Book Review

Book Review of *Against Therapy* by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson

Jeffrey Masson's book *Against Therapy* posits the premise that the profession of psychotherapy is inherently harmful to mankind through it's very fabric of omnipotent power and hence the propensity for corruption. Masson's view of therapists is one of abrogation of client's concerns and interests and arrogation by the therapist to impose his/her own views and interpretation, disdaining the direction or input from the patient.

His premise, which pictures psychotherapy as nefarious, is built upon investigations of virtually all theories of the therapeutic profession. The abuses of the profession from its beginnings are documented through letters and early case histories that proliferated with accounts of incarcerations and abuse of patients by family members for other purposes than therapeutic reasons. Masson's statement that the hallmark of psychotherapy is to blame the victim might have originated from Freud's seduction theory developed from a client, Dora, whose needs he simply ignored in the service of his own which was to find more evidence of his psychological theories. Other psychoanalysts, adding to the specious picture of psychotherapy that are vital parts of Masson's book are Sandor Ferenczi, Carl Jung, and the infamous John Rosen, a proponent of direct psychoanalysis. Ferenczi, recognizing the all-powerful nature of psychoanalysis, separated himself from Freud's discipleship, and tried to democratize psychotherapy by a practice called "mutual analysis." His break with Freud arose from a dispute over the inability of Freud to acknowledge the reality of sexual abuse. Masson pictures Ferenczi as a therapist whose efforts pointed toward a realization of the abuses of therapy yet one who did nothing about bringing these abuses to the public or at least to the attention of the professional community. contribution to the nihilistic view of psychotherapy propounded by

Masson was his purported involvement with Fascism during World War II. Masson uses Jung's editorship of the *Journal for Psychotherapy and Related Disciplines* as evidence of collaboration with Nazi Germany. Finally, the renowned abuses of direct psychoanalysis by John Rosen are graphically delineated in the book with the whole of the psychotherapeutic profession being impervious to the aberrations of the sexual and physical abuse reaped on his patients and the patients of those under his tutelage. Masson contends that the profession of psychotherapy refuses to acknowledge the gravity of Rosen's influence, present and past, in psychotherapy.

While the pretention of power in therapy is in the main premise of abuse of psychoanalysis and behaviorism, the pretentious lack of power as hypothesized in Carl Rogers' work is addressed by Masson as "the problem with benevolence." The crux of his attack on Rogers' work is that his hypothesized three conditions essential to successful therapy, congruence or genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding, are in essence unattainable because of the artificiality of the circumstances of therapy and the nature of man, namely the therapist. Therefore, the person-centered therapist is intrinsically deceptive because the therapist is "playacting." Masson states, "No real person really does any of the things Rogers prescribes in real life." Masson's critique of Rogers' work is encapsulated by an analogy to political life: "...a benevolent despotism may make for a better policy than a malign, Hitlerian one, but it remains a despotism, and is built, necessarily, on the same bedrock."

Masson further addresses family therapy, gestalt therapy, feministtherapy, incest-survivortherapy, Ericksonianhypnotherapy, and eclecticism. In his criticisms of these therapies as in others he identifies an underlying common assumption that renders psychotherapy harmful. His premise rests on the concept that the therapeutic relationship always involves an imbalance of power and that every therapy is characteristically lacking in an interest in the

world, in physical and sexual abuse and in social injustice. In addition, each therapist is self-serving since the client's problems are seen in terms of the particular theoretical therapeutic orientation of that therapist. Therapists try to impose their own structures on their clients. In essence Masson denounces psychotherapy as dishonest.

In conclusion, Masson's premise is that all psychotherapy is harmful and unethical as a result of the power inherent in its practice and the therapist's proclivity toward imposing his/her own interpretation according to theoretical orientation discounting the client. One of the early documented cases of the aberration and abuses of psychotherapy was the account of Hersillie Rouy in the asylums of France. One of the characteristic problems of her release was her use of several names. She was known by the inmates as Polichinelle, a hunchbacked and deformed puppet of the French theater. The inmates called on her for help by this name when they were threatened by the staff. Rouy stated, "This name that belongs to a puppet, taught me that I was loved by the poor, by the miserable, the abandoned, not for my name, but for myself." Perhaps one may see an analogy of Masson's book to Polichinelle. Masson's book, though thoroughly documented and well-planned, tends through overgeneralization and egregious concentration on abuses -- the deformity of the hunchback and psychotherapy -- to be tendentiously written. He is holding the "puppet" of psychotherapy, controlling its movements, and disallowing its natural movements or attributes by constantly pointing to its deformity. We as readers can become spellbound by the abundance of support and by the erudite style identifiable with someone of Masson's credentials. However, the reader should be aware of the guiles of his puppetry and ferret out his/her own interpretation and conclusions concerning the nature of psychotherapy.

Jeanne Stubbs

Announcements

The International Conference on Client-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy. September 5-9, 1994. Gmunden, Slazammergut, Austria

1993 ADPCA Annual Meeting. May 27 to May 31 (noon). Maryville College, Maryville, Tennessee. For information or to send abstracts of presentations, write to: Planning Committee for '93 c/o Ken Newton Psychology Department-Austin Peay Building University of Tennessee Knoxville, Tennessee 37996

Diploma in Person-Centred Counselling. An international course consisting of one year of full-time study. For further information, write to: Dave Mearns, Coordinator Jordanhill Counselling Unit, Jordanhill College Jordanhill College of Education Southbrae Drive Glasgow G13 1 pp, Scotland

Seventh Annual Person-Centered Workshop. Warm Springs, Ga. (February 17 to 21 (noon). Sponsored by the Person-Centered Studies Project, University of Georgia. Write to: Jerold D. Bozarth, Aderhold 401, University of Georgia, Athens, Ga. 30602

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