

Psychiatrist Willard Gaylin at Columbia, a model of what it means to be both human and intellectual, has thought out loud about feelings in his just-published [Harper&Row/79] collection of essays subtitled OUR VITAL SIGNS. This thinksheet (1) goes with his antimoralism, agreeing with him that the whole range of human feelings should be seen heuristically as life-bent, life-intending, given us to "direct us toward individual survival and the obligations of group living"; (2) supports his attacks on objectivism, behaviorism, subjectivism, hedonism, expressivism, and pseudo-mysticism; and (3) agrees with him that upper ["rational"] and lower ["emotional"] coils are inextricably interrelated in the healthy person; and even in the disturbed person feelings have rational content, for feelings--instead of being "alternatives to it"--"are the instruments of rationality." Consequently, our attitude toward our and others' feelings should be both holistic (understanding a particular feeling vis-a-vis organism-organum-reality) and analytic (distinguishing shades within a feeling-continuum--e.g., distinction between boredom and ennui, shame and guilt, guilt and guilty fear).

Whether in connection with my BVR ("basic visceral response") method of reading the Bible alone and sharing in group, or in connection with journal-keeping, tell a self-story on each of the following emotions, using this question as guide: As I think about this feeling in the context in which Gaylin has placed it, what story from my life comes to mind with sufficient strength to convince me I have something to learn from (1) prayerful meditation on the event and (2) sharing it in group?

"Signals for Survival: Serving Self and Group"

- 1 ANXIETY
- 2 GUILT ("shapes so much of our goodness and generosity")
- 3 SHAME
- 4 PRIDE

"Caution Signals: The Center Is Not Holding"

- 5 FEELING UPSET
- 6 TIRED
- 7 BORED
- 8 ENVIOUS
- 9 USED

"Signals of Success: Reaching Out and Moving Up"

- 10 FEELING TOUCHED
- 11 HURT
- * 12 MOVED
- 13 GOOD

BVR

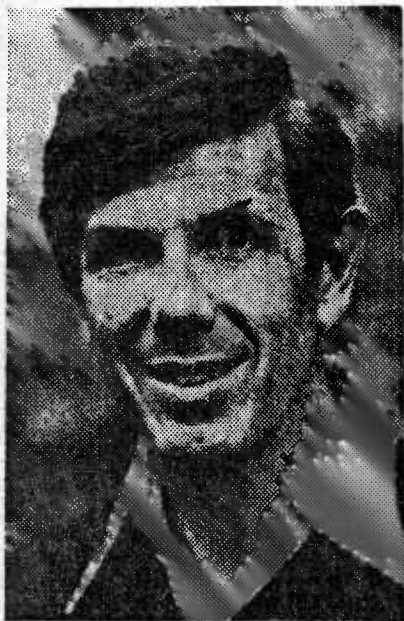
Some things not to do with one's feelings: (1) Let 'em all hang out; (2) Keep 'em all inside; (3) Revv 'em up to "ventilate" or explode or scream 'em; (4) Consider 'em either the best or the worst things you've got; (5) Trivialize 'em by imagining 'em infinitely manipulable; (6) Moralize 'em, rating some negative and others positive; (7) Enslave them to some exonomous "principle" (e.g., power or pleasure).

Books of The Times ^{12 Jan 79}

By Christopher Lehmann-Haupt

FEELINGS: OUR VITAL SIGNS. By Willard Gaylin, M.D. 254 pages. Harper & Row. \$10.

IT is Dr. Willard Gaylin's thesis that feelings are useful — that even bad feelings, such as shame and guilt and anxiety, serve a function that helps people to survive. Does this sound too obvious to be worth writing an entire book about? Perhaps it does, but consider the potential opponents to what Dr. Gaylin, a practicing psychiatrist and clinical professor of psychology at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, is saying in his latest work, "Feelings: Our Vital Signs." (His previous books include "Caring," "Partial Justice: A Study of Bias in Sentencing," "In the



Dr. Sheldon Gaylin

Dr. Willard Gaylin

Service of Their Country: War Resisters in Prison" and "The Meaning of Despair.")

On the one hand, there are the scientists, behavioral and otherwise, who, in their striving for objectivity, have either denied the existence of feelings altogether, or relegated them to a corner of the laboratory for being too difficult to measure, too slippery and mushy. (Even in the literature of psychology and psychoanalysis, Dr. Gaylin points out, there is remarkably little of a descriptive nature on feelings.) To the scientists Dr. Gaylin is saying that whether or not feelings can be objectified, they are vital to our existence, and the balance, now tipped toward neglect, must be redressed.

Emotions Written Off

On the other hand, there are those who, having perhaps been misled by science's desertion of the realm of feelings, have tended to trivialize emotions by acting as if they were infinitely manipulable. These include the advocates of what Dr. Gaylin calls the "emotions as pus" school of thought,

which holds that emotions, in order to be brought under control, "are obliged to be discharged into the environment" — that when it comes to feelings, we should "let it all hang out." ("I myself feel we have a responsibility — not only to the social unit, which demands a certain amount of evasion, reserve, and dissembling, but also our personal dignity — to keep 'it' in.")

They include those who believe "that self-improvement can be achieved by generating the emotion so that it may later be relieved." ("The problem with people who have pent-up emotions is usually not their inability to express them but their incredible capacity to generate them. They do not need a weekend marathon of provocation and humiliation to express the very emotions that they generate to excess without provocation.")

Finally, the trivializers of emotion include those who would encourage the pleasurable feelings and deny the painful ones, as if selective self-recognition could determine our emotional make-up. To these and the other manipulators, Dr. Gaylin is saying that "Feelings are the instruments of rationality, not — as some would have it — alternatives to it."

Having said all this by way of introduction, what is there left for Dr. Gaylin to do, besides steer a careful course between the rock of scientific objectivity and the whirlpool of emotional mush? Again, what he does sounds deceptively simple.

He describes in a series of chapters the most fundamental feelings, classifying them according to what he sees as their functions. Thus, under the heading of "Signals for Survival: Serving Self and Group," he writes about anxiety, guilt, shame and pride. For these are the feelings he believes were given us, through the process of evolution, to "direct us toward individual survival and the obligations of group living." (For instance, guilt, far from the crippling agent that the trivializers dismiss it as being, is in Dr. Gaylin's view, "the emotion that shapes so much of our goodness and generosity.")

Under the rubric of "Caution Signals: The Center Is Not Holding," he writes about feeling upset, tired, bored, envious and used, for these are the feelings "which warn us of malfunction." Finally, under the title of "Signals of Success: Reaching Out and Moving Up," he includes the chapters "Feeling Touched (and Hurt)," "Feeling Moved" and "Feeling Good," for these are the emotions "that acknowledge the fact that survival of the individual and the group must have meaning beyond the mere fact of surviving."

His Purposes Served

If the arbitrary nature of these categories make it sound as if Dr. Gaylin were guilty of indulging his own brand of pseudo-science, never mind; they serve his purposes. And these purposes are far from simple-minded. What he has really done is string together a series of essays on the various human feelings.

Sometimes his intention is to explain

the function of certain feelings — of guilt or anxiety or fatigue, which last he believes to be not a physiological state but rather the precursor of depression. Sometimes his intention is to make distinctions — between ennui and boredom, for instance, or among shame and guilt and guilty fear. Sometimes Dr. Gaylin's purpose is to provide himself with a vehicle for his insights and beliefs — his conviction that we ought not to deny so stringently the right of people to hide from the inevitability of death (regardless of what Elisabeth Kübler-Ross advocates, who "has in recent years discovered the af-

terlife, which to many of us simply seems a return to denial"). Often his purpose is nothing more than to describe an emotion, by citing famous passages from literature.

But whatever his purposes are and regardless of whether we agree with his beliefs and distinctions, one effect of these essays is paramount. They make us think about our feelings as if they were objective realities. By the very act of doing so, we are bound to feel enriched in self-knowledge.