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### The Psychotic Process

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By *John Frosch*. New York: Int. Univ. Press, 1983, XIII + 521 pp., \$40.00.

In spite of Freud's recorded distaste for treating psychotic patients and the associated therapeutic pessimism inherent in his stressing the improbability of effecting a workable transference in the narcissistic neuroses, analysts have always shown an interest in unraveling the mysteries of the psychoses and tilting a lance at this therapeutic windmill. In recent years, important contributions have come from child analysts, like Mahler, on the one hand, and from investigators working with adult psychotics, on the other. Both groups have benefited from our pushing back the developmental frontiers through infant observations that have heightened our understanding of both early normal, and pathological development. John Frosch is among those who approached this study from a professional lifetime interest in the dynamics and therapy of primarily adult psychotic patients.

Encyclopedic though this book may be in covering the psychoses (there are some 18 pages of references), it is much more than merely a survey of the vast literature or an eclectic harvest of the views of others. In a scholarly fashion, yet peppered tastefully with a unique wit and humor, Frosch has attempted to make some sense of the divers psychoanalytic contributions to this data from their origins in Freud's own changing theories to the variations and opposing ideas espoused by other workers. This required some preliminary work before Frosch could even compare the above with the distillate of his own formulations. He was faced with a need to redefine terms such as ego and self, which cover a multitude of meanings, which in turn have been confused by metapsychological changes. Many terms that each of us takes for granted have been reexamined and redefined in keeping with his special and unified view.

Frosch traces the accretions to our clinical and theoretical understanding as Freud moved from a topographical to a libidinal orientation, to a dual instinct theory, and finally to a structural formulation. With the increased complexity of the new framework we could move from the stress of the unconscious homosexuality in paranoia, with decathexis and recathexis of object (or withdrawal and restitution) to the inclusion of the role of aggression in understanding melancholia, to the place of dedifferentiation of all structures in schizophrenia. The latter includes not only self-object fusion but idego regression dedifferentiation as well as that of ego-superego.

But even before this was possible, it was necessary to clear up many nosological problems such as the frequent lack of differentiation in the literature between various categories of psychosis. Even delineating the role and position of borderline conditions becomes important to Frosch, since for him this category, which he sees at the interface between the neuroses and the psychoses, offers an area for fruitful future study. It may answer the crucial question of what determines, in patients with similar symptomatology, why one manages his internal and external stress via neurotic reactions, while another can only cope by resorting to delusional symptoms and faulty reality testing.

He sought commonalities among the psychoses, or frames of reference, which might both define the psychotic process and then be used as a measuring rod for the similarities and differences between the various psychoses as a means of comparing the various theoretical formulations of individuals or schools of thought. This also became the basis for his understanding of the whole gamut of psychotic symptomatology including depersonalization, hypochondriasis, fixity of delusional ideas, end-of-the-world delusions, automatisms, depression, and suicide, among others. It is here that one is struck by the unusual caliber of the frequent clinical illustrations which, in a very economical presentation, aptly and sharply illuminate a basic proposition.

Frosch's frame of reference for what he was to call "the psychotic process" is a search for organizing principles. These ultimately reflect his own conception of what separates the neuroses from the psychoses and what forms the least common denominator in the clinical picture of psychosis. First there is the nature of the conflict and the danger. But this is somewhat deceptive, since, while Frosch does include libidinal conflicts in paranoia and aggression in depression, these are definitely subordinate for him to the nature of the danger—the basic anxiety that is remobilized in psychotics. Thus he states (p. 207), "At

this point I should perhaps clarify that I do not believe basic anxiety is necessarily related to conflict." It is a fear of disintegration and psychological annihilation of the self brought on by a dedifferentiation where both object and self are totally threatened. He makes clear repeatedly that this unique kind of anxiety may stem from ego defects rather than conflicts. Although he is aware of and accepts the role of somatic and constitutional factors as substrates for the psychoses, it is my distinct impression that, above all, he favors the presence of real and early life-threatening dangers as affecting ego development and affording the prototype for the kind of anxiety that is so devastating for the psychotic patient. It is also why he differs with Arlow and Brenner who stress the continuum between neurosis and psychoses. For them, the conflict is primary in producing the anxiety which is then handled by broad-gauge ego and id regressions as defenses against this anxiety.

Within Frosch's frame of reference are the special techniques the patient uses to cope with this danger. This includes introjective-projective techniques, projective identification (about which he has written one of the best discussions I have yet encountered) fragmentation, splitting, massive denial, and loss of reality testing. This latter function can be part of a basic defect, or used defensively.

While the above is important, it pales in significance to Frosch's final organizing principle—the unique ego functions that are impaired, with special emphasis on reality testing. It is the delineation of his views of reality that includes relation to reality, that must be rated as his unique and most valuable contribution to the understanding of the psychoses. He unequivocally sees absence or gross distortion of reality testing as the *sine qua non* for the presence of clinical psychosis. I cannot do justice to his fascinating delineations of the varied ego functions that ultimately participate in our conception of reality, in the space allotted. I can only say it is well worth leisurely study.

Frosch also describes the views of M. Klein, the British object-relations school, the interpersonal school, as well as those of Mahler and Jacobson. In addition, he devotes a section to the treatment of psychotics and its relation to the theoretical orientation of the therapist, his experience, personality, and even charismatic features. He ends with a plea for a unified research effort that includes integrating the views of psychologists, biologists, as well as our unique contributions.

One does not need to work with psychotics to benefit from reading *The Psychotic Process*. In the case of this book the whole is indeed

greater than the sum of its parts. It offers a very sturdy and worthwhile platform to further contributions in this field which the future will undoubtedly bring.

It seems entirely fitting to give a hint of the personal quality of the author by quoting his own final sentences in his Epilogue. He has given due importance to the possible underlying biological and physiological basis of psychosis and yet has a word to say regarding possible psychoanalytic contributions. "In the same way, we might ask: If the paranoid hallucinates, why are the voices calling him such bad names and making such derogatory remarks? Psychoanalysis tries to answer questions such as these."

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