

reading this book I found myself swinging back and forth in these respects. On balance, however, I agree with the writer, who is perhaps more positive than I towards Laing, that Laing's best work during the 1960's is impressive and that his influence on psychiatry is unquantifiable. Care in the community in the twentieth century perhaps started with Kingsley Hall. It is sad, though, that he was never able to build on these brilliant beginnings with a continuing methodology leading towards a comprehensive "science of persons". That legacy has been left to others who will write more singularly in the existential/phenomenological tradition.

Nick Zinovieff

***Accepting Voices (The British Edition) by Prof. Marius Romme and Sandra Escher (Eds), MIND Publications, London (1993) 258pp. £13.99**

This is a book that clearly demonstrates that it is impossible to prove that one particular theory is superior above all others, and yet, when it comes to the subject of schizophrenia the dominant theory tends to be the medical one where we find ourselves sucked into the world of psychiatric psychosis. According to Marius Romme, himself a psychiatrist, 'hearers of voices seldom find psychiatric frames of reference sympathetic or faithful to their personal experience. What is needed is the freest possible exchange of experience and theory between professionals and hearers' (p.145). It would be nearer the mark to say that this book gives both professionals and voice-hearers a voice, each with something to offer. Marius Romme and Sandra Escher set out to show how the gulf between the professional and patient, theory and experience, objectivity and subjectivity can be reduced or bridged.

Accepting Voices is based on eight years of original research that really took off with the first ground breaking conference for people who hear voices in Utrecht, Holland in 1987. This conference followed two years of work by Romme, who contacted and set up meetings with voice-hearers who could in one way or another cope with their voices. Twenty of these voice-hearers became the speakers at this conference which was the beginning of what is referred to in this book as the Dutch experiment, which aims to help people who hear voices by rescuing them from the impersonality of the illness model.

The core and by far the most important part of the book are the thirteen personal accounts and personal theories written by people who have, in one way or another, come to terms with and accepted

the voices they hear. These voice-hearers are divided into two groups, the first seven contributors are all people who hear voices but have never been near a psychiatrist or in psychiatric care. These are all people who are socially active and have never seen themselves as ill. They have instead adopted a spiritual, mystical or parapsychological perspective. All have been able to make contact with people who have understood and recognized their experiences, which enabled them to avoid the dangers of isolation.

This section is followed by a chapter on non-psychiatric perspectives which includes inner voice experiences, mystical, religious, metaphysical, parapsychological and Karmic perspectives.

The other six contributors have all been in psychiatric care, all have been diagnosed as schizophrenic and from a psychiatric point of view would be regarded as very ill. These six have not only had to overcome the stigma and taboo that isolates people who hear voices, they also have to fight against the powerful psychiatric attitude, that more often than not believes that the hearing of voices in itself is proof that someone is suffering from a mental illness. All six have found it essential to identify with their voices in order to understand their meaning and to control them, in other words accepting their voices as part of themselves and their lives is vital in that it also enables them to overcome the social and relationship problems that are associated with that experience.

These accounts are followed by a chapter on some of the different psychiatric and psychological perspectives such as classical psychiatry, Functional Analysis, Cognitive models, Carl Jung's Extrasensory Perception, psychosis and many more.

The last section of the book is clearly written for people who hear voices, particularly for those with a psychiatric diagnosis of schizophrenia, so that the term 'cure' cannot be applied to these voices. Once again this section is the outcome of a partnership between the professional and the person who is trying to overcome the negative effects that hearing voices can have.

The philosophy behind this new approach is very much in keeping with the existential-phenomenological therapists attitude in that the emphasis is on the partnership between the voice-hearers and professionals, where the professionals learn from and follow the 'patient', and where ultimately the theory about the voices comes from the person who is actually hearing the voices. In Marius Romme's and Sandra Escher's own words, the goals they have set for themselves in this book are: 1. To enable people who hear voices to relate their own experiences to those of others. 2. To show that the real problem is not

so much the hearing of voices as the inability to cope with the experience. 3. To demonstrate the wide variety of experiences and their origins, and the different possible approaches to coping. 4. To provide therapists and families with information that will help both them and the voice-hearers themselves to cope more effectively with the voices. One of the conclusions that the authors arrive at is that an explanatory theory does appear to be essential to the development of a coping strategy.

At the time I was given this book to read a close member of my family was hearing voices. I had by then worked my way through quite a few books on Schizophrenia, because those were the only books I could find that dealt with the phenomena of hearing voices. Most of the books were written by psychiatrists, psychotherapists and psychologists, others were first hand accounts of those who were personally involved with someone who suffered from schizophrenia and how they managed on a day to day basis. One was called *Coping with Schizophrenia - A Survival Manual for Parents, Relatives, & Friends* by Mona Wasow (1982). In this book the author gives her heart wrenching account of how her son gradually succumbed to chronic schizophrenia. But as the title suggests, there was one person in the book that had no voice at all and that was the unfortunate son himself. It was as if he was a lost cause and confined to a completely different world from the 'normal' family. The absence of the son's side of the story made this book for me doubly depressing, so as far as I was concerned I thought I had read my last book about people who hear voices for a long time.

How wrong I was! As I opened the first page and started reading the introduction of *Accepting Voices* I knew I was in for a refreshingly different experience when I read: "This book is primarily intended for those of you who hear voices. Our main objective is to enable you to relate to the experiences of other voice-hearers in a way that may help you to manage and understand your own". Marius Romme and Sandra Escher certainly kept their word, I have at last found a book that gives people who hear voices a voice.

Diana Mitchell