Beating the Comfort Trap

Windy Dryden and Jack Gordon
Sheldon Press, 1993, £5.99, 133pp.

In their introduction, the authors state their aim is to explain why being in the 'comfort trap' diminishes rather than enhances the pleasure and satisfaction that can be gained from life, and to show precisely what action needs to be taken to escape from the trap. 'Precisely' is the operative word, as they make no bones about their belief that this is the only way to achieve a rational philosophy designed to help one live a maximally creative and happy life. They agree that life is uncomfortable, but believe that people tend to stay in the minor discomfort of the 'comfort trap' rather than tolerate the maximum discomfort needed to get out of the trap and change their lives. Opting for instant gratification rather than long-term benefits is not a new subject, but this book does not waffle about 'how you could do it if you tried'; it simply offers you 'if you want to do it you can, the choice is yours, here is the way'. In order to get out of the trap they offer the cornerstone of their rational philosophy of living, including identifying high frustration tolerance, self acceptance, acceptance of uncertainty, risk taking, flexibility and scientific thinking, commitment and responsibility for self, and an awareness of long-range hedonism and non-utopianism. A huge philosophy to come to grips with for the average reader of Sheldon Press Books, but this is a clearly-defined process, illustrated with individual experiences, clarifying each objective and offering techniques to practise in daily living.

Traditional Beliefs (TBs) are discussed and substituted with Rational Beliefs (RB's) in a no-nonsense approach: clearly you either accept this philosophy, absorb it, and live it, or you reject it, as 'just another book which doesn't help', and stay in your own particular 'comfort trap', blaming your situation on the failure of the book rather than owning responsibility for yourself and your actions.

Each chapter offers a step out of the trap, and I particularly relished the chapter on procrastination. Having a deadline for this review looming on the horizon, I easily recognised the symptom of getting involved in pseudo-work, and using rationalisation to justify procrastination. After reading the chapter twice, it was the verse by Jack Gordon which enabled me to start: 'Forever I can sit and stew, but I haven't forever to live and do.' Not a book to dip into and try bits and pieces, but a book to be read as a whole and, if accepted, to be applied as a whole by anyone who wants to achieve their goals.

Sandra Booth

Psychotherapy for the 1990s

J. Scott Rutan (ed.)
The Guilford Press, 1992, 378pp.

The title of this book represents something of a misnomer for the humanistic practitioner who might be hoping to find an overview of the broad spectrum of approaches that comprises psychotherapy in the 1990s. In fact nearly all the articles in this book are written by teaching staff at Harvard Medical School or the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston and so the range of therapeutic approaches covered by the book is limited by those environmental contexts. So there is no mention here of humanistic, transpersonal, process oriented or body work approaches. The approaches that are covered represent the broad central mainstream of psychotherapy as it is practised within the institutional context in the USA. That is from cognitive behavioural on the one hand across to psychoanalytical on the other.

Nevertheless within this rather limited range of approaches there are a number of very interesting articles in this work which are all written in the succinct and scholarly manner that one would expect of the teaching staff at top USA hospitals and institutions. The range of themes covered is from value systems of psychotherapy through to thoughts on the nature of the therapeutic relationship and transference and counter-transference. A great deal of time is given also to short-term psychotherapy and the conversion of short-term psychotherapy into long-term psychotherapy. There are also chapters on supervision, contemporary child psychotherapy, family therapy, treatment of AIDS and incest and eating disorders.

I found particularly interesting the overview of short-term dynamic psychotherapies which contains very succinct and comprehensible accounts of the various different approaches to brief psychotherapy and the differences between them and also several chapters that acknowledged the integration of cognitive and analytic approaches that is becoming an acceptable integrative method within contemporary psychotherapeutic practice. There is an interesting and fairly radical chapter on gender bias in the diagnosis of borderline and narcissistic personality disorders, and an excellent discussion of the importance of the acknowledgement and acceptance of shame in the treatment of incest.

This book would probably be extremely valuable to anybody on a cognitive or analytic training, but as far as training in humanistic, transpersonal or process-oriented work is concerned, its main use will be as a reference book for resourcing names and systems in modern American cognitive/analytic psychotherapy.

David Kalisch

Breath and Spirit: Rebirthing as a Healing Technique

Gunnel Minett
Aquarian, 1994, £7.99, 144pp.

Here is an inspired contribution to rebirthing. As a rebirther myself, incorporating the technique successfully into my psychoanalytical psychotherapy practice, I find this book deeply rewarding and informative. Divided into four parts: the power of breathing, the physiology of breathing, the psychology of breathing, and the spirituality of breathing, it is packed with information on all aspects of the breath and breathing and provides a synthesis of present-day knowledge of world-wide practices with the breath.

Gunnel Minett intersperses facts with personal experiences and a range of pertinent quotations from eastern and western sources. Her scope is astonishing. A second and third reading of the book rewards with fresh impact and insight.

The first section deals clearly and responsibly with the actual rebirthing practice. (After her explanation of this in Chapters 1 and 2, I think it a pity that Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are not relegated to the end of the book as they stem the flow of thought set up in the description of rebirthing. Also it might be appropriate to give the last word to Leonard Orr, the 'father' of rebirthing.)

We then go on to the interesting sections of physiology and psychology which develop the theme of the fundamental power of breath and breathing and its ability to unlock the memory and release the tensions and defences stored in the body as well as in the brain, which may in reality be a giant gland dispensing hormones. 'This implies that the mechanisms which underlie thought operate in the same way throughout the body and are not confined to the brain. In other words, our memories are not just stored in the brain but throughout the body.'

Minett is modest in her knowledge and presentation. Some of the most perceptive comments are hidden, and at least one creative idea – that of having 'work out places for the mind as well as for the body' – is put in parentheses.

The resource addresses, bibliography and index are well-presented and comprehensive. The final chapter, 'Breathing in Different Cultures' is fascinating, containing many strands and connections from Chinese, Tibetan and Indian traditions to the latest thoughts of Sheldrake, Berendt and Grof.

The penultimate paragraph of this book is perhaps too negative a note to end on. Having spoken throughout of integration why are we urged to 'get rid of' anger and fear? Should they not also be integrated through the transformative use of breath to reinforce the spiritual energy of love?

For those of us brought up in the Christian tradition these insights could help re-interpret our desiccated perception of Jesus' teaching and bring a new understanding of the activity and power of the

holy spirit as life energy. He breathed on them and said, 'receive the holy spirit' (John 20 v 22). The supreme ability of the breath has barely begun to be appreciated by the world as a whole. You certainly need to stop and breathe as you read through this book! It will be sometime before it is surpassed.

Bronwen Astor

Visions for the 21st Century

Sheila Moorcroft (ed.)
Adamantine, 1992, £14.95, 178pp.

Inventing the Future: Reflections on Science, Technology and Nature

David Suzuki
Adamantine, 1992, £14.95, 247pp.

These two books both come from Adamantine's exciting new series 'Studies on the 21st Century'. If you want to know more about the broader issues facing society as the millennium approaches then this series will be of interest to you. Both books deal with the wider social context in which we move and have our being. They raise questions about the nature of the good society and what we might need to do to achieve it.

Sheila Moorcroft's collection comprises some twenty pieces which all, in very different ways, embody some vision of what the next century might comprise. Contributors range from Vaclav Havel and Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan to well known futurists such as Willis Harman and Warren Wager. The essays vary from poems and memoranda to more detailed studies of global issues. They vary too in quality and depth.

Here is a flavour from three of my favourite pieces. I like Robert Muller's poem 'An impossible dream,' which begins 'I dream/That on 1 January 2000/The whole world will stand still/In prayer, awe and gratitude/For our beautiful, heavenly Earth/And for the miracle of human life.' I like James Ogilvy's 'Earth might be more fair' when he writes 'Despite the wonders of modern science there never seems to be enough: enough love, enough attention, enough respect, enough dignity. So we make too much of the things we know how to make: war, toxic wastes, bad television.' I admire Ziauddin Sardar's sharply penned sketch of the implications of postmodernism, 'When the pendulum comes to rest'. In this he emphasises that whereas modernity suppressed non-western voices, postmodernity allows for a greater variety of narratives to be heard. Taken overall, this is an interesting, but not an amazing, collection of visions.

David Suzuki is a Japanese Canadian,

newspaper columnist and TV presenter who, with his scientific training, casts a critical eye over a wide range of ethical issues from genetic engineering and the hazards of the 'technological fix' to aboriginal worldviews and the need for more reflective education. The articles collected here come from his newspaper columns over a five-year period. They have been grouped together under various thematic headings such as: genetics and society, science and the military, economics and ecology, and education.

The weakness of this approach to such profound issues is that there is no opportunity to give them the in-depth treatment they deserve, but then other books do this. The strength of this approach is that it offers a series of easily digestible sound bytes which air a range of crucial ethical issues facing humanity now and in the future. It is a light read but a good read.

Whilst humanistic psychology plumbs the depths of the psyche it is important to remember, as John Heron has pointed out, that our existential and archaic anxieties occur within the broader parameters of planetary and transcendental anxiety. This is why books such as these are important: they help tell the story of our times, of self and global society.

Dave Hicks

The Jaguar and the Anteater: Pornography Degree Zero

Bernard Arcand
Verso, 1993, £17.95 hb, 286pp.

This is a brilliantly written and sophisticated examination of pornography by a Quebec anthropologist. It covers the subject from every possible angle, and brings in all the Francophone literature as well as the Anglophone.

To illustrate the wide diversity of his angles, perhaps this quote will serve as an opening: 'Not since the abolition of child labour in the coal mines of Northern England has an industry tolerated such exploitation of its workers with such excessive profits for the owners. No-one yet, however, has really dared to come forward to defend the rights of pornography workers.' (p.45)

He also remarks how the Trade Descriptions Act is regularly infringed in the case of pornography, which so often promises more than it performs, yet no-one comes forward to complain that the video was not as erotic as it claimed to be.

There is a section on the history of the subject, where it becomes clear that there was no pornography in the modern sense until the advent of the printing press. It at first consisted of scurrilous and sexy portrayals of the notables of the day, performing acts which were out of comportment with their dignity.

He is good on the question of pornography being basically a series of lies about people: 'First, there is the biggest and most obvious lie: it promises sex, when in real-

ity it is providing only a stimulus for masturbation, which is a minimal form of sex; it makes it unremarkable for a man to ejaculate eight times in twenty minutes; it depicts organs that are three metres long. And most of all, it pretends that sex is easily dissociated from the rest of human experience: not only from all feelings other than raw desire, but also from bills that must be paid, and sheets that must be washed.' (p.176)

He is not against masturbation, and has an interesting chapter on the advantages and disadvantages of it, ranging from the Bible to Albert Ellis and Betty Dodson, and full of interesting cross-cultural material. But he is fully up to the feminist critique, and goes into great detail about all the ramifications of different feminisms and different objections. He does see the point made by sensitive women: 'But such a reduction is also seen as contemptuous: the creation of a servile being who is always available, ever obedient and whose essential form of self-expression is the exhibition of her sex. One can easily see how this sex-object invented by pornography resembles the same woman who, elsewhere in society, risks being harassed, violated, beaten, underpaid, and, even in the best of cases, paternalized and treated with condescension. There is thus, at first sight, the shocking right of men to represent women in whatever way they choose, all naked and cuddly, like animals in a zoo, or like bunnies, as if they had just hopped out of the Disney studios. In a word, pornography succeeds, with one simple and crude image, in gathering together everything that women fear is essentially how all men regard all women.' (p.184)

But in the end he does not go with this, nor with any of the other positions he describes so well. What he is good on is the paradoxes of pornography: the way in which pornography needs modesty to function well, and also destroys modesty by every step it takes; the way in which pornography is and must be marginal, and also offers huge fortunes to those who organise it; the way in which pornography offers secrets, and only ever delivers the obvious and predictable. He gives no answers. His vision of the future is one where pornography is no more remarkable than chess: 'Like chess, pornography would offer a closed universe into which it would sometimes be pleasant to disappear, as long as it remained quite clear that it was a game of lies and limitations . . . The future stakes of pornography will be decided by our capacity to put lying in its proper place.' (p.257)

A rather quiet ending to a book full of fireworks. It should be made clear to the prurient that there is not a single example of pornography in this book. In the end it is a marvellous compendium, which would become the making of any essay on pornography or masturbation.

John Rowan

Standards and Ethics for Counselling in Action

Tim Bond
Sage, 1993, £10.95 pb, 232pp.

The author is a staff tutor at the University of Durham and chair of the Standards and Ethics Subcommittee of the British Association for Counselling. He says the book is intended to meet the needs of trainee counsellors and experienced practitioners. It is divided into four parts: the background; responsibility to the client; the counsellor and others; and the whole picture, which proposes a model for ethical problem-solving.

Bond traces the origins of counselling back to one Frank Parsons (1854-1908), a radical social activist, who set up the first counselling centre in Boston for immigrants, in the last year of his life. He says that counselling is part of a movement towards democratising society and empowering the individual.

Some useful information is given on the law as it applies to counselling, though the author makes it clear that if legal questions arise proper legal advice should be sought.

There is a chapter on the suicidal client. This not only covers adults but also children. A good deal of information is given on confidentiality, its scope and limits. Much of this is helpful, but in the end there seem to be many grey areas left unspecified.

There is a good chapter on supervision, where it is made clear why counsellors go in for supervision as much as they do. It is suggested that the British practice of post-probationary supervision, not at the moment common in the USA or in Europe, is being considered much more widely.

This is a good book, which sticks to the ordinary and average type of problem rather than the more recondite or obscure. It would be a useful resource in any training course.

John Rowan

Embracing Your Inner Critic: Turning Self-Criticism into a Creative Asset

Hal and Sidra Stone
Harper San Francisco, 1993, £7.99 pb, 217pp.

Many of us have an inner critic. It claims to be on our side, just protecting us from making mistakes. It claims to be the voice of reality, simply telling us the truth about how things are. It sees all our faults and failings with pitiless clarity, and chastises our false pretensions. If it makes us miserable, that is just too bad: it is only because we fall so far short of our best. We don't like it, but we have to admit it is

right. But now the Stones (of voice dialogue fame) tell us that this is all a misunderstanding: 'No matter how much you try, you cannot please your Inner Critic. The harder you try to change yourself, the stronger it gets. Try to please it, and it will grow.' (p.6)

The main way that the Stones deal with the inner critic is to dialogue with it. In the dialogue many things can happen. First of all it can become clear how unfair the critic is; secondly the dialogue can clarify where the inner critic comes from; and thirdly it can show how to talk back to the inner critic.

One chapter is headed 'The Critic as Abuser of the Inner Child', and this is a good point. Most of us have a vulnerable child inside us, and the critic is particularly vicious if it thinks this child is listening. There is some political awareness here, too, in the chapter on the differences between the inner critic in women and in men. They talk about the Inner Patriarch, which seems very similar to what John Southgate and I call the Patripsych.

In the end the authors think the inner critic can be transformed, and give a lot of hints on how this can happen. But I still think most people could not do all this just with the help of a book: in the end I think a therapist is needed for this sort of work.

John Rowan

Inward Bound: Exploring the Geography of Your Emotions

Sam Keen
Piatkus, 1993, £8.99 pb, 228pp.

This is divided into two parts: boredom, blahs and blues — the geography of night country; and the whole-some life.

The first part is mainly about boredom. He says we avoid boredom by keeping busy, speeding up, consuming things and being entertained. As a result we are tired all the time, or easily resort to the six forms of violence: divorce, drug abuse, vandalism, suicide, war, and illness. He goes into the history of boredom. He describes different personality reactions to these issues: the runners and warriors as against the hiders. He has a map of the emotions, running upwards into wonder and joy and downwards into suicide. There is a whole chapter on fatigue, and all its possible ramifications. He goes into temporary boredom and chronic boredom. And this leads on into depression and apathy.

In the second part, Keen tells us what we can do about this. The first lie he tackles is that the answer to boredom is to do something — anything! Much better, he says, is to accept boredom and to really experience it. Having done that, it is useful to look at the guilt and shame in us, and to have a good look at the sources of those things. Most of us don't like doing this,

and wish to deny that we have any guilt or shame at all.

We then turn to the renewal of imagination and desire. Let us pay attention to our dreams. 'Dreams are the vocabulary of desire.' Let us allow ourselves to feel. Even the worst feelings are our own, and we are entitled to them. We show we are alive by taking risks. But risk-taking can be neurotic too. It is creative risk-taking that means most to us. And so we come on to sex and intimacy.

This is not a particularly original book, but it is well-written and will speak to those who are troubled by boredom and its defences.

John Rowan

One Couple, Four Realities: Multiple Perspectives on Couple Therapy

Richard Chasin, Henry Grunenbaum and Margaret Herzig (eds)
The Guilford Press, 1990, 420pp.

Counselling Couples

Donald A. Bubenzer and John D. West
Sage, 1993, £9.95 pb, 182pp.

Two very different books — one a playful wrestle with four different therapists, the other a dusty and serious manual. The Chasin *et al* book is based on a conference held in the US in 1983, where they had the idea of four therapists working with the same couple for one session, then each presenting a 45-minute video extracted from this work at the conference. It was a great success, and the conference presentation was repeated three more times in different parts of the country before the couple asked them not to do it any more. Then six years later, when it was decided to do a book on it, the couple were contacted again and contributed an update and a final evaluation.

As well as a good account of the four sessions, there are chapters by other therapists who led workshops at the conferences, offering critiques and helpful suggestions. The whole thing comes across as very alive, and anyone who works with couples would get some new ideas and fresh thoughts from this book.

What is curious about the book is that these therapists all describe themselves as family systems therapists, and yet we find them actually using all sorts of humanistic techniques, taken from Moreno, Perls, Satir and so forth, with no acknowledgement and no apparent awareness that these things have a source.

Not so with the other book, which is family systems oriented to the core, with no funny business at all. Although it is advertised on the cover as being part of the 'Counselling in Practice' series edited

by Windy Dryden, it is purely an American book, carrying a whole raft of US statistics and facts. The authors make it clear, too, that they are mainly going for marital therapy, and concentrating on couples with children. There is nothing much at all on childless or child-free couples, and nothing on gay or lesbian couples. All the cases mentioned seem to be white middle-class, and the assumptions are middle-class, as witness this quote: 'It has been stated that there are two great books that will enable you to fully understand relationships. One is the couple's checkbook and the other is their appointment book.' Those who don't have cheque-books or appointment books are presumably excluded.

The authors believe in strategic family therapy, structural family therapy and brief therapy, and make all these things sound supremely boring. Not a good buy.

John Rowan

Male Violence

John Archer (ed.)
Routledge, 1994, 414pp.

Helping Men Change: The Role of the Female Therapist

Beth M. Erickson
Sage, 1993, £24.50, 470pp.

Revisioning Men's Lives: Gender, Intimacy and Power

Terry A. Kupers
The Guilford Press, 1993, 200pp.

The Myth of Male Power

Warren Farrell
Fourth Estate, 1994, £6.99, 446pp.

Instead of quietly assuming that men are typical of all humanity, some books now are taking men as a distinct and separate group in society and looking at them afresh. This is of course a response to feminism, which for the first time made the point that men and women had very different life chances because of the distribution of power in society.

The Archer book has eighteen chapters by different authors, most of them British. After an introduction by Archer himself, Part I is about aggression in childhood, Part II is about inter-male violence, Part III is about violence towards women and children, and Part IV contains explanations and theoretical perspectives.

This latter section has chapters on

genetic and hormonal influences, evolution and biology, socialisation theories, power analysis, representation and meaning, and a final integrative chapter. This is an academic book, which takes feminism seriously and is not badly written. Excellent if you are writing an essay.

The Erickson book is also quite serious, but is much more readable and much more for the ordinary interested person. In the first few pages there is a sparkling account of forty years of family therapy, written by Frank Pittman. Then comes the Introduction, followed by Part I, on the person of the therapist. Part II is on the art of treatment planning; Part III is about the structuring of treatment; Part IV is about working with couples and groups; the threads are brought together in an Epilogue.

This book is addressed to women, but I find that it has much to say about working with men in general, and male therapists would benefit from reading it. The author is very flexible, being able to use systems work, family-of-origin work, couples work, group work and hypnosis.

There is no peddling of a single orientation here, but rather an sincere appreciation of all kinds of work. For the inexpressive man, there is a list of 218 emotions, so that the client can look down the columns and pick out the one he is feeling.

The Kupers book is again by a therapist, this time a man, and deals with a number of issues in chapters including 'Nice Guys Needn't Finish Last', 'Pathological Arrhythmicity in Men', 'The Conscientious Father and the Unappreciative Son', and 'The Men's Movement: Making the Personal Political'. For those who wonder what 'pathological arrhythmicity' is, Kupers invented that himself to describe the way in which men don't respect their own or other people's rhythms, and want to push things on irrespective of proper timing. This is a sophisticated and human book, which really does justice to the complexity of men 's reactions to the world.

The Farrell book, on the other hand, represents the anti-feminist backlash in full flood. It purports to be a sober examination of the facts about discrimination against men, and the way men suffer in society. It is supported by a panoply of notes and references, but really it is a journalistic book.

To political people generally, power is something social. It is on the grand scale. It is about laws and customs and questions like 'Who rules whom?' But not for Farrell, who says: 'In this book, I define power as having control over one's own life.' This immediately transforms power from the large stage to the small one, and much of the book is devoted to showing that many men don't feel as if they have control over their own lives .

There are some good things in this book, plus a genuine caring for men and their problems which I find quite touching. I wish more of the book was like this, stressing what men do to themselves and each other rather than all the cheap gibes and sideswipes at women and feminism.

John Rowan