An intelligent person's guide to psychotherapy

by Anthony Stevens
Duckworth, 1999, £14.95

My sense is you can read the title of this book in at least one of two ways. That it is indeed a guide to psychotherapy for intelligent people and/or that it is an intelligent person's i.e. Anthony Stevens - **personal** guide to **his** understanding and experience of psychotherapy.

For me, as with the others I 've read in the series, Mary Wamock's Guide to Ethics and Oppenheimer's Guide to Modem Guilt: they are actually highly personalised **views** rather than guides and quite polemical at that.

Hence I found the title by the earlier definition, somewhat incongruent to the highly subjective words inside, but being both an admirer of Stevens and the great legacy of Jung's contribution to psychotherapy (Stevens is a highly individual and probably therefore, individuated, Jungian I both eagerly anticipated and immensely enjoyed this moderately priced (for a hardback) book.

It proved to be a rip-roaring read in that it both challenges past and current therapeutic practices, especially those of a psychodynamic nature and suggests new evolutionary developments in a concluding chapter, Evolutionary Psychotherapy; The New Paradigm.

In the book's jacket blurb, taken from Stevens'own words, it is stated that 'dynamic psychotherapy' now finds itself in grave crisis as a result of the intellectual shipwreck of its founder, Sigmund Freud. Since Freudian theory has been shown to be largely without empirical basis, what is to stop the whole psychotherapeutic edifice from collapsing into the quicksands on which it is built? Anthony Stevens argues that the best hope for the future lies in research to determine the positive therapeutic ingredients that all methods have in common'

And this is just what Stevens does, with critical chapters on Freud, Jung, Klein, Object Relationists, Bowlby and finally, after 'Jung Revisited', two fascinating chapters on Research and Evolutionary Psychotherapy.

An early criticism I have is that in such a heavily weighted review of psychoanalysis (Stevens is referred to as an analyst) there are but scant referrals to Rogers, Perls, Berne and Integrative Psychotherapy. Developments in all these have surely already effectively critiqued Freud et al and for some time now been seeking and practising what Stevens advocates as common approaches, as if this were a (or his) new idea.

Interestingly,I thought, the dodo bird features more than once in this book as a rich metaphor; firstly as the Alice in Wonderland bird where to illustrate

that there has been little progress in developing an evidence base for longer term psychodynamic therapies and that research does not demonstrate that any one form of therapy is more effective than another, he writes of the Dodobird effect and from Lewis Carrol's book quotes 'Everyone has won and all must have prizes'.

Several pages later the dodo appears again (not bad for an extinct bird!) when writing against psychotherapists' propensity to pathologise, e.g. anxiety as a classifiable illness; he makes the point that the 'capacity to experience anxiety is indispensable to survival (his italics), for an animal incapable of fear is a dead animal' (p26). He illustrates this point by the fearless dodo succumbing to humans and the introduction of predators where before none had existed (for the dodo) and thus becoming extinct.

The dodo's appearance in this book caused me to wonder if Stevens, unconsciously or not, actually sees psychotherapy (at least in its current form) as heading for extinction

Perhaps not, for the final chapter offers a new paradigm for psychotherapy in which he discusses evolutionary psychiatrists viewing depression, anxiety and other symptoms not as signs of disease, but rather as natural responses to situations and/or from our collective unconscious; responses with which all members of our species are equipped. Stevens writes:
'... what has traditionally been classified as 'illness' is often a consequence of a potentially healthy organism struggling to meet the demands of life .... Instead of forms of futile suffering, symptoms are seen as the growing pains of people struggling to adjust to the demands that life has put on them. (p193)

In such an apparently well researched book I was therefore disappointed that there was no reference to either the seminal work of Thorwald Dethlefsen - The Healing Power of Illness (1990) or Michael Kahn's Between Therapist and Client: The New Relationship (1991) both of which by almost a decade predate Stevens' book and discuss at great length a positive view of illness and a new therapeutic consensus.

Amongst his criticisms of all dynamic psychotherapies and, in particular psychoanalysis, with such statements as those already quoted on the jacket blurb is the sentence:
'Given the most exhaustive case history, highly qualified and experienced psychoanalysts can produce conflicting but equally plausible interpretations of the same material and no systematic method exists for establishing the validity of their alternative formulations ' (p168)

This really set me to wondering, not only as to the validity of any one 'school of therapy' as already well written about (Clarkson and Feltham) but also as to the efficacy of accrediting, registering and qualifying therapists largely (though not solely) on the basis of their presentation of a case study. Indeed, as with the BAC's accreditation process, perhaps all that this largely measures is whether the therapist practices the theory they expound or purport to work from and out of. If seeking to measure the effectiveness and efficacy of therapists, perhaps such measures actually tell us very little. Except that the therapist'stheory and practice is psychodynamic, person-centred, rational emotive etc or that they are instead muddling theory and practice. What it does not tell us, and this, I think, is my interpretation of Stevens' point, is whether or not the therapist is *effective* or not.

In which case, what exactly does BAC, UKCP or any other registration actually tell the would-be client?

Only the Independent Practitioners Network (in my opinion) attempts to grasp the efficacy issue, perhaps precisely because it does not represent a 'school' or as critiques several therapies as 'sects' or 'cults'; not seek to 'professionalise' counselling and psychotherapy.

Stevens writes:
'in the absence of sound empirical foundations each school has attempted to make good the deficiency by establishing strictly 'professional' credentials, with strict rules and regulations of varying degrees of practical relevance about how therapy should be done'. (pacify)

In writing of the 'furious arguments that have characterized the proceedings of the UKCP' he concludes:
'... the impasse that results is attributable to the lack of reliable evidence concerning the relative success or failure of these different therapeutic approaches'. (p166)

Stevens argues that patients who have reported upon the beneficial effects of therapy attributed their improved condition to such factors as:
'... the reassuring comfort derived from forming a bond to a warm accepting psychotherapist, the reduction in anxiety or despair afforded by the expectation of being helped, the gaining of some understanding of the nature of their problems, the acquisition of better adjusted patterns of behaviour and the influence of the therapist's personality. A further crucial factor may well be the provision of a plausible system of explanation enabling patients to make sense of their situation'. (p168)

From this Stevens deduces that such 'explanations' are culturally contemporary to any given age. Up until the time of the Ancient Greeks this was essentially a mythic or magico-religious explanation and in more modem times, scientific. Freud's explanatory system he states 'fell somewhere between the mythic and the scientific, for it still clung to the notion of occult drives operating in the 'unconscious".

Stevens goes on to reason that as Freudianism (replacing Judeo-Christianity) in the West and Marxism in the East have failed and retreated, only monetarism and scientific materialism remain as primary explanatory systems. For many people, Stevens say this is not enough.

'The explanatory vacuum remains. It is in this vacuum that psychotherapists continue to do their work'.(p168)

In his chapter on research, Stevens cites the study of the Menninger Foundation in the 50's where patients were offered either psychoanalytic psychotherapy or supportive psychotherapy for between, at their request, 6 months to 12 years. Follow-up questions were asked of them two or three years after termination of the therapy and
'... (there was) no evidence of any superior effect of psychoanalytic psychotherapy over supportive psychotherapy. In fact, *the outcome of psychoanalytic psychotherapy was worse* while that of supportive psychotherapy *was better* (my italics) than the investigators expected'. (p170)

It will hopefully inspire any doubtful or flagging humanistic practitioner readers of this magazine to both read of this and other similar studies and recall Charles Rycroft's early 60's notion that psychoanalysis is not a scientific discipline but rather 'a branch of the humanities; (p169 Stevens) and best viewed from the hermeneutic perspective.

I also hope that it discourages the forces within the humanistic philosophy that to perhaps stay politically correct and in, I think, a futile attempt to match up to the BAC's often psychodynamic approach; try to measure therapeutic outcomes by only scientific yardsticks! That said, therapy cannot exist outside of a culture of accountability and as Stevens writes:

'Psychoanalysts have had 100 years to prove what they do is valuable and so far they have conspicuously failed to do so!' (p172)

In this same chapter on Research, Stevens refers to David Orlinsky's Chicago University findings that found that what is of 'crucial importance' to a positive outcome for psychotherapeutic patients is: the therapeutic bond or alliance.
'It is essential that this alliance should be experienced as positive and supportive and that it should be based on a 'collaborative sharing of responsibility' as both participants focus on the patient's feelings, experiences and difficulties.' (p172)

Reading this, I thought that surely the humanistic styles of therapy were being validated especially as Stevens goes on to refer to William Henry and Hans Strapp of Vanderbilt University's findings that:

Several studies have linked greater frequency of transference interpretations to *poorer outcomes* (my italics)!'

He goes on to say that indeed transference interpretations do not necessarily repair poor alliances and may damage the existing alliance. Also they are more likely to elicit defensive responding and since this is against the necessity of the good, close working alliance for a positive outcome:

'the emphasis placed on transference analysis by Freudian, Kleinianand Fordhamite Jungians .... May be anti-therapeutic'!! (p175)

For humanistic therapists, these are words to rejoice to. Stevens, a well-respected Jungian analyst, clearly hammers in yet another nail to the psychoanalytic coffin and, by inference, those psychodynamic styles that are founded upon the works of Freud and Klein in particular.

The words of wisdom in this book and his incisive criticisms of old paradigms made then for very good reading and historically support modem contemporary developments in psychotherapy thatIwould have liked to have seen (especially humanistic developments) more comprehensively evidenced.

John Sivyer

Water in the glass: Body and mind psychoanalysis

by Nick Totton

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The Roman Catholic Church generated some very great minds, most of whom are its heretics, since it provides something *against which* to define oneself. Likewise, in psychotherapy, for the same reasons, psychoanalysis time and again has generated deep therapeutic innovations. Freud was himself an *internal heretic* against his own authoritarian impulses. Because of the rigid orthodoxies of the followers most of the best heretics are forced to leave, or are marginalised.

Like Reich, Ferenczi, Bowlby, Berne, Perls, Winnicott, Searles, Nick Totton represents this sort of heretical dialogue within and without psychoanalysis - mostly unread by psychoanalysts. A recent American psychoanalytic book on the body (*Relational perspectives on the body*, Aron and Anderson, eds, 1998) has not a *single mention* of Reich in the index. But if one mark of true Freudian thinking is to engage passionately in depth with the unfinished *Project for a scientific psychology* of 1895 (Freud, 1950), and with the way it shaped all of his subsequent work, Nick Totton is a true Freudian.

This also means that the gateway into Nick's book, which is crucial for humanistic and integrative understandings of the body in psychotherapy, is a difficult yet necessary passage through Freud's epistemic ambivalences about *how* he thinks the body and its life are *represented*, yet in some sense also *not actual*, in mind and consciousness. With devastating consequences. For the purging of the bodywork and relational heretics from institutional psychoanalysis ran parallel with the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe, and psychotherapy has never since healed its own split. (Jung is a key omitted figure in this saga.)

Once through that difficult gateway, Nick has major, split-healing, things to say about the compatibility of psychoanalytic understandings with the heart and soul of bodywork, and with its insight into the person, and into psychological-somatic disturbance. I would go so far as to say that for humanists this body-based book is the best extant way into relational psychoanalytic insight, vital and real for the deepening of the sometimes too thoughtless, saccherine, or utopian, approach to human existence which is the caricature of humanism. Nick says he is playing for "the Reich-Ferenczi All Stars, who coulda been contenders, but got knocked out at an early stage in the tournament". This team includes (some are unexpected members, let alone teammates) Groddeck, Winnicott, Lacan, Stern, Bateson, Kristeva, van der Kolk, Holt, Perry, and Damasio - both psychoanalytic 'Independents' and Information theorists.

This is an important book written with passion, heart, and clarity of thought.

Heward Wilkinson