

To read Reich's responses to the charges of the F.D.A. (9, Appendix), is to see a man fruitlessly engaged in a defense against the very forces he tried to combat throughout his life via education and reform. The gradual increase in suspicion, sense of persecution, feelings of extraordinary specialness and grandeur finally became quite pathological. Reich made extravagant statements about his powers, felt that UFO's were interested in his work, that President Eisenhower was secretly supporting him, and that he could significantly modify the weather. The extent to which his personality brought on his persecution, or that the real persecution that he received finally caused his deterioration, is hard to assess. I share the impression of Kovalenko and Brown (4) that no one was really willing or able to confront Reich at the "deep level of challenge and outspoken emotional exchange which was apparently natural and comfortable for him." This is particularly apparent in his interview about Freud (10), which we will discuss later on. Here, however, we must note that Reich's isolation and broken love bonds, experienced from early life onwards, and the tragic effects of moralistic judgment, haunted him throughout his life. He was attacked unmercifully and unfairly by individuals and groups who often twisted the spirit of his work. He was to comment on this activity in the concept of "emotional plague," which we will describe later.

#### REICH'S INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Early in his career, Reich found that patients would talk endlessly about their symptoms and problems, but that when the possibility arose of changing the way they lived or the structure of their personality, there was enormous resistance. He then shifted his attention to the analysis of the patient's character traits, much as symptoms had been worked with. By "character," Reich understood a stereotyped or characteristic way a person had of approaching life. This rigid responsiveness was seen as defensive in function and in the service of controlling and blocking off unacceptable feelings from within and, simultaneously, to defend against threats from outside. He called such modes of being "character armor" and found that these began early in life, later to become the foundation for neurosis and the blockage of any spontaneous response to life. The book, *Character Analysis* (7), appeared in 1929 and was both attacked and hailed, but was ultimately incorporated into the body of psychoanalysis. It was during this period (1923-1934) that he also developed his orgasm theory (see below), the idea of "stasis neurosis," sex-economic self-regulation of primary natural drives as distinguished from secondary perverted drives, and explored the role of irrationalism and human sex-economy in the origin of political and personal dictatorship.

Most importantly, however, Reich extended his concept of psychic or character armor into that of muscular armor. By this idea, he meant that muscular tension and rigidities not only served the same purpose as did neurotic character structure, but that indeed they were functionally identical. A retracted pelvis is inhibitory of sexual drives as much as is a strait-laced attitude. The same holds true for a perennially sweet smile, or an elevated stiff chest: all serve to inhibit feelings and drives which training had labeled bad, e.g., rage, anxiety, resentments, sexual

desire and, on the other hand, grief, love, pleasure, sympathy. Rigidity of musculature, in short, represents frozen emotion (5). This frozen emotion finds its expression in neuromuscular tension, postural defects and visceral disfunction.

Reich's therapy was devised gradually as he began to touch patients where he saw tension and rigidity. He gradually invented non-verbal techniques that penetrated bodily/armored resistance and had a reorganizing effect. The therapy is based on methods of breathing, movement, and relaxation which have the aim of dissolving the horizontal bands of tension which cross the body. He discovered these bands of tension which can be seen as segments: ocular, oral, neck, chest, diaphragm, abdomen, pelvis. Later researchers, such as Alexander Lowen, have added the knees and the feet ("grounding"). In the respiratory block, for example, the person may have a chronic condition of holding the breath, or shallow breathing, originating in childhood fears and aimed at keeping control. Through the breathing methods in Reichian therapy, there is a gradual relaxing of this "holding," and the underlying feelings of anxiety, etc., can be released.

As the bands of tension dissolve, the autonomic nervous system becomes able to react strongly and powerful sensations, "streamings" (see below) and feelings emerge. Many people find such active sensations frightening and uncomfortable. If the therapy continues, however, the patient will ultimately find total release of tension, and experience what Reich referred to as the "orgasm reflex," a relaxation of the organism accompanied by a shivering, much as a cat does when it relaxes. This full release, occurring on the couch as the patient lets go of control, brings an enormous sense of well-being, re-organizes the character structure, and enables the individual to enjoy deep, open tenderness with others. Vulnerability is accepted, as well as the capacity to experience exchanges in which the core of their being is in connection with others. A natural sexuality is central in this exchange, as well as a natural morality.

A person's armor is what either precludes sensations which should be erotic or pleasurable, or prevents build-up and discharge alike, leaving people in a chronic condition of unreleasable tension. Aggression and hate are among the few emotions that heavily armored people express. Their eroticism is converted into hate, just as does the surrounding armored culture. One of the most characteristic changes in Reichian therapy is that people begin to refuse to continue relationships which were exploitative, battering, or injurious. Yet the culture is full of such negative relationships, and Reich called the collective condition of armor the "emotional plague." He felt that such a label was accurate because of its chain-like reaction, when people are involved with flurries of truth-twisting, rumors, gossip, persecution and automatic rejection of the new, as well as a fear of freedom.

The very vivid tingling sensations which people experience in therapy, called "streamings," along with clonisms and other somatic phenomena, occurring in various regions of the body, become expressions of the bio-electric energy which Reich felt he had discovered. This quite concrete development of the libido idea, Reich called "orgone." At first, Reich recognized that these tinglings and

prickling sensations were caused by the free-flowing orgone which had been kept latent because of the chronic muscular tensions.

Gradually, by experimentation, Reich concluded that these energies also existed external to people. He believed that he had discovered an energy which is part of the living, pulsating world, a basis and source of life. This bio-electric energy streams among persons, earth's environment and the stars. There is, therefore, a cosmic stream of orgone energy which can be experienced in the organism, demonstrated in the laboratory, visible as "bions" and also seen in the atmosphere.

From 1940 onwards, Reich's work shifted from a clinical and therapeutic interest to what he felt was an increasingly biological and natural science endeavor. This resulted in increasing ostracism and antagonism toward him. Notable here was his work in cancer (*The Cancer Biopathy*, excerpted in the Writings, 9). He felt that cancer was a matter of biological frustration, an organismic shrinking and withdrawal, which occurred, as did other somatic diseases, in just those areas where armoring was most severe. This view of cancer, along with his use and advocacy of an "orgone energy accumulator"—a box-like device he believed could increase the orgone energy surrounding a person and help to relieve illness--brought on the wrath of the medical establishment.

As if these threats to current biological and medical thought were not enough, he also researched an area which he called "cosmic orgone engineering" (C.O.R.E.), which led him to speculations about smog, storm-control, weather in general, drought and desert conditions. He even produced a tentative technique for the production of rain in arid areas.

I am in no position to evaluate his biological and engineering research, but it is relevant to note that the attack which he received for his views was formidable--even though he described in detail how his experiments were conducted and asserted a natural science basis. None of his critics sought to replicate his work. This attack finally led to his imprisonment and death: a concrete and tragic example of emotional plague.

It is important to ask how isolated was Reich in what he discovered? His energy concept is remarkably similar to that described in East Indian, Asian, and western occult literature, even to the parallel of his armor segments with the chakra centers. Reich's vegetative streamings are not unlike the vertical meridians of acupuncture or the energy experienced in Kundalini Yoga. Reich seemed not to know of these parallels. Indeed, he showed no interest in comparing his findings and views with other material in contemporary or ancient physiology or psychology. His biological conception of core and periphery seems overly simple to biologically trained people, and his language often seemed too authoritarian and alienating.

Yet his work was vast and profound. All the body therapies of today owe much of their origin to his thinking and discoveries. Reich's personal and social isolation was tragic and one still does not know when his theories and discoveries can be put to an adequate outside test.