
Book Review: *PSYCHOSOMATIC MEDICINE AND CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOANALYSIS* GRAEME J TAYLOR, IUP PRESS

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Dr Graeme Taylor is a New Zealander who, subsequent to his MBChB from Otago, trained in psychiatry and psychosomatic medicine at the University of Toronto and State University of New York Medical Centre. Presently he is Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Toronto and consultant to Mt. Sinai Hospital, and in this important and scholarly book *Psychosomatic Medicine and Contemporary Psychoanalysis* has brought together psychobiological research and psychoanalytic theory with child development observations in a much needed synthesis from which he proposes a new model for understanding psychosomatic process based on preneurotic pathology as a consequence of faulty object relationships in early life.

From Freud's drive-conflict model through Alexander's conflict model, response specificity theories, ego regression theories of Schur and Margolin, and pregenital conversion theories of the classical era, to Engel and Schmale's concept of 'giving up / given up' complex, a rich and detailed history of thinking about psychosomatic process leads to the contemporary construct of alexithymia in which patients have a striking difficulty in describing their own feelings or discriminating emotional states from bodily sensation.

Recent research has shown the importance of the mother-infant relationship as the interactional organising system from birth, beginning at a biological - neurophysiological - behavioural level and shifting to a more psychological level as the capacity to symbolise, think, use language and separate from mother develops in the baby's mind.

Hofer's animal studies showing that the mother is a biological as well as behavioural regulator are reviewed, in the possibility that homeostatic systems of human mothers and infants are also linked – with some evidence already in support of this being the infant's regulation of the mother's milk flow, and observations of thermo-regulation and stimulation of gastric secretion when in the presence of attachment figures. This allows then for the conceptualisation of a psychobiological dysregulation model of psychosomatic disease which Dr Taylor supports using cybernetic principles of feedback, self regulation and dysregulation. He describes the mounting evidence that disruption in object relationships can cause dysregulation of physiological processes which in turn increase vulnerability to development of disease – whilst high levels of social and personal support may in fact decrease it.

The book gives many interesting case examples and concludes with the prospect that psychoanalysis has an opportunity to illuminate medical illness by enabling understanding of the influence of interpersonal relationships which may predispose such illness or maintain health. To quote: “psychobiological research has shown that independent self-regulation does not exist, even in adulthood, and in varying degrees people use social interactions and their other selfobject attachments as accessory regulators ... The conceptual frameworks of self-psychology and object relations theory provide ways of intervening psychoanalytically and/or behaviourally to alter patients’ internal and external object relations, thereby increasing their resistance to disease.”