

Retro Review Classics

Review by **Robin Shohet**

The Reluctant Adult: An Exploration of Choice

By: Jill Hall, Prism Press, Bridport, Dorset, 1993, 250pp

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Put simply and starkly *The Reluctant Adult* argues convincingly that the human race is attracted to victim consciousness, and shows the enormous cost of that way of being, both individually and collectively.

In the preface, Sue Hatfield describes how furious she was when she heard the author give a lecture on the theme of this book. She writes that before the talk, she had seen herself as very much a victim of life's circumstances, particularly a victim of her parents' seeming inadequacies. Listening to the lecture, she thought, 'Well, if it isn't my parents' fault, then it must be mine.' And she was furious that she, the innocent child, was, as she saw it, being blamed, reversing the idea of innocent, wounded child and guilty mother. She writes:

I had no sense of my part in creating the reality which I now found so painful; no sense of being a cause unto myself; no sense that I could shift things around and come to see reality in some other way. (p. viii)

In doing so, and taking responsibility and moving beyond blame of parent and self, she gained a freedom. And this is what Jill Hall offers in her book. I have been puzzled as to why the book has now been remaindered on Amazon, and I can only conclude that when Eric Fromm wrote *The Fear of Freedom* over 70 years ago, that fear still stays with us. Like Sue Hatfield, we may have to give up some of our cherished world views, built on the shaky sand of victim consciousness.

In Chapter 1, 'Psychology in Infancy', Jill suggests that many psychological theories encourage or legitimize a blaming syndrome – the innocent child and the inadequate or bad mother. She also challenges our prevailing notions of cause and effect which support this idea – over simplistically, bad mother causes neurotic child. The basically Newtonian model of the universe, useful for predicting aspects of the physical world, is not useful for human nature where we

are constantly creating and re-creating 'reality' by the way we see things. She suggests that our attachment to causal thinking lays the ground for blame and the Victim Archetype, which in her opinion is the strongest archetype of them all.

The urge to regress, which some psychotherapy can encourage, reinforces this. And throughout, Jill argues for bringing in the spiritual dimension which, she writes, if there, must always be there. In other words, from that perspective, we are not just helpless infants, but the spiritual dimension gives us agency not necessarily in what happens physically, but in the way we make meaning out of it. What a fine line to not make it 'our fault', a pitfall Sue Hatfield describes well.

What I particularly enjoyed about the book is how well Jill Hall describes how the external world mirrors this split between ego and spirit inside us. So our inner depletion in not recognizing spirit leads us to demand that the external world compensate, which in turn leads us to use up the world's resources as we struggle to fill the void. Also with a fragmented self, we try and form special relationships to save us from our self-imposed isolation. These relationships of course do not work, as our flawed self-concept still exists and uniting with other egos will not work as our pop songs, films and divorce courts testify. The relationship to an external God also fits this category. He(!) becomes the father God that is supposed to serve the needs of our infant psychic state, and as the Old Testament demonstrates we are at the mercy of His moodiness, co-dependent in our wish to please him, i.e. victims. The way we see self, Jill argues, determines our lives, and embracing spirit is a powerful way of organizing our meaning and creating our experience, moving us beyond the fear of annihilation. This fear leads us to a hierarchical model of society which, in the short term, seems to protect us, but ultimately will prevent lasting transformation as the system has an investment, like the ego, in preserving the status quo.

In Chapter 6, 'The Circle of Self', Jill introduces us to the Medicine Wheel from North American Indian culture. The circular way of looking at the world is obviously not linear and hierarchical, and avoids simplistic cause-and-effect approaches. Borrowing from another culture to which many

of us have had no exposure can make it difficult for the reader, but I enjoyed Jill's exposition and how she integrated the Medicine Wheel approach into the theme of her book. So, for example, she looks at choice and responsibility from the point of view of the four directions, North, South, East and West, and how these are acted out in each direction. I particularly liked her exposition of choice, such a feature of modern government:

What a paralysing double bind to be attempting to exercise choice from our infant victim self... Once our child energy solidifies into set positions, then only trivial positions remain open to the adult in us; choice at the 'soap powder' level. (pp. 148 and 153)

In Chapter 9, 'The Dynamics of Power', she writes

Power could be seen as the ability to feel secure – at ease as a being in the universe. We come into this power through acknowledging spirit as the source of our being...

The distortion of power – power 'over' others stems from insecurity and generates insecurity. (p. 173)

And in the final chapter, 'Towards Full Adulthood', she examines the pull of the apparent freedom of irresponsibility in wanting to be in love and fuse with another, or a group of nations, a regression that is the very opposite of freedom, as it leads to fixation. She writes that the energy of attachment is

so strong that we are blind to the opportunities life offers, and we obstinately try and hold on to our selected 'love object'.

Jill concludes that it is life itself, or rather a willingness to fully experience and connect, that will take us away from the victimhood of the past: 'The extraordinary vitality of life both within us and all around us, if we do but connect with it, is far more reliable than any parent could hope to be. It alone is always "there", unfailingly present.' (p. 247)

Not a new message, but the analysis of the pull of Victim Consciousness helps the reader to understand what prevents this happening.

Although this is not a scholarly work in that it deliberately provides no references, the author presents her arguments cogently and with a sense of urgency. It is no good going for social change when Victim Consciousness has not been recognized, as the change will be cosmetic and lead to more of the same. In this way, I think Jill Hall has a valuable contribution to make, particularly in asking us to move beyond simplistic cause-and-effect thinking, and embrace a world where we are far from powerless in our ability to make meaning. It would seem the Victim Archetype is alive and well, and in my opinion the way she presents her argument cannot but lessen our attachment to it. I have been very glad to re-read it for this review. 🍎

Announcing... 'Self & Society Events, 2015'

AN EXCITING NEW HUMANISTIC WORKSHOP SERIES (London)

Starting in January 2015, the newly constituted AHP board is launching a new series of innovative CPD workshops in London, which we're calling 'Self & Society Events'.

Full details still have to be agreed by the board, but we envisage holding ten monthly, reasonably priced events a year (excluding August and December), which would be held of an evening at an accessible venue in London, and would last for 2 to 2½ hours.

This new series is a key aspect of our re-launching of the AHPB, to rest alongside the purchase of the journal by international publisher Taylor & Francis (*aka* Routledge). This is a great opportunity to put Humanistic Psychology back on the 'psy' map where it rightly belongs, so that the core values of Humanistic Psychology are more easily made available to a world which sorely needs them.

This is therefore about *re-imagining the AHPB*, offering a place regularly to meet like-minded people and have enjoyable and growthful experiences, while at the same time gaining CPD through access to cutting-edge theory from leading figures in the HP field.

All the talks will have an experiential, participative aspect,

as well as leading-edge theory; and we may also look to have a round-table discussion at the end of each session, with invited guest panelists.

The workshops will be well publicized across all the usual networks, with AHP administering the bookings and payment, and *S&S Events* will both raise funds for the AHP and generate a fee for the workshop presenter (probably based on a percentage of the fees taken).

If you'd be interested in running a workshop under this banner, do please let **Serra Pitts** know ASAP at serra@arresmedia.com, as there will be just ten places to fill for 2015, and we're also writing to a substantial list of practitioners with an initial invitation to offer a workshop.

Finally, our first launch event has been fixed for **Sunday 11 January** at the **Open Centre, London, 2 till 5 p.m.** – this will be a general introductory session to the new Events series, chaired by **Andrew Samuels** – and also a party celebration! All most welcome – and there will be no charge for this first Event of the series. (Details for finding the Open Centre are available from <http://www.opencentre.com/ocloc.html>.)

Richard House, on behalf of the new AHPB Board