Trauma and Transformation — Growth in the Aftermath of Suffering

Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun
Sage,1995, £14.95 pb, 176pp.

This book argues, in a clearly-structured and scholarly way, in favour of the truism, 'What doesn't kill you makes you strong'. It starts with a discussion of the cathartic effect of Greek tragedy and the desire of humans to 'practise' dealing with our own trauma by learning from ancient myth, and goes on to the attitude of both Eastern and Western religions towards suffering and its inherent potential for growth. The negative consequences of trauma are acknowledged and outlined in the context of the question, 'Is there a positive side?'. The authors present research findings which bear out the belief that trauma can result in psychological growth, particularly self-reliance and the ability to be closer to others emotionally. There are certain personality characteristics, for example optimism and resilience, which make it more likely that an indvidual will emerge from the aftermath of trauma with increased strength and self-reliance.

The processes which a sufferer may pass through to reach transformation are described and the roles of family and friends, support groups and helping professionals identified. Some guidelines for effective ways of offering support are suggested for families and professionals. Support groups of veterans of similar traumas are seen as particularly helpful, as is an attitude of acceptance and endurance in the sufferer.

I found the book readable and persuasive in its arguments, though I would have appreciated more guidelines for helping those suffering from the effects of trauma that, as a practitioner, I could work with in an experiential way. Similarly, if I should be unfortunate enough to

suffer trauma myself, which is likely by the very nature of life, I would value the wisdom and hope offered by the book, but maybe find its message more accessible if more specific 'things to do' were included.

Gerrie Hughes

The Radicalism Handbook: A Complete Guide to the Radical Movement in the Twentieth Century

John Button
Cassell, 1995, £14.95, 460pp.

I'll begin by describing this extraordinary book. It is a sort of biographical dictionary of radical thinkers and activists of the twentieth century, with entries culled from all over the world and virtually every field of human endeavour. There is a section of 'forerunners' (important influences but not of this century), one on 'groups and movements' that is a mine of information in its own right, and appendices covering radical activists organised by country and activity. In general the book is well thought out, explains how its selections were made and is extremely reader-friendly. In fact, I would go so far as to say that what we have here is the best single-volume introduction to global progressive politics presently available. I predict it will have a long life and be used in both personal and academic contexts.

Holding the volume together is a forty page essay by John Button on 'Radicalism in the Twentieth Century'. He organises his material into historical sub-divisions: antecedents 1790–1860, Marx, socialism and anarchism 1860–1890, the hopeful years 1890–1920, the dark years 1920–1955, the 'rebirth' 1955–1975, fragmentation and consolidation 1975–1995, and a radicalism for the twenty-first century. Of course, there will be academic snobs who won't like the use of tagged periods of time like this but, as I read, I found the snob in me silenced by quite a profound emotional experience of actually being within the myth of radicalism that Button unfurls for us. I found that I certainly did not know all the facts, or how the various great names fitted together in the way that they did. But I found that even a victim of a conventional British education such as myself knew what he was on about. What gets revealed is something almost beyond time — though of course nothing is, that's academic sense, not academic snobbery! What I mean is that there has been something going on beyond or at least alongside the litany of the defeat of good intentions that our century recites for us. What that 'something' is, the author is careful not to tie down. It has something to do with 'social justice'; with an understanding that, in politics, point of view is a crucial variable (things look different according to where you are in a system); with what therapists would call going be-

yond mere symptom relief; with a certain kind of self-expression that has alterity and integrity at its core; and with the 'religious instinct', using the term in its widest ethical and spiritual senses.

I was particularly interested in the author's rebuttal of the idea that from the perspective of radicalism, right and left cannot be differentiated. He sticks up for egalitarianism, co-operative activity and a belief in dialogue — all of which are features that the left espouses (even if haltingly at times) and the right is frightened of. It is important to theorise like this at a moment in British (and foreign) politics when we are invited to go 'beyond left and right' in a simulacrum of the homogenising globalisation that is part of the problem. It is simplistic and defeatist to proclaim the end of all ideological differences in a worldwide market place and John Button punctures that currently fashionable intellectual balloon.

In the spirit of dialogue that the book encourages, I would like to raise a few issues. First, how are we to understand the key role of feminism and the women's movement in present day radicalism? Feminist theory shows how much of old-style socialism (and maybe quite a few other -isms) left women out and we are surely confronted every day with the seemingly unalterable levels of antipathy or at least ambivalence between women and men. Can we truly look forward to a partnership between radical males and radical females? Or does this smack of an unachievable romantic ending in which the male and female radicals walk off hand in hand into a red-hued environmental sunset?

Second, given the fundamental connections between economic power and all other kinds, what are the prospects for a sea-change in the assumptions that back up economic decision-making in what we can still call 'the real world'? I strongly agree with the author that those who control an economic or political system also control the commonsense notions of that system. If the economic human is greedy and competitive, ask who benefits from that definition — as well as asking if it is true. But there seems to me a debate here that the book certainly summarises but does not quite address — maybe it is something that many of those written about in the book came to despair of addressing — and this concerns the kinds of economic activity that our world valorises and protects. As I read some entries and flipped through others I felt a lack of a psychologically cohesive economic vision (save for Marx, perhaps). I realise that psychology and economics still seem strange bedfellows, but the linkages exist and await flushing out. For example what are the psychological implications of the success stories of alternative economics — the co-operatives and self-help organisations of so many countries?

Third, where *do* we stand on 'power'? It has become a truism that power is not all bad, that there are creative uses for it and so forth. I have myself tried to get a fresh evaluation of political power going by considering its relation to 'political energy', assessing whether a particular manifestation of power facilitates or even adds to the quantity and 'quality' of politi-

cal energy within a system, or in the individuals who are part of that system. What struck me about the great radical figures of our times about whom John Button writes was that so many of them found niches, often in education, journalism or academia, where they might be said to have a degree of insider-power. Many of them learned to work the system in its own terms. Nothing wrong with that. But if one looked for facilitation or addition to political energy, that is if one looked at the entry with that particular consideration in mind, then a somewhat different evaluative vertex emerged.

I do not like reviewing books and when it is done I usually put the book firmly to one side. I do not envisage that happening with this indispensable volume — a work of reference, to be sure, but also a labour of love, and a source of inspiration for the times when one's own place in the radical myth seems a chimera and the myth itself, never mind one's level of personal involvement in it, seemingly threatens to die out altogether.

Andrew Samuels

The Art of Listening

Eric Fromm
Constable, 1994, £9.95 pb.

Eric Fromm died in 1980 after 50 years of practising and teaching as a psychoanalyst in New York and Mexico and this is a welcome posthumous collection of his lectures, interviews and seminars. It is a beautiful book to read; it is not about psychoanalytic technique, but evidence of his warm empathy and humanistic view of his patients. Fromm regarded the aim of psychotherapy not as seeking a cure, but 'to help the inner freedom of the person'.

According to Freud, 'the stronger the trauma the better the chances for cure'; for Fromm, what matters in man, determines his actions, and makes his personality, is not trauma, but the kinds of passion that move him, whether a passionate interest in destruction and death (necrophilia), or a passionate interest in all that is alive, which he terms biophilia (the passion for love, interest in the world, in people, nature, thinking, reality and all artistic interest). Fromm discusses much of Freud's work and ideas, the contribution of constitutional (genetic) factors, childhood experiences, parental influences and above all, the patient's ability to mobilise his or her will for psychic growth. However as a humanist he does not ignore the moulding impact of society and culture.

In looking at the therapeutic relationship he emphasises the importance of personal knowledge through analysis, acknowledging our narcissism, destructiveness and irrationality. But he also considers that training should include

'the study of history, history of religion, mythology, symbolism, philosophy', rather than a degree in psychology (or a PhD as in the States). In other words, critical social analysis and personal analysis cannot be separated; and reading Balzac, Dostoyevsky and Kafka will imbue all psychotherapists 'with a wealth of deep insight'.

Lastly Fromm focuses on body language, the meaning of a posture, a gesture, the physical typology, and then recommends concentration and meditation exercises as a daily discipline. He regarded psychotherapy as an Art (the Art of Loving and the Art of Listening), just like the art of understanding poetry! For him, understanding and loving are inseparable in the sense of reaching out to the other person without fear of losing oneself.

There are many nuggets of reality and truth in this collection, and much to be learnt and enjoyed.

Betty Gould

Freud, Jung, Klein: The Fenceless Field

Michael Fordham (ed. Roger Hobdell)
Routledge, 1995, £40 hb.

This is a pretty disappointing book for anyone who is not passionately interested in Jungian analytic psychology. It is dated: not a mention of child abuse, although Michael Fordham worked for years with Winnicott in the Children's Hospital of St. Mary's and was involved in family therapy. He was also very interested in autism, but this field has changed since the 1970s.

Anyone who considers that birth is not traumatic must be male and blinkered. Thank goodness regression and rebirthing work have revealed how many patterns of behaviour stem from early traumas.

This publication draws together Fordham's key writings on psychoanalysis and analytic psychology. He reviews the recorded cases of Freud, Jung and Klein: (Dora and Little Hans, yet again, and the Wolf Man!), relating their findings to his own model of development. There is a long discussion about individuation and how early this begins, and some of his reviews of Bion and Meltzer's work.

Maybe this book will be of interest to students who know little about psychoanalysis and its development; it is very theoretical and heavy going — especially at £40!

Betty Gould

Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: the Spirit of Evolution

Ken Wilber
Shambhala, 1995, £12.95, 831pp.

This is the first of three volumes (but complete in itself) where Wilber lays out his vision of the way things are, and then relates this to numerous other movements and writers. Some of this comes across as vigorous polemic, and it is exciting to see Wilber coming off his sometimes rather distant high horse and engaging so intimately with writers such as Theodore Roszak, Joseph Campbell, Morris Berman, Robert Bellah, Jacques Derrida and so forth.

Of course the basic lines of the Wilber position are well known. There is a hierarchical process of evolution, such that each new phase builds on the previous one. Wilber deals in detail with four such hierarchies: interior-individual — the I (previously dealt with in his book *The Atman Project*); exterior-individual — the singular It (this he has not written about in any detail before); interior-social — the We (this was discussed in his book *Up From Eden*); and exterior-social — the plural It (this again he has not written about very much before). The book is thus enormous in its sweep and span.

In all four of these realms he applies the same twelve points. 1. Reality as a whole is not composed of things or processes, but of holons (this is a word coined by Arthur Koestler to represent units which have other units above and below them in a hierarchy). 2. Holons display four fundamental capacities: self-preservation, self-adaptation, self-transcendence, and self-dissolution. 3. Holons emerge. 4. Holons emerge holarchically (another new word, meaning simply a developmental hierarchy composed of holons). 5. Each emergent holon transcends but includes its predecessors. 6. The lower sets the possibilities of the higher; the higher sets the probabilities of the lower. 7. 'The number of levels which a hierarchy comprises determines whether it is "shallow" or "deep", and the number of holons on any given level we shall call its "span".' (Arthur Koestler.) 8. Each successive level of evolution produces *greater* depth and *less* span (in the old saw, the higher the fewer). 9. Destroy any type of holon, and you will destroy all of the holons above it and none of the holons below it. 10. Holarchies coevolve. 11. The micro is in relational exchange with the macro at all levels of its depth. 12. Evolution has directionality. Many of the points are quite mysterious without the explanation which Wilber gives at length, but it seems worth while to lay them out even in such a summary form, just to indicate the sort of thing we are dealing with here.

But this is only half of the story. As well as evolution, he says, we have to talk about involution. Evolution is the great Ascent to higher and more complex levels in all four realms. Involution is the great Descent from the higher to the lower. We are much more familiar with the idea of

evolution than we are with the idea of involution. Plotinus, who is quite a key figure for Wilber, talks about the Efflux whereby the divine reaches down into and informs the lower levels of being — in Christian theology this became immanence and Agape. Immanence refers to the presence of the divine in all things. Agape is the love which requires no response, which simply pours out regardless. He also talks about the Reflux, whereby the creature reaches up in aspiration to the divine — in Christian theology this became transcendence and Eros. Transcendence is about the way in which the divine is continually beyond our reach, even as we aspire towards it. Eros is the love which wants a response, which continually reaches up for more.

It is his insistence on the importance of the divine which marks out Wilber from the multitude of commentators who dominate the intellectual scene today. He is firm in his grasp of a mystical definition of the divine, seeing it as the Nondual, going beyond all categories of human thought. If we want some symbol of it, he says, think of the paper upon which the book is written. This does not grasp it at all, but such an idea may at least rescue us from the most crass mistakes.

Bringing this all together now, he is saying that if we can understand the importance of the Ascent and of the Descent, then we can see through much of the intellectual life of our culture and perceive that it completely ignores or distorts the Ascent. (The Ascenders have become pursuers of some restricted vision of the divine which they think they own; they create a culture of fear instead of a culture of love, in spite of their own declared wishes.) Our culture is mostly one of Descenders, who have lost all sense of what the Descent is from. As for the I, the We and the It, our culture ignores the I and the We and turns everything into an It, to be studied mechanically. Even those who want to be spiritual do it in such a way as to ignore the Nondual in favour of something simpler and nearer to hand.

He is particularly critical of ecophilosophy as exemplifying this tendency. The biosphere is an It, and to attempt to turn an It into something divine is not on. It is to confuse shallowness and extent with depth and intensity. It gives us a kind of flatland. Flatland, in its original formulation, was a mathematical game where the author played with the idea of a world of two dimensions, where the inhabitants moved around in one plane only. Much of our current intellectual world, says Wilber, is just such a flatland, robbed of depth and height by our refusal to admit the divine into our discourse.

This is an amazing book, and I think has to be regarded as one of the great books of this century. It presents a soundly-based intellectual argument for the importance of spirituality. Not a vague and comfortable spirituality, but a tough and demanding spirituality which makes sense of our world in all its heights and depths. Humanistic psychology fits into this as an important contribution, forming a link between the psychological and the spiritual both for the I and the We.

From my point of view one of the nice things about it is the way in which Wilber makes his peace with Grof at last! Don't be put off by the size of this book: it is well written and a fascinating journey. Don't be put off by the enormous footnotes, some of which are essays in themselves. Just enjoy it for its magnificent vision of a world with all its dimensions intact, and its refusal to distort or minimise our full experience as human beings.

John Rowan

A Brief History of Everything

Ken Wilber
Shambhala, 1996, £12.95, 339pp.

This is the popular version of *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, written for people who are impatient with the whole academic rigmarole of references, notes, bibliographies and indexes, who just want the message straight from the horse's mouth. It is written in the form of a dialogue of questions and answers and is extremely readable and easy to digest. It is no good for people who want to look things up, check references, find out the number of times Hegel is mentioned or whatever. But for anyone who wants to get a bird's eye view of the terrain, a mountain-top vision of the world from one of the great minds of our time, this is a marvellous book to read from cover to cover. It gives the whole story from beginning to end, and enables readers to locate themselves in the scheme of things much better than any other book I know.

The best thing might be to read this book first, and then embark on the bigger book if it seems worthwhile.

John Rowan

Falling Backwards: An Exploration of Trust and Self Experience

Doris Brothers
W W Norton, 1995, £22 hb, 260pp.

The title is based on the well-known 'trust exercise' used in humanistic microlab experiences, where people allow themselves to fall backwards into the arms of one person, or in another variation, to fall backwards into the arms of a small circular group, who may then roll the person around the circle or push the person from one side of the circle to the other. Unfortunately that is about as close as the author gets to our point of view on trust, as expressed for example in the excellent chapter on the subject by Golembiewski & McConkie in the book *Theories of Group*

Processes edited by Cary Cooper (Wiley 1975).

It turns out to be a book about the psychoanalytic view of trust, especially in its relation to trauma. The author is particularly interested in self-trust, and links this to the self-object theories of Kohut. She says: 'My contention that traumatic self-trust betrayals underlie all psychological disorders goes hand in hand with my belief that dissociation and dissociative phenomena are fundamental aspects of psychological disturbance.'

However, this does not lead her to any such notion as subpersonalities, though this would seem to be an obvious derivation from her ideas.

Nor does the idea of self-trust offer much scope to any idea of such a thing as birth trauma. The closest that Brothers comes to talking about this is: 'Using the language of self-trust, we might say that Kohut's baby is born with a rudimentary sense of trust-in-others and trust-in-self. And, growing up with reasonably responsive care it will not, under normal circumstances (i.e. those that are not traumatic) lose the self-trust with which it is born.' This is the first, and so far as I can see, the only mention of birth trauma.

There is a lot of interesting material in this book, for example on paranoia, but it is so remote from humanistic psychology that I do not think it will appeal to many readers of this journal.

John Rowan