

REVIEWS AND ABSTRACTS

SEX BY PRESCRIPTION. Thomas Szasz. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980; 214 pages; \$10.95.

This is a scrapbook full of rhetorical positions, one-liners, dark aspersions, and abstract libertarian pronouncements that reads like a tabloid-level tract. Szasz relies heavily on media reports and on his own nightmare version of the whole psychotherapeutic establishment. He has no intention of entering into scholarly discourse; *Sex by Prescription* is all on the level of let's-run-the-rascals-out-of-town.

What concerns Szasz is the possibility that sex therapists and sex educators may be indoctrinating the public into their own sexual value system under the guise of diagnosis and treatment or the presentation of objective sex information. This is such an elusive issue and one of such gravity and urgency that any new contribution would be welcome. Yet what Szasz offers is a capricious caricature that will quickly be forgotten.

Szasz simplifies the issue at one stroke by simply assuming that sex therapy and sex education are *nothing but* an attempt to narrow zealots to impose their anything-goes sexual ideology on a gullible and unsuspecting public. Ironically, what Szasz presents is exactly the popular view of sex therapists and sex educators as quasi-pornographic sex technicians who want to make sexual virtuosity the new virtue.

Although one is tempted to dismiss Szasz out of hand, it must be said that he knew he was moving into a heavily politicized area, one in which, as in psychoanalysis, the critic is likely to be dismissed as a reactionary. Szasz's tone of absolute certainty, whatever else it represents, may be in part of reaction to his anticipation that he would be written off as a rightwing moralist in any case. Szasz's brisk sloganeering seems intended to disarm and confound any opposition. Unrestricted sexual freedom is "a sort of sexual lobotomy" (p. 156) and, citing Robert Chartham's goal of removing "all fears and doubts about the propriety and validity of all the sexual manifestations of which the human body is capable" (p. 154), Szasz declares that this is a "repellent, but fortunately impossible, goal" (p. 154). Characteristically, Szasz spends little time explaining why he thinks this goal is both repellent and impossible to reach. He only follows this with an even more sweeping denunciation: Quoting Chartham further to the effect that group sex is a step in the direction of sexual freedom, Szasz then reproaches "sex educators" for not caring that "such a radical transformation of sex from a private into a public act would entail the end of individual freedom and dignity" (p. 155).

The next step in Szasz's argument further exemplifies his polemical style. Asserting that "an exuberantly free sexual life might go hand in hand with an exceedingly unfree existence" (p. 155), he only cites as evidence Huxley's own nightmare vision in *Brave New World*; he ignores all the evidence that totalitarianism is accompanied by sexual restrictiveness, as in Russia, China,

India, and much of Africa and Latin America. Szasz seems not to recognize that sexual freedom *requires* "individual freedom and dignity" and the sense of self that goes with it.

My point here is that this may be Szasz's way of saying that some sex educators are so preoccupied with relieving guilt about sex that they unwittingly indoctrinate their students into an ideology of sex-at-all-cost. (Here is where Szasz's rhetorical abstractions trip him up. To the extent that he is right, sex education would create performance pressure, making sex into work, not fun—hardly a suitable opiate for the masses.) Similarly, Szasz may want to say that some sex therapists are so preoccupied with sexual technique that they not only make sex into work, they blindly push for sexual license and sexual exploitation, with little or no sensitivity to the client's own value system (it may help put this book in perspective to note that in it people do not have sexual *needs*, only sexual *values*). However, this is the way Szasz actually puts it:

Telling someone how to conduct himself sexually is (potentially, at least) inconsistent with letting him discover and develop his own style of sexual behavior. . . . This sort of "professional help" is likely to constitute a moral copout for the client and collusion in it by the expert. Sex education and sex therapy provide people with a rich reservoir of socially legitimized evasions about how they should conduct their sex lives—which may be the main reason why they are so popular. (pp. 160-161)

Such a proposition about the state of the art would not be an easy one to demonstrate in any case, yet Szasz offers it with no substantiating evidence. Again, this looks like his way of surviving as a critic against the anticipated mud-slinging of his wounded opponents and of not being downed by the complexity and subtlety of the issue he addresses. It may also be his way of compensating for not having done his homework and obviating the need for any further dialogue that might expose the gaps in his preparation. There is not a single reference in his bibliography to an article appearing in any of the four major sex journals (*Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality* represents the depth of Szasz's scholarly penetration). His only citation of Helen Singer Kaplan is one general reference to *Disorders of Sexual Desire*. *The New Sex Therapy* is not mentioned, nor are Hartman and Fithian. Szasz also seems unaware of the large number of sex therapists who are primarily behavior therapists by training and inclination. Yet on the journalistic level his sources are unusually diverse. Among them are not only multiple mentions of *Time* and *Newsweek* but also a variety of metropolitan dailies, including the *St. Petersburg Times*, *The Sacramento Bee*, and the *Tampa Tribune*.

This kind of background leads Szasz into gross misrepresentations. For example, he relies on an obviously erroneous *Time* report that Masters and Johnson, after terminating their surrogate program, continued to treat single men without partners with a resulting failure rate of 70-75%. Giving this error renewed currency, Szasz takes it as evidence of Masters and Johnson's moral impropriety and declares that these men should have been warned that they could no longer be helped. (At another point, Szasz recognizes that Masters

and Johnson restrict their treatment to couples, but there he takes them to task for this, contending that it shows their "anti-individualistic bias.")

Szasz attacks the technique approach as if Van de Velde still dominated the field, apparently innocent of any recognition that the Masters and Johnson revolution was based on a rejection of the technique approach. Surprisingly, Szasz does quote Masters to the effect that since "sex is a natural function . . . we don't need to teach anything; we only need to remove stumbling blocks" (p. 46). Although there could hardly be a clearer statement of Masters' anti-technique position, Szasz finds in it only what he is looking for (he sees in it only Masters' justification for medical intervention—the idea being that if sex is a natural function then sexual difficulties are pathological).

Perhaps sex therapists should share some of the responsibility for the view of the field that Szasz and the general public still hold, although it is hard to see how sex educators could be more explicit in making their position known (Sol Gordon will be astonished to learn that as a sex educator he is promoting unrestricted sexual freedom). However, for a book such as this to have been written and published calls attention to the lack of a comprehensive conceptual framework in the sex field. The field consists of a variety of low-level clinical constructs without much to hold them together. On another level is the sex-positive rhetoric that can make it difficult even for Masters and Johnson to advocate a sex-neutral position without sounding sex-negative. We are all encouraged to search ourselves for any sign of sexual ambivalence and to root it out (the SAR process is now institutionalized by having been made a prerequisite for AASECT certification). As long as we depend on sex-positive rhetoric, the more cautious critic is intimidated and only the more irresponsible gets into print.

Bernard Apfelbaum, PhD
Berkeley Sex Therapy Group
2614 Telegraph Avenue
Berkeley, California 94704

APPLICATION OF HYPNOSIS IN SEX THERAPY. Hugo G. Biegel and Warren R. Johnson. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas, 1980; 314 pages; \$29.75.

It was with a great deal of trepidation that I undertook the review of a book bearing the names of such illustrious pioneers of modern sexology as Doctors Hugo Biegel and Warren Johnson. What, I thought, if I didn't like it? Surely the review would be thought a cowardly heresy; on the other hand, if I did find the book worthy, I was sure to be accused of doting sycophancy. Fortunately, my response lay between these two extremes.

Problems began with the introduction. First, I learned that, while both authors had planned to collaborate on a book such as this, Doctor Biegel had passed on while his contribution was still in note and rough manuscript form; this left Doctor Johnson in the unenviable position of "reconstruction" based upon his long friendship with Biegel. In a grand gesture, Johnson states that