

David Boadella

Assisted Passage

Some views on training and responsibility, in the practice of therapeutic help.

The emergence of experiential groups involving the body in dynamic emotional ways, has led some of the professional therapists to take up entrenched positions, and to defend very rigorously the view that only accredited personnel with specialisms in medicine, psychiatry, or the course of a particular college, should be allowed to help those in emotional distress. There is thus a strong pressure from many of the professional bodies to institutionalise the roles of therapist and patient. Therapists are defined as the people with the training, the expertise, the intellectual know-how, and the authority, to give 'treatment' to 'patients'. 'Patients' are defined as people suffering from some classifiable neurotic symptoms of character-traits who need to be cured by some form of treatment.

Those concerned with therapy tend to specialise early. It is easy to get in the groove of a particular medical, psycho-analytic, or even bio-energetic thought-framework and word-system. If one's horizons are bound always by concepts such as 'ego and super-ego', and the various systems of multi-classification devised for understanding the unconscious, it is easy to forget that in dealing with neurotic behaviour we are faced with pseudo-behaviour. Sometimes, if we are not careful, the theoretical structures that are built by different therapeutic schools are in danger of becoming pseudo-structures, that reflect some of the neurotic confusion found in the very problem one is trying to understand.

Take a simple word like 'schizoid'. How many books and learned papers have been devoted to examining the psychology of this condition? The whole function of psychiatric classification is to divide people up, to sort the sheep from the goats, to distinguish the sick from the healthy, in a word to *split up*. Yet splitting-up is part of the pathology of the schizoid condition, and it has come to be recognised, due to the work of the anti-psychiatrists, how mental illness in the schizoid patient is a response to schizoid behaviour on the part of his family, his friends, and finally of the hospital staff, doctors, psychiatrists etc. who are safely distant, the other side of the great divide between sanity and madness, shielded in their pseudo-normality.

I don't think we shall make much progress therapeutically until we come to realise that it is not a question of distinguishing healthy people from sick people, and then of subdividing the sick people down into various types of sickness, but of distinguishing between healthy *processes* and sick *processes*. Every human being tends to be governed by both in varying degrees, and the enlightened therapists have always recognised this.

Many of the therapists working by these new methods with the body are doctors. Reich himself was a doctor and his attitude to the authorisation of therapists underwent two phases. In the first phase, a number of people who had learned his approach were encouraged to help others by the use of touch, movement, help with breathing, and so on. The first vegetotherapist was a linguist by background, who came to psychology later in life, and had no medical skills. Others who were allowed by Reich at this time to apply his methods of therapy included a teacher, and a dancer. In the second phase, Reich took up an exclusively medical position, which is held to with the utmost rigour by the group of organomic doctors who practise in the USA. Reich believed that his techniques were so powerful that they constituted a form of emotional surgery, and that it would be as irresponsible to allow these methods to be used by the non-medical, as it would be to issue laymen with scalpels.

Fortunately we do not have to choose between these two positions. Those with medical training will continue to be valuable in dealing with people whose suffering is so deep that it takes organic form, resulting perhaps in functional disease heart disease, or other forms of psychosomatic illness, although even here the medical monopoly is by no means absolute and many of the auxiliary therapies have had dramatic success. But the small number of professional doctors qualified to perform 'emotional surgery' on the body can never be enough to cope with the extent of emotional suffering.

Dissatisfaction with the 'medical' approach to health has led Charles Kelley in a recent article on Janov and Reich, to contrast therapeutic attitudes with those found in education. His critique is valid here it attacks the idealisation of health, and the medical view that it involves some separate *category* of existence. But both Reich's and Janov's concepts make immediate sense when seen in terms of a spectrum. Such a view was used by Lowen in formulating his own concept of a mature person:-

"Neurotic and healthy are opposite ends of a spectrum in which health means the capacity to enjoy life and neurosis the incapacity for that enjoyment."

Education and therapy are not true alternatives. Education in depth must have therapeutic consequences, and a therapy experience will probably be the deepest re-education a person will undergo. Education means to draw out. Therapy means to heal, that is to make whole. Both have their roots in the same growth process. Here also we have a spectrum; ranging from educational dance and psycho-drama, through the growth-experiences offered by encounter groups, to the specific restructuring of a psychosomatic therapy. Curing a neurosis means caring for a person - a specific kind of care that is focussed on the encouragement of body feeling with full insight and integration.

For therapy to succeed, it seems to me, it is essential for the real person, who at some level every therapist is, to recognise the real person that at some level every neurotic is, and to help him to grow. Thus therapy is concerned with recognition. The various concepts about defenses, character-structure,

etc. are helpful only if they aid the therapist in seeing through the unreality of the defense layers. Without a concept of character, and an understanding of where a person is at in his life and the meaning of his expressions, it is easy for patients to produce breakthroughs which give temporary relief but which are not genuinely helpful. All the techniques are valuable only if they assist in freeing the process of re-growth which alone can cure.

Let me relate this to my own background and interest in the work of Reich. At the Wilhelm Reich Conference in San Francisco, in July 1974, the opening address was given by Dr. Myron Sharaf, who studied with Reich for many years and translated many of his articles. He made a distinction between two types of extremism that could develop out of the exciting body of work that Reich left to the world: on the one hand there was the danger of extreme conservatism and doctrinaire protection of his concepts and in particular of his therapeutic techniques: this leads to a rigid, authoritarian, closed-shop kind of medical orthodoxy, jealously guarding its citadel of truth against all invasion or depletion. On the other hand there was the danger of watering down essential truths, taking over bits of the work piecemeal, generating a thousand minuscule "Reichian therapists" without any kind of validation or authentication.

Wilhelm Reich was, in my view, the advancing tip of human consciousness as its understanding of emotional and energetic processes in the body developed. There is an immense amount his work can teach us: that teaching gives shape to and helps form the basic human understanding of what it feels like to express or suppress emotions, to tense or relax the body. The skill of helping another human being can be written about in scientific terms, in the language of medicine, physiology, embryology, psychiatry; but in the end it is an art-form. There are exact parallels in other areas of deep human emotional interaction. A mother-to-be may find guidance from the child psychologists and paediatricians may be useful: but her most sensitive tool is the truth function in her own organism, her ability to respond to the cues she receives from her baby as she enters the delicate relationship of mothering her child. Similarly two people in love may learn much from the sociologists and sexologists about the dynamics of their relationship but this can never replace or be a substitute for what they can learn from each other about the potentialities of love relationship, as they build and nurture the contact between them.

There are thus two traditions in the therapeutic work I am describing: the 'royalist' and the 'democratic'. The 'royalist' approach in therapy resembles the apostolic succession. The 'right' to do the work is passed on down, not from father to son, but from trainer to trainee. We have the various schools of psychotherapy, most of them springing from the insights into the unconscious opened up by Freud around 1900. Jung, Adler, Rank, Klein and others all began their separate schools of therapy out of this matrix. Reich also took his point of departure here, making his decisive breakthrough into the realm of the vegetative and bio-energetic functions in the mid nineteen thirties.

When I was a young student, in London, in the early nineteen fifties, eager

to change myself and to experience the process of coming alive that Reich said was possible, I wrote to Reich to ask him to recommend a suitable therapist. At that time he recommended only one man in Europe, this was Ola Raknes who worked in Oslo. The situation now, some twenty five later, is not much advanced on that. Ola Raknes is now dead. There is no-one in Europe that Reich trained left alive. In the USA there are a few dozen doctors associated with the one therapist that Reich authorised to continue the work of training people in his therapy.

I considered the feasibility of moving from England to Norway, and made the decision not to take Reich's advice. I discovered in London a woman psychiatrist who had trained with Od Havrevold in Norway. Od Havrevold was a colleague of Reich's in the period when he developed his methods of vegetotherapy. I learned much that was useful from this woman therapist. but found more that was vital and original in the help I got from a young architect who had begun to develop an *intuitive* vegetotherapeutic approach after reading Reich. This was Paul Ritter who was later to become famous as a town-planner, sociologist, and as a creative thinker using Reich's functional approach.

Reich at first was not against people without medical training practising his therapy. Ola Raknes had a background in English Language and psychology. Alexander Lowen was a teacher. Lowen subsequently gained a medical degree, but has taught his methods to a much wider range of people in the helping professions. Reich wrote to Paul Ritter as follows:-

"I understand your situation perfectly well; since there are no trained medical ergonomists in England and since you understand the workings of bio-energy you felt justified in helping those people around you. however, it should be quite clear to you and everybody else in a similar situation that, as you express it yourself, a tremendous responsibility is involved in this medical work. It is no more and no less than bio-psychiatric surgery and can only be done securely by well-skilled and well-trained hands and structures. It is therefore restricted to physicians only. I suggest not to yield to the temptation of starting to treat people, no matter of whether or not you feel yourself capable of doing it". (October 9th 1950)

Paul Ritter, in choosing to disregard Reich's advice, nevertheless acted with great responsibility. He did not use an over-pressurised approach, and proceeded basically non-technically, following his own intuitions, and working with the awareness of bodily dynamics and his own capacity to establish and maintain alive contact with what was going on. I was in therapy with him in all for a period of five years. Towards the end of this time a friend who had got into a depression due to a broken-up relationship with his girl-friend, and who had heard of Reich's approach, asked me where he could get help. I replied that the only qualified Reichian therapist was in Oslo. He then asked me about how I had got help for myself, and I told him about Paul Ritter. Ritter

was unable to take him on as a patient; so he asked me to help him. After a year of this help, his relationships improved greatly and he discontinued the therapy.

It taught me something of the resources that may be possible without 'going to Oslo'. My own way of keeping responsible in this work was *firstly* in having worked for some time on my own character difficulties and bodily tensions; *secondly* in becoming as informed as possible about the background and content of this Reichian work by learning as much as I could about it; and *thirdly* by experiencing first hand the work of those who had learned in the succession down from Reich, that I was able to meet. I had a number of additional therapeutic sessions with Ola Raknes himself, when he came to Britain in 1970, and with Gerda Boyesen, who had trained with him in Norway. I attended workshops and conferences organised by Alexander Lowen. I learned greatly from Stanley Keleman, who had trained in bio-energetics with Lowen, but had learned from a variety of other sources. And with Anne Parks, who had studied with Keleman and had also worked out her own style of intuitive massage. All these experiences can be said to be within the Reichian tradition of influence as it broadened its impact which began to flow outwards through many divergent channels.

Frank Lake's work with re-birthing was developed independently of both Reich and of Janov in the first instance. Although Lake was a doctor by training, and his way of working to begin with involved the use of LSD therapy, he advocated a kind of self-help network of contacts between people who had attended his groups, so that they could begin to give emotional support to each other on a continuing basis as need arose. The most powerful advocate of this kind of mutual help process in England, has been Tony Crisp. Tony Crisp developed methods of working with bodily charge, breathing, muscular tensions, and the contact and energy of small groups, quite independently of Reich, Janov, Lake or Lowen. He took from Reich not techniques, but the principle of self-regulation, which he was already familiar with from natural healing, and developed ways of encouraging people to learn from their own process, and of working with each other. I regard his as the best exponent I know of what I should like to call the 'democratic' approach to working with emotional and bodily energies. Realising that though it is not specifically focussed on birth as such, nevertheless his work involves a deep process of helping people give birth to the shut off parts of themselves, Tony has given to some of the groups he runs, the name "assisted passage".

The body has learned, through a multitude of unhappy experiences, to function badly. A child who is mocked or punished for crying, learns to suppress showing its hurt. This can lead to a number of blocked feelings and inhibits the ability to reach out and make warm contact with people. The adult who is partly emotionally frozen, as a result of such bad experiences, needs to learn to unfreeze, to feel his hurt, and to discover that reaching out to make contact with people need not lead to punishment or rejection. Who is to teach him? I believe the ability to help another person in emotional distress is an untapped human skill which exists in many ordinary people, and that one of the greatest

needs at the moment is to find ways of developing this skill. Just as many people have latent creative abilities (it may be in words, paint, or some other art form) which can be encouraged and developed by the right kind of experiences, (rather than by formal 'training'), so there is evidence that the ability to form a creative helping-relationship with one or more other is one that is also waiting to be discovered and encouraged.

To say this is not to open the doors to indiscriminate 'therapising' but to suggest that the right to self-help and to mutual-help is too basic to become the monopoly of any specialism. But how, if emotional help becomes democratised, can there be any standard of responsibility? Responsibility means, simply, the ability to respond. The ability to respond in the right way to another's need for touch, or space, pressure or distance, to read his body signals, and interact effectively with him, to resonate purposefully with his dormant aliveness, can only come from a knowledge of one's own feelings, and bodily expressions, a sense of contact with the movement and direction of one's own life.

In his therapy Reich worked with the expressive language of the body. He soon discovered that it was useless to press on tense muscles in order to get them to relax, and pointless to teach breathing exercises to those who restricted their breathing as a way of suppressing strong feelings. What was needed more than anything, if he was to help the people who came to him in distress, was a special kind of empathy which he called 'vegetative identification'. Vegetative identification is the most basic ability used in making contact with people's emotions through the body. Every mother uses it in dealing effectively with her babies. How else does she interpret body signals before the birth of language, except by feeling in her own tissues the need expressed in the body movements and facial expressions of her child. The ability to sense where another person is stopped in the flow of their expressiveness, to detect the impasses which constitute the emotional blocks, depends absolutely on being free enough oneself in those areas to sense the tightness in the other person. A mother who was blocked in the expression of her own crying as a child will be insensitive to the tensions that block her own child from giving in to tears. This insensitivity is the basis on which bad emotional experiences are passed on through generations, and anchored successively in the growing bodies of the young. Reich always insisted that the first and most basic requirement in anyone practising his therapy was that they had worked on themselves enough to have learned the taste in their own tissues of the difference between tension and relaxation, open-ness and closedness, the breath of life and the shrinking of death. Only then is it possible for one person to sense in his own body the tension-states built into the body of another, and to relate to those in a way that gives opportunity for change.

Dans cet article, David Boadella discute de la tendance vers des positions bien enracinées quant aux structures théoriques et à l'accréditation des thérapeutes. Il considère que, bien que l'on puisse écrire en termes scientifiques sur la capacité d'aider une autre personne, l'exercice de cette habileté est le processus d'une forme d'art. Cela dépend du développement personnel du thérapeute et d'une conscience végétative conséquente tout autant que

de l'application d'une théorie.

David n'est pas en faveur d'une thérapéutisation aveugle, mais il considère que le droit de s'aider soi-même et de s'aider mutuellement est trop fondamental pour que cela devienne le monopole d'une spécialisation.

David Boadella est un psycho-thérapeute et l'éditeur du journal "Energy and Character" (Energie et Caractère) et l'auteur de plusieurs importantes publications sur l'oeuvre de Wilhelm Reich et des développements de thérapéutiques qui y sont associées.

Brigitte Kluge

The Effect of Lifestyle on the Personality

Last summer I spent some time in Norway to get to know new kinds of lifestyle. I visited some alternative agricultural collectives to find out the influence of the way of living on the psychological structure of the collective members.

In the mountains on the south coast of Norway I had some particularly interesting experiences. There were eight young people just building up their own living existence on a farm. They lived together in couples or singly in self-made huts. But they were busy building a central communication house.

The young people had lived in the city before but were unsatisfied with the life there.

I think it is very honest if you move away from the industrial consumer society if you are disappointed with the lifestyle there. It is very easy to be against an existing social structure and stay there nevertheless because of the convenience.

You need much more power and personal strength if you want to build up another lifestyle.

The group mentioned before left the highly populated cities and began a new life in undeveloped natural surroundings. Their aim was to build a self-supporting farm with biological dynamic agriculture and to become independent of the sick industrial society.

In the natural surroundings of the mountains it is much easier to connect with a natural cycle of living. The food for example is not in a slot machine, but you grow it on your own fields and prepare it yourself. The work on a farm is healthy, creative and satisfying, compared with the monotonous work in some factories or offices. You work with both body and mind in a friendly atmosphere and clean environment. I think the working conditions there are very good and consequently have a strong influence on their mental health.