss of self esteem as a symptom; in my experience it is more often a cause. In fact, a chronic low self image is one of the most usual causes for depression and other mental and behavioural problems. He suggests rationally discussing this with the subject: but a depressed person is **not** rational. If they were, they probably wouldn't be depressed. More effective by far would be forms of positive affirmation, including Carl Rogers' 'positive unconditional regard'.

Which reminds me, Rogers, and Person Centred Therapy, are also missing from the chapter on Psychological Treatment. Together with Gestalt Therapy, Primal Therapy, Reichian Therapy, Bioenergetics,

Existential Therapy, Rational Emotive Therapy, Experiential Therapy and Focussing, he is subsumed in a throwaway sentence - 'more therapies . . .originate from the USA and the vast majority are untested and untestable.'

Yet drug treatments get a whole chapter, as does psychiatric hospitalization, and electric shock treatment gets most of a chapter.

However, for a traditional approach to a far from simple disorder, this book is first rate. Although one might prefer some of the humanistic approaches, most of these are very time consuming and are not available on the National Health Service. And when the real crunch comes, there is a certain relief in being able to forget everything and relax into a well run hospital system.

Not that Andrew Stanway is 100% establishment orientated. He gives a fascinating account of an experiment in Canada which demonstrated negative and positive psychic powers in relation to depression.. The subjects were only plants, but when watered from a flask which had been held by a spiritual healer their rate of growth was considerable better than the control: when the flask had been held by a sufferer from acute psychotic depression, the growth was noticeably slower than with the control.

Briefly, an excellent all round study of the depressed condition with very helpful, and very specific, practical advice.

Vivian Milroy

THROUGH THE BREAK: WOMEN IN PERSONAL STRUGGLE Ed.Pearlie McNeill, Marie McShea and Pratibha Parmar Sheba 1986 276pp. £6.95

My first thoughts on reading this book were that I was the wrong person to review it, that as a male I was intruding on something very personal. The articles are very harrowing and tended to make me feel ashamed, ashamed of other males and afraid of being tarred by the same brush. They should also make some in the medical profession, and some parents, feel ashamed too.

However, the articles themselves do not set out to lay blame. They are all written from a fair-minded perspective and it is this lack of blaming that makes them harrowing indictments of the way we live.

Sunna was trapped by an incestuous uncle who made her feel guilty. She could;tell no-one and tried to make herself as unattractive as she could, she became afraid of her own sexuality. It was not until she came into contact with a black gay network that she escaped. Leo was trapped by a constrictive family set-up and parental responsibilities. Her husband

set standards of behaviour that destroyed her individuality and caged her. She escaped to a more open relationship. Ruth was robbed of twelve years of her life by negligent mental health professionals. Natalie, with the help and support of a women's refuge, escaped a husband who beat her regularly. Perhaps the most disturbing story is Saroj's. She was raped when she was fifteen. Instead of finding comfort at home her mother actually blamed her. She had to have an abortion and all this time she did not understand what was happening to her. She was forced into an arranged marriage with a husband who beat her and her parents took his side against her. When she finally escaped she had to leave her child behind. Visiting her child later her husband beat her again. As a result she ended up in hospital in the psychiatric ward. She has now gained custody of her child and works in a women's refuge.

The personal stories also highlight the amount of hurt people can inflict on others, either knowingly or unknowingly, and with good or bad intentions. Hopefully people reading this book will start to examine their relationships and just how they are affecting others.

Women reading this book will, I hope, not have to face the problems of the contributors but if they do find their own story there then perhaps they will see a little hope in the way the contributors coped. That the women concerned came through their experiences in one piece seems a miracle, but if they survived there is hope for others.

On a practical level the articles are beautifully written. The book should be accessible to anyone. The book also contains nearly twenty pages of contacts and resources for women in need.

My last thoughts on reading this book were that all men, and psychiatrists, psychotherapists and G.P.'s, and parents, as well as the women this book is aimed at, should read this book. However, those in the first five categories who should most read this book are probably the ones least likely to. They will continue to beat wives, prescribe valium, and, heedless of their protests ignore, blame and maltreat children. That in itself is the biggest shame of all.

Adrian Tomkinson

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CONSUMING PSYCHOTHERAPY by Ann France, Free Association Press 1988 £9.95

This is a book about what it is like to be someone on the receiving end of psychotherapy - what the author calls a consultor. Basically it tells the

story of the author's experiences with three different therapists - all of them Freudian (or neo-Freudian) in their orientation, two of them supervised Peter Lomas - over a period of nine and a half years.

It also functions as a guide to other books about the experience of psychotherapy, and one could use this book as an up-to-date jumping off point for a much deeper examination of the whole process of consuming psychotherapy.

It contains a wealth of detail, and makes it very clear that some of the things which therapists do are helpful and some of them are hindrances. I think any therapist would do well to read it, to alert them to some of the mistakes to steer clear of, and some of the things which they might not have been aware of at all.

But basically this book made me angry. It made me angry because at the beginning of the book the author is suffering from severe and recurrent depressions, which take her to the brink of suicide, and at the end of the book the author is still suffering from severe and recurrent depressions, which take her to the brink of suicide. The only difference is that, somewhere around the middle of the process, her strong negative transference to one of the therapists led her into a continuous depression which did not lift for two years.

It is true that there are some positive things. The author is no longer frightened of spiders. She did have a good period of six years after the first three and a half years of therapy. But on the other hand she was not very frightened of spiders in the first place, and the six years did come to an end with another crisis, which further therapy did little to resolve.

At the end of the book the author says that the best she could do was to erect once again the defences she had had at the start, and which she had learned in her early years. Here is a quote from near the end of the book:

"While in therapy, my previous defences had been broken down, revealed as false stratagies. But I do not think that newer, more effective ways of coping took their place, as the textbooks suggest they do. I simply changed my view that I was neurotic not to cope ALL the time (although I usually did) for the view that I was actually stronger than many because I did in fact continue to function in situations which most people would find unacceptable. But it did not stop depression from engulfing me at times of crisis."

I think anyone reading this book and trying to decide whether to go for psychotherapy would stay away, would run a mile if they had any sense. If this author's experience is anything to go by, psychotherapy is an

expensive failure.

The woman who wrote this book did not only have the three therapists - she also had a Samaritan who visited her, she also had a psychiatrist who was helpful from time to time; she also had a number of friends she could call on, but it seems to me that they all failed her in the end. Why?

Obviously none of us really knows. My own best guess would be that none of them went far enough back into the origins of the depression. There are some hints in one of the chapters that some very early stuff about symbiosis was involved, and none of the therapists was competent to handle such material. It just didn't fit with their model, their training or their experience. And nobody told her this, nobody alerted her to the possibility. She defends herself against such a possibility at one point, by making the dark hint that stories about people REALLY getting better are usually written by therapists, rather than being written by consultants.

The author herself lays great stress upon authenticity and genuineness as being the most healing thing about the therapists. To the extent that they listened to their texts and training rather than to the consultant, to the extent that they removed themselves from the real interaction, they did a bad job and did not succeed with this particular person at any rate. But it seems crystal clear from this book that authenticity and genuineness are not enough. The therapist also has to have a good enough training that they are able to go with the consultant into the places where that person needs to go. One of Ann France's therapists told her at one point that she was coming up against her limitations; it is not enough for a therapist to be aware of their limitations - it is their responsibility and their duty to question those limitations, to work with them and on them, and to grow further at the instigation of the person they are supposed to be working with. That is how therapists grow, or how they avoid growing. In this book, they avoided it.

John Rowan

WICKEDNESS by Mary Midgley, 1984, Routledge & Kegan Paul, £14.95, 224 pp.

Is wickedness a word in your personal or professional vocabulary? Has the AHP any place for the concept of wickedness amongst those other attributes of the human condition with which we live and work? Just as academics like LSE sociologist David Martin are campaigning to bring back Book of Common Prayer parlance, with absolutions that enjoin us to 'turn from our wickedness and live', so Mary Midgley, former lecturer in philosophy at Newcastle University, suggests that this ancient word merits our renewal of interest.

No longer should we debunk its significance with all the pop derivatives which describe wicked hangovers, wicked prices and wicked hairstyles. No more should we only allow ourselves to search for and find such a strong old-fashioned word when we are protesting at Greenham or outside the South African Embassy. We should, as Mary Midgley urges, try to understand the 'natural history of moral evil', not by externalizing it in a trivializing way, but by trying to understand the way in which it works and grows in our hearts, so that it has power over us and our society. We have responsibilities for the wickedness in the world, whether we categorize this in terms of racialism, political oppression, economic deprivation, sexism or any other acute or prolonged state of cruelty, injustice or slavery.

In her first chapter, **The Problem of Natural Evil**, she refers to Erich Fromm's thesis that evil is destructiveness, and suggests that in any state of wickedness there must be a strong anti-life element. In her second chapter on **Intelligibility and Immoralism**, she asks whether wickedness is just a negative state, or a positive force: what about Nazism and all the other isms? Yet she points out that Christianity has always maintained that only God can create whilst the Devil destroys.

She then discusses in her next chapter, **The Elusiveness of Responsibility** how "public wickedness vanishes into a social problem as private wickedness does into mental illness" as we redefine addiction and sexual violence in our courts. With her sharp eye for the nuances and contradictions in our present social mores, the subsequent chapters of her book examine aggression, fatalism and freewill, our selves and our shadows, the role of the death-wish, and evil in evolution. She is at home with Freudian and Jungian perspectives as she is with Nietzsche and Darwin, and she returns continually to her theme that wickedness is intrinsically related to our destructiveness, particularly with regard to all those beliefs, attitudes and actions which, as we might well say, are totally opposed to those of humanistic psychology and philosophy. Love is a word sparsely used in the book but it is firmly upheld as the power which can overcome evil, the life-force which overcomes the death-drive and which God gives us for our joy . . . 'I am come that they might have life and that they may have it more abundantly'.

Mary Midgley ends her thoughtful and thought provoking book by reminding us of Fromm's concern that machines have become 'systematically exalted over people, sterile, gleaming metal over vulnerable flesh, means over ends, thought over feeling, and calculative, impersonal thought over the imagination'. Wickedness in biological and ecological terms needs our urgent attention.

Walter Cresswell