

This wealth of achievement since leaving work saves the book from a potentially annoying list of do's and don'ts. His very personal approach is eminently readable, and the tide of optimistic expectancy carries the reader over the muddy sandbanks of style and the shallow waters of content.

He covers the classic points laid down by Alastair Heron, but is brave enough to also raise the question of the single elderly and the problems of the elderly in a multi-racial society.

And perhaps this is the author's – and the book's – main strength; retirement is not just about accommodation and finance, but it is very much to do with attitudes and faith.

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James B. McCarthy, *Death Anxiety: the Loss of the Self*, Gardner Press Inc., New York, 1980. \$16.50. ISBN 470 265 086.

James McCarthy is a Clinical Psychologist working in New York, who has also trained as a psychoanalytical therapist under one of the American programmes. His book is about what he terms 'death anxiety', which he defines as being the fear of one's own death in a physically healthy individual. In view of the dynamic origins of McCarthy's ideas, one has to consider his work against the background of orthodox psychoanalytic theory. Charles Rycroft in his *Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* defines anxiety as 'the response to some as yet unrecognised factor either in the environment or in the self, which may be caused either by external dangers or unacknowledged (unconscious) forces in the mind'. Rycroft points out that of the two varieties of anxiety suggested by Freud in his definitive account of 1926, signal anxiety serves to warn the ego of possible threats to its equilibrium, whereas primary anxiety is defined as the anxiety that accompanies disillusion of the ego. The internal function of signal anxiety is to make sure that primary anxiety associated with very early experiences of the loss of the self never menace the ego of the individual.

McCarthy takes up Freud's hypothesis and uses it as a basis for the description of what he terms 'death anxiety' which he describes in terms of the neurotic fear of loss of the self. This neurotic fear is present throughout life and needs to be met within each individual in all developmental stages throughout the life cycle. In particular the affect of depression underlies death anxiety as it is experienced. In these terms the fear of death is both ubiquitous and universal.

In metapsychological terminology, McCarthy takes up Freud's suggestion that the fear of death is a consequence of conflict between two mental structures, the ego and the superego, and suggests that it should be regarded as a consequence of the relinquishment of narcissistic investment of external objects. He develops the idea that death fears arise in the course of the early relationship between the child and his environment, and that these fears as

experienced in symptoms or in dreams symbolize the fears that the self might be lost or destroyed.

The author then discusses both the psychoanalytic and the existentialist literature on death as well as recent research on the attitudes of the dying when contemplating their own deaths. He suggests on the basis of his own research that there exists throughout life an inherent relationship between depression, separation anxiety, and the fear of death. Therefore the fear of death does not emerge when death becomes imminent but rather that it is present throughout life. He relates this phenomenon to the pathology of depression and the individual's fears for the safety of his self and of his objects. To paraphrase and slightly alter Freud the shadow of the superego falls upon the subject.

The author has read widely in the pursuit of this argument. He offers for our consideration literary accounts of terror and death as described by authors as various as William Blake and Franz Kafka together with the ways in which organized religion has created mechanisms for defence against fears of death and disillusionment.

In the second part of his book, McCarthy extends his argument to children and their fear of death and dying; to the concept of identity as elaborated by Erikson; to the phenomena of neurotic illness and to the possibility of expressing fears of death more psychologically through the use of concepts derived from the existential school of psychology. There is a final long chapter on the use of the concept in the working through of psychotherapeutic procedures with patients suffering from various forms of neurosis.

The author is widely read and presents a wide range of clinical and literary material to the reader. For the psychotherapists, particularly those who work with older patients, some of his illustrative material is very helpful. However, I did not feel that the author has genuinely resolved the question which troubled me concerning the book. I can easily agree with his thesis about threats to the integrity of the self being central to a great deal of neurotic experiences but I did not see the necessity of attaching such fears entirely to the affect of death anxiety. While this may be a helpful label it seems also to circumscribe our thinking far too much, and overlaps fears to do with other losses more appropriate to everyday living than death itself. I feel it would be preferable to keep the term of death anxiety, even though it is ugly, exclusively for the anxieties experienced in the second half of life as individuals in our culture become more and more aware of their approaching death and talk, as indeed the author does in his sub-title of the book, of their fears about the loss of the self. If we consider the book in those terms then it represents a contribution to a large literature in psychoanalysis although I feel that the non-specialist reader interested in this topic would be better served by writers such as Winnicott, Balint and Fairbairn.

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