

BOOK REVIEWS

Ehrenwald, Jan, Psychotherapy: Myth and Method, An integrative Approach. Grune and Stratton, New York, 1966, 212 pp.

In this small, but well-reasoned, scholarly book, Dr. Ehrenwald challenges some of the basic assumptions of contemporary psychotherapy. At the outset he asks: what is the effective principle of psychotherapy: myth or scientific theories? He proceeds to answer that even though Freud put psychotherapy on a scientific basis, myth has by no means been eliminated from the picture. There is, as it were, the myth that therapy is effective, a myth which is commonly shared by therapists and patients alike. This, according to Dr. Ehrenwald, accounts for the fact that all schools of therapy report successful cures even though their theories are widely divergent. The interaction between therapist and patient has many magical elements which cannot be entirely banished from the therapeutic arsenal.

Dr. Ehrenwald describes in great detail the presence of myth in the history of psychotherapy, ranging from the primitive medicine man to the modern faith healer. All these systems worked because the patients were ready to believe in them. The advance of science and the increasing demythologization of the modern world have pushed myth into the background as a disreputable remnant of earlier superstitious times. Psychoanalysis based itself firmly on reason and rationality, as opposed to myth and magic. This, according to Dr. Ehrenwald, may have been a mistake. He believes that myth leads an underground existence in contemporary psychotherapy, appearing in disguised forms in both therapist and patient. Properly recognized and understood, however, such myths could be effectively managed "in the service of treatment," and thus shorten the treatment process.

The author does not advocate a return to myth at the expense of scientific knowledge. He wants to combine psychoanalysis, myth and learning theory into one cohesive structure, claiming that this will eliminate some of the pitfalls of contemporary analytic practice. He cites some case histories which illustrate that the method works for him. Whether this is due to his insights or to his personal myth is a question left unanswered.

Dr. Ehrenwald has written a challenging, thought-provoking book. However, it raises some questions that are difficult to answer in terms of his own theory. He asserts that all therapeutic schools can claim successes because the patients unconsciously comply with the therapist's wishes and needs. Granted that such "doctrinal compliance" exists, the question then arises why so many therapists feel the need to change from one school to another in the course of their professional career (as did Dr. Ehrenwald himself). Doctrinal compliance should have validated their feelings of competence as therapists and motivated them to stay within the folds of a particular school. Yet it seems there is also the need to account for the facts as they are presented by the patient's personality and his problems, and that this can often be done better in terms of one theory rather than another.

Furthermore, is doctrinal compliance not the result of overloading the patient with technical jargon and letting him know exactly what kind of adjustment is expected of him? Do all patients have to react in such a way? In this writer's experience this is not the case. If we avoid the temptation to appear omniscient, if we keep technical terms to a minimum, if we let the patient find out for himself what his potentials are and how he can go about realizing them, then doctrinal compliance might be kept within reasonable bounds. Therapy then becomes an encounter between two human beings on a plane of equality, rather than an attempt to impose an ideology on another person.

Ultimately, we must question the thesis that myth should be re-admitted into psychotherapy. Myth is still alive in the field of politics, and while it works for political movements and ideologies, it has often produced disas-