

Book Reviews

Medard Boss. *"Existential Foundation of Medicine and Psychology"*. (translated from the German by Stephen Conway and Anne Cleaves) Jason Aronson, New York, 1979.

Boss, in typical German tradition, creates a strong argument for a restructuring of our understanding of human being, in relation to philosophy, modern psychology and medicine. He makes a careful analysis and critique of psychosomatic medicine and psychoanalysis, demonstrating the inherent inadequacies of these approaches in the light of a fuller understanding of our being, based on Heidegger's ontology of Da-sein, complete existing here and now.

He has used a case history for illustration throughout and compares the interpretations of 'disease' as made by various traditional schools of thought. He is clear when highlighting the partial nature of these approaches but it is difficult to find much in his development of 'Daseinanalysis' that goes beyond philosophy into applicable, possible action.

One seeks new 'methods' in vain, but perhaps this is 'Da-sein' in its very nature, and the individual being is really obliged to recognise his-self wholly before and in being with any 'patients' who may come his way. After all, the title of the book is "the Foundations" and thus is really in the realm of exposition of fundamental philosophy underlying possible new activity.

So, what is 'new' and enlightening in what Boss writes on the 'foundation'?

His basic premise is that our essential nature as human beings is "as an open clear realm of perception, so essentially spatial that they dwell from the beginning *with* whatever is accessible to perception, and in a way suited to the meaning they perceive".

He urges us to "remember that existence consists solely in its possibilities for relationships", and that "All bodily pathological symptoms are to be seen exclusively as impairments, innate or acquired, of the ability to body forth specific human ways of being."

This does not seem revolutionary, following on, as it does the insights of many educationalists, philosophers, psychologists of the late 19th and present centuries (Steiner; Laing etc.)

At some points in the text one is struck by what seem to be inherent contradictions in Boss' arguments for the 'Dasein', for example his statement that, "All human beings are fundamentally more or less cut off from the absolute and reduced to individual limited existences; sorrow is grounded in this condition." Statements like these are 'bodied forth' from Boss, presumably from his own personal thoughts whilst writing, as no valid reasonings substantiating them are given within the text.

However, that he personally has had success as a 'Daseinanalytic' therapist is true: Stem reports (in the introduction) Boss's patients as reporting that they felt 'Profoundly and dependably. . . understood and supported, from the very first therapy hour, by Boss' prodigal receptiveness." His book can be used to guide us towards a fuller understanding in ourselves and perhaps an increase in our own receptiveness as a result, in his emphasis on the "phenomenological approach" which does "not need to rely on any hypothetical entities supposedly operating under the surface." A truly scientific, empirical and honest approach!

Richenda Power