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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Arkoff, A. (1993 in press) The illuminated life. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. (500 pp. Paper)

This book represents the author's lifelong experience both as a teacher and as a clinical psychologist. As the reviewer, I should inform the reader that I have been involved with the material in The Illuminated Life for several years before its publication.

The Illuminated Life allows the reader to systematically examine his or her life using 14 key questions, one question addressed in each of 14 chapters. Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Abe Arkoff's objective is to facilitate a systematic life-review leading to deeper self-insight and personal growth.

Arkoff explains that he was drawn to the study of lives because he was saddened that his father had not found fulfillment in his own life. The stated purpose of the book is "to illuminate your life." According to Arkoff, by addressing the 14 basic questions, participants may clarify the past, find joy and peace of mind for the present, and direction for the future, all leading to greater fulfillment.

The first half of The Illuminated Life takes the reader on an exploration of self-knowledge. Questions such as "Where am I now in my life?" and "What is my relationship to myself?" are addressed. Seven introspective questions are skillfully presented along with experiential exercises designed to promote growth.

The second half focuses upon possibilities for the future. For example, chapter eight deals with "What's possible for me?" focusing on the reader's potential. Through the final seven chapters, Arkoff takes the reader on an adventure that includes an examination of values, goals, and assets, and culminates in the query, "What's ahead for me?"

Each chapter of the book contains four distinct sections. First, there is the text, in which the author provides an in-depth overview of the psychological aspects of the specific question. Second, a number of applications are offered in which the reader is encouraged to apply the material from the text to his or her own life. Third, many seed thoughts are presented. The seed thoughts are appropriately chosen quotations that provide inspiration on the topic. The fourth and final section of each chapter contains explorations, which are experiential exercises designed to help the reader expand his or her awareness.

This text is a workbook written for use by teachers in the classroom or by other groups interested in personal growth. Arkoff stresses two perspectives he feels are crucial to the process of personal growth. First, that individuals in the group act

as a "caring presence" to each other. Second, that individuals are "caring disclosers". As the author states, "When persons who know how to be caring presences and caring disclosers come together, something very special can happen" (p. 10). It is this aspect of personal sharing he sees as a catalyst to deepen insight and enhance personal growth.

One of my concerns with The Illuminated Life is the number of quotations in the text. Arkoff seems to give credit to other psychologists rather than focusing on his own, unique contribution to personal growth. His opinions, after 40 years experience as a teacher and clinical psychologist, would be invaluable. Also, the large number of quotes make the text somewhat difficult for the reader. However, the author's careful scholarship offers a reference list that reads like a "Who's Who" of humanistic psychology.

Another concern is the omission of a question that deals specifically with spirituality. Religion is briefly discussed in two chapters, but the issue is not addressed in depth. Spiritual and transpersonal awareness belong to the overall concept of personal growth and addressing them might deepen the self-insight process.

The book poses examples of some situations inappropriate to a more mature individual. For example, the chapter on potentiality has an extended section on personal growth in college assuming that the college student is a young adult. With so many non-traditional students entering college, a wider focus might be more helpful.

I have used this text as the basis of several workshops in the USA and Russia, and have used it in my Psychology of Adjustment classes. Students and participants have reacted very favourably to the materials and individuals came away from the process with an expanded sense of awareness. I have also participated in a workshop as a member and found the material very beneficial in my life.

Overall, The Illuminated Life is a rich source of material for fostering personal growth and enhanced self-awareness. The book is an exciting tool that educators and group facilitators can use for guiding individuals along as they share the stories of their lives. Arkoff has made a significant contribution to applied psychology with this text and I highly recommend it to all those interested in facilitating personal growth and adjustment in group settings.

Denise Lajoie

Murphy, M. (1992). The future of the body: explorations into the further evolution of human nature. Los Angeles: Jeremy Tarcher (785 pp. Paper)

The future of the body is an encyclopedic gathering of selected accounts pertaining to extraordinary and metanormal human accomplishments. Murphy uses the terms extraordinary functioning and metanormal functioning interchangeably and defines them as "human functioning that in some respect radically surpasses the functioning typical of most people living today." In his attempt to entice the reader into the possibility of a futurist world of extraordinary human beings, Michael Murphy uses a very eclectic and broad-based approach, presenting challenging reports from medical science, psychotherapy, philosophy, genetics, hypnosis, spiritual healing, psychical research, comparative religious studies, sports, martial arts, and more.

Murphy's far-reaching work is a hybrid of a textbook and a reference work. As a reference work, The future of the body is a practical resource tool for scholars wishing a succinct overview of the range of human potential. In addition to 42 pages of notes and an 86 page bibliography, the book contains a 40 page appendix--part of which provides supplementary references for specific and varied topics such as parapsychology, parent-child telepathy, paranormal photography, meditation, psychokinesis, mental healing, near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, and creativity. Furthermore, throughout the book examples of human transformative capacity are cross-references which makes this lengthy volume more user-friendly.

Reading it as a textbook, however, I experienced some frustration because of its repetitiveness and lengthy quotations. The unbalanced organization was also unsettling--for example, in Chapter 22, Murphy does not justify why he allocates 19 pages to stigmata and only a half-page to extrasensory powers.

Another criticism I have is the lack of a clearly defined philosophical framework which gives this book a sense of somewhat purposeless wandering. Many of the research studies cited have gained credibility because they are under the umbrella of transpersonal psychology (now part of division 32 of the American Psychological Association). But, in this 785 page encyclopedic work, Murphy only devotes a page and half to the field of transpersonal psychology, failing to even provide a definition of the area (only transpersonal therapy is defined). Furthermore, from my perspective, the references offered by Murphy vary in their credibility which may leave a reader confused regarding the reliability of the work as a whole.

Related to the credibility issue is the author's voice which often switches from that of a careful scholar to a visionary who stretches his imagination a bit too far. For example, Murphy suggests that superordinary powers found in cartoons and science fiction movies are an early sign of what can be realized by the human race. Although I am not opposed to such speculation, the voice of speculation and the voice of scholarship (especially in Parts I and III of the book) alternate so

frequently, that the reader cannot easily distinguish the two. Skeptics, as well as sympathizers, may be driven too easily into disbelief by Murphy's unrestrained speculative optimism.

The main content of the book is divided into three parts. Part One, Possibilities for extraordinary life, consists of ten chapters which sketch various scientific, philosophical, spiritual approaches to metanormal functioning. One of the primary contributions from this first part of the book is Murphy's attempt to categorize metanormal phenomena according to a developmental framework which assumes evolutionary continuity. Using this framework, Murphy classifies all metanormal attributes within the following 12 categories: (1) Perception of external events, (2) Somatic awareness and self-regulation, (3) Communication abilities, (4) Vitality, (5) Movement abilities, (6) Abilities to alter the environment directly, (7) Pain and pleasure, (8) Cognition, (9) Volition, (10) Individuation and sense of self, (11) Love, and (12) Bodily structures, states and processes. Using these categories, Murphy explains how every metanormal attribute has emerged from psychosocial development and animal evolution. For instance, telepathic rapport can be regarded as an outgrowth of verbal and nonverbal communication abilities, which can themselves be traced back to the complex signaling found in primitive organisms. Although Murphy's evolutionary theory is appealing, I found myself wishing he had substantiated his claim with a more descriptive account of what goes on between the psychosocial stage and the metanormal stage.

Part Two, Evidence for human transformative capacity, consists of 13 chapters which include compelling evidence from various fields such as medical science, hypnosis, psychotherapy, somatic disciplines, sport, martial arts, and religious practices. This part of the book is less repetitious than the first part and reflects a higher standard of scholarship. I was particularly impressed with the comprehensiveness of the chapter on mesmerism and hypnosis; its 60 pages represent a valuable little book on the subject in its own right.

Part Three, Transformative practices, is the shortest part, consisting of only three chapters. In this last section, Murphy attempts to tease out the elements contributing to the acceleration of a metanormal transformation. However, the reader lacking a justification may wonder why working toward self-transformation is such an important objective. Murphy's answer, contained in the conclusion to the book, is based on his belief that such practices would "place us on a path toward extraordinary life," which includes "types of love, joy, and embodiment beyond our present abilities to conceive." This final comment, another example of Murphy's unbounded optimism, must be taken on faith.

Despite the criticisms I have mentioned, The future of the body remains the most comprehensive, synoptic compendium of the further reaches of human potential on the market. It is a thought-provoking work and a rich source of information. It is also an obvious labor of love by the author and a paen to the latent powers of human transformation. I can highly recommend this volume to anyone interested in a far-ranging overview of extraordinary human capacities of the mind and body.

Philippe Gross