

LECTURE 3

HISTORICAL DISSOCIATION

*"Although we speak of alienation as the estrangement of man from nature and from his fellowman, its base is the estrangement of the person from his body. I have discussed this theme more fully elsewhere [in *Betrayal of the Body*], and if I reintroduce it here, it is because it is central to bioenergetics."*¹ – Alexander Lowen

I. The Architect: Alexander Lowen

- Was a disciple of Wilhelm Reich who developed the psychotherapeutic method known as Orgone Therapy, a therapeutic system that "introduced the concept of orgasmic potency as a criterion of emotional health."²
- A student of Wilhelm Reich from 1940 to 1952 and Reich served as Lowen's personal psychoanalyst from 1942 to 1945. In *Bioenergetics*, Lowen describes his experience in therapy under Reich's care.³
 - "Reich pointed out clearly how the structure of society is reflected in the character of its individual members, an insight that clarified the irrational aspect of politics... In my opinion, if this vision is ever to be realized, it will be by following the direction Reich gave us."⁴
- Later separated from Wilhelm Reich and his followers due to what he viewed as fanatical devotion to the pioneering psychoanalyst
- Unashamedly craved fame (cf. Pro. 28:25; Jas. 3:16).

II. The Architecture: Bioenergetics

"Bioenergetics is an adventure in self-discovery. It differs from similar explorations into the nature of the self by attempting to understand the human personality in terms of the human body. Most previous explorations focused their investigations on the mind. Much valuable information was gained through these inquiries, but it seems to me they left untouched the most important domain of personality—namely, its base in bodily processes. We would readily acknowledge that what goes on in the body necessarily affects the mind, but that is not new. My position is that the

¹ Alexander Lowen, *Bioenergetics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 107.

² Alexander Lowen, *Bioenergetics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 35.

³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

energetic processes of the body determine what goes on in the mind just as they determine what goes on in the body.”⁵

“Bioenergetics is, as I have emphasized, the study of the human personality in terms of the energetic processes of the body.”⁶

A. Source of Authority

1. The physical body

“Body language contains the wisdom of the ages.”⁷

“The search left [Reich] to investigate the nature of the energy at work in living organisms. He claimed, as is known, to have discovered a new energy, which he called orgone, a word he derived from organic and organism...Reich’s greatest contribution was his delineation of the central role the body must play in any theory of personality. His work provided the foundation on which the edifice of bioenergetics has been built.”⁸

“The body doesn’t lie. Even when a person tries to hide his true feelings by some artificial postural attitude, his body belies the pose in the state of tension that is created. No one is fully the master of his own body, which is why a lie detector can be used effectively to distinguish truth from falsehood... If each aspect of bodily expression is revealing of who we are, then, certainly, our whole body must tell our story more fully and more clearly.”⁹

2. The past

“We learn by studying the past. So a person can grow only by strengthening his roots in his own past. And a person’s past is his body.”¹⁰

B. Sin

⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁷ Ibid., 280.

⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁹ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰ Ibid., 34.

1. Body problems

"A person is the sum total of his life experiences, each of which is registered in his personality and structured in his body. Just as a woodsman can read the life history of a tree from a cross section of the trunk showing its annual growth rings, so it is possible for a Bioenergetics therapist to read a person's life history from his body."¹¹

2. Childhood relationships

"This pattern of being placed in a bind by mixed signals is the cause of the anxiety underlying all neurotic and psychotic personality disorders. The situations that lead to the bind occur in childhood between parents and children. Babies and children look to the parents as a source of pleasure and reach out to them with love. This is the normal biological pattern, since parents are the source of food, contact and sensory stimulation that infants and children need. Until it meets with frustration and suffers deprivation, an infant is all core—that is, all heart. But this doesn't last long in our culture where deprivation of emotional contact and frustration are common and where growing up is generally accompanied by punishment and threat. Parents, unfortunately, are not just a source of pleasure: they become quickly associated in the child's mind with the possibility of pain. The resultant anxiety is, in my opinion, responsible for the restlessness and hyperactivity so many children show. Sooner or later defenses are erected to diminish the anxiety, but these defenses also diminish the life and vitality of the organism."¹²

3. Denial of pleasure

"This sequence — reaching out for pleasure → deprivation, frustration or punishment → anxiety and then → defense—is a general scheme to explain all personality problems."¹³

C. Salvation

1. Freedom from social restraint

"The tragedy of Reich's death proved to me that man cannot be saved against himself. However, what about the individual who is sincerely committed to his own personal salvation? If by 'salvation' one means freedom from the

¹¹ Lowen, *Bioenergetics*, 57.

¹² *Ibid.*, 136.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 136.

inhibitions and restraints imposed by one's upbringing, I could not claim that I had achieved this state of grace. Despite my having successfully completed Reichian therapy, I was aware that I still had many chronic muscular tensions in my body that prevented me from experiencing the joyfulness I longed for. I could feel their restrictive influence on my personality. And I wanted a still richer and fuller sexual experience—an experience I knew was possible."¹⁴

2. Freedom from inner turmoil

"I wanted someone to take over and do it for me. Trying and controlling are aspects of my neurotic character, and it was not easy for me to surrender."¹⁵

"The journey of self-discovery is never finished, and there is no promised land at which one finally arrives. Our first nature will continually elude us, though we get closer to it all the time... If therapy cannot return us to our first nature, which is the state of grace, it can bring us closer to it and so diminish the alienation most of us suffer."¹⁶

3. Freedom from muscular tension

"The conflict was resolved by a compromise. In the first half of the session I worked with myself, describing my bodily sensations to Pierrakos. In the second half he dug in on my tight muscles with his strong, warm hands, kneading and relaxing them so that the streamings would occur."¹⁷

"It makes no sense to proffer principles to bodies in pain. A principle is not designed to reconcile a person to his suffering, but to provide the inner harmony that makes possible a balanced and joyful life. Principles are not survival techniques. When the focus is on survival, principles are irrelevant. Before we talk of principles, we must be sure the young feel good in their bodies and about themselves. Principles make it easier for them to protect their good feelings."¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid., 38.

¹⁵ Ibid., 39.

¹⁶ Ibid., 106, 107.

¹⁷ Ibid., 39.

¹⁸ Ibid., 341. In this, the reader can recognize Lowen's opinion that body work, or being brought into a state of physical wellbeing, must precede moral instruction (in context, he gives the Ten Commandments as an example of moral instruction). Clinically-informed brothers make a similar claim in attempts to justify the use of bodily therapeutic interventions; however, Psalms 3, 16, 22, 119 and Second Corinthians 4 clearly teach that the soul can believe, receive, and give transformative truth in the midst of excruciating pain as well as bodily deterioration.

4. Freedom from sexual impotence

"I do not wish to say that the therapy with Reich was ineffective. If it did not fully resolve all my problems, it made me more aware of them. More important, however, it opened a way for me to self-realization and helped me advance toward that goal. It deepened and strengthened my commitment to the body as the basis of the personality. And it gave me a positive identification with my sexuality which has proved to be the cornerstone of my life."¹⁹

"It is easy to criticize Reich for his emphasis on the central importance of sexuality, but I would not do so. Sexuality was and is the key issue in all emotional problems, but the disturbances in sexual functioning can be understood only within the framework of the total personality, on the one hand, and the conditions of social living, on the other."²⁰

"Without a determined pursuit of the goal of sexual satisfaction and orgasmic potency, I would not have understood the energy dynamics of the personality. And without the criterion of the orgasm reflex one cannot comprehend the involuntary movements and responses of the human organism."²¹

D. Sanctification

"My personal solution was to use the bioenergetic exercises, developed to promote the therapy, as a regular routine at home. I have now been doing them for about twenty years. Not only have they enabled me to keep in touch with my body and to maintain its life, but they have also furthered the growth that therapy instituted. I found them so helpful that I encouraged my patients to do them at home as a supplement to the therapy. Their value has been confirmed by all who do them. And we have now instituted regular bioenergetic exercise classes for patients and others who are committed to the life of the body. Since the commitment to the body is lifelong, we expect that a person will make a similar commitment to the exercises."²²

E. Support System

F. Sparring

¹⁹ Ibid., 25.

²⁰ Ibid., 29.

²¹ Ibid., 30.

²² Ibid., 71.