The use of self in therapy (2nd edition)

Author: Michèle Baldwin

The Haworth Press, 2000 pb £18.85

This is superb set of readings, which should be in the library of every humanistic therapist. Michèle Baldwin has of course worked with Virginia Satir for many years, and the spirit of Satir hovers over this book. It is dedicated to her. I had not realised before that it was she who had introduced the term 'personhood' which is so important to the humanistic practitioner.In her Introduction, Baldwin says:

She [Virginia Satir] views therapy as providing the context for empowering patients and opening up their healing potential, and states that this goal can only be obtained through the meeting of the deepest self of the therapist with the deepest self of the client. In concluding, she makes a plea that the self of the therapist be considered an essential factor in the therapeutic process. (p.2)

The first chapter is by Satir herself. The second is an interview with Carl Rogers, conducted by Baldwin. In it, Rogers says a number of wise things about the person of the therapist, as for example this:

To be a fully authentic therapist, I think that you have to feel entirely secure as a person. This allows you to let go of yourself, knowing confidently that you can come back... The therapist needs to recognize very clearly the fact that he or she is an imperfect person with flaws which make him vulnerable. I think it is only as the therapist views himself as imperfect and flawed that he can see himself as helping another person. Some people who call themselves therapists are not healers, because they are too busy defending themselves. (p.36)

I had not come across this interview before, and it was a pleasure indeed to read something so relevant to the actual practice of therapy.

Many of the chapters are saying things which I had not come across before. For example, Judith Bula introduces the idea of 'the multicultural self', and says that the person who wants to work with people who are different (and everybody is) had better develop a multicultural self, which is sorted (aware) on questions such as ethnicity, gender, age, class, religion, sexual orientation, differing abilities and language. Any training which ignores these things is going to make it harder for the therapist to develop and extend this multicultural self.

The chapter by Meri Shadley, based on research she did herself, has a good deal to say about self-disclosure. She distinguishes four different styles:

Intimate interaction – Tends to share self through verbal and nonverbal expressions of therapeutic reactions. References to present or past personal issues are likely.

Reactive response – Typically expresses both nonverbal and verbal feelings of emotional connectedness within therapeutic relationships, but generally does not verbalize personal life details or parallels.

Controlled response – Inclined to maintain a slight distance by limiting self-disclosures to past experiences, anecdotes, non-verbalized feelings, or literary parallels.

Reflective feedback – The exposure of self occurs through questioning or challenging families and by giving impressions. Seldom shares personal information or strong emotional reactions.

I had never thought before that there was such a range of styles, all neatly described and all apparently viable. This book was quite an eye-opener, for me at least.

There are good chapters by Charles Kramer, Helen Collier, Bunny Duhl (with some very interesting technical ideas), Harry Aponte & Joan Winter, and a fascinating chapter by Grant Miller & DeWitt Baldwin entitled 'Implications of the wounded-healer paradigm for the use of self in therapy'.

All in all, this is a book which I can recommend to all those humanistic practitioners who are at all interested in the question of how their own self comes into their work.

John Rowan

Integral psychology

Author: Ken Wilber

Shambhala, 2000 pb: £11.99

This is a book which will be either upsetting or incomprehensible to many academic psychologists, but balm and encouragement for humanistic psychologists. Chapter 13, in particular, lays out the philosophical basis for humanistic psychology with a clarity I have not seen elsewhere.

The main framework the author lays out is the same one he has used since his 1995 book *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*. It has four quadrants which he labels as the I, the We and the It (the It divides into two, to cover the singular and the plural). It has thirteen levels in each quadrant (though he says that there are really more than that). And what he is saying is that any science worthy of the name, in any one of the quadrants, has to take the other three quadrants into account somehow, and not pretend that they do not exist. And to be adequate to its own subject-matter, it has to take several levels into account, and not assume that just one level will do for everything. Ultimately he is arguing for an all-quadrant, all-level approach.

Coming specifically to psychology, he says that terrible mistakes have been

made in the past and in the present. The worst of these is that psychologists have so often assumed that they can study psychology simply and solely in the quadrants labelled as It. This he calls a flatland approach, because it has no place for the I and the We. It has no place for the subjective. And if by chance it does recognise the I or the We, it does so on only one level, ignoring the others. This is a misconceived psychology, which can never give us anything deep or involving about human beings.

Humanistic psychology is different. It does recognise the subjective, it does recognise more than one level, it does take the social into account as well as the individual - as witness, for example, the title of *Self & Society*. It refuses to reduce human beings to something less than the human. It insists on studying mind at the level of mind, not at the level of things. It insists that psychology is about the meeting of people, and the meaning-making of people. It continually emphasises the importance of creativity. This is what Wilber has to say about creativity:

In other words, *creativity*, by any other name, is built into the very fabric of the Kosmos. This creativity - Eros is one of its many names - drives the emergence of ever higher and ever wider holons, a drive that shows up, in the interior domains, *as an expansion of identity* (and morals and consciousness) from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. (p.117)

This is just what we in humanistic psychology have been saying all along, and it is good to hear Wilber underlining and confirming our case. Wilber has a whole section on Maslow, according him a place as one of the major thinkers of this century.

This book has the best chapter I have seen on postmodernism, giving it credit for making crucially important points about the nature of truths, but pointing out that it, too, often adopts a flatland approach, which leaves out vital quadrants.

There is a chapter on childhood spirituality. Wilber is often accused of saying there can be no such thing, but he clarifies what he is saying here, and makes sure that we understand his real position.

There is a chapter on the mind-body problem, which he solves with elegant concision, showing at the same time exactly how the difficulties usually associated with the solutions offered actually arise.

One of the strongest features offered in this book is the series of charts at the back. These are similar to the charts we are familiar with from *The Atman Project*, but now each level is divided into early and late, or sometimes into early, middle and late. They summarise the evidence which undergirds Wilber's position on levels of development. They update the charts, so that the nine fulcrums of therapeutic problems now become ten, with the addition of F-0, adopted from the work of Stan Grof. The efforts of Jenny Wade and Don Beck are now included, and so forth.

Wilber says that this is only a brief version of something which will be published later in a much fuller form, but it is enough to be going on with. Particularly for those in humanistic psychology, it is a stunning and very helpful work.

John Rowan

PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY

William West

Sage, 2000 pb £16.99

Almost from the start, I found this book surprisingly accessible to read and this says as much about the author as the contents. There is plenty of evidence in the book that West has experienced his own form of spirituality and is not just viewing the subject from a purely academic perspective; this I found particularly refreshing.

West poses the question, 'Are counsellors and psychotherapists willing to address the spiritual dimensions of people's lives?'. In asking this question, he offers a definite challenge for many practitioners, simply because transference and counter-transference issues can get in the way.

The book also suggests that some therapists may have difficulty in discerning the difference between an altered state of consciousness that is rooted in a healthy ego state and that of a psychotic episode. The message appears to be about the responsibility of the therapist to address his/her own spiritual agenda so as to be in a position to accept that of his/her clients. The author equates this to a counsellor having worked on their own sexuality so that it does not intrude into the counselling relationship.

West endeavours to untangle a web of mythology around religious beliefs in general and the 'spiritual' in particular especially in relation to New Age spirituality and culture. His ability to write in simple terms about a complex subject without losing the reverence and sacredness that it deserves is commendable. I like the way West identifies the difference in roles between a spiritual director who may be an authority for a particular religious faith in contrast to a therapist who works in a spiritual and psychological way, which may or may not have religious connotations. I would like to know more about the author's own spiritual quest that led him to work in the way in which he does.

I admire the way each chapter had a series of headings enabling one to select and focus on the different issues he chooses to raise.

The key to working with a spiritual perspective is well summarised by Lukoff who is cited as saying that it is 'a positive explorative attitude toward the spiritual experience, which in turn, will facilitate a successful interpretation of the experience'. This seems to me to be a logical way forward because to make sense of any experience is a way of grounding it so that it can become a reality.

The book is a must for those practitioners who may be seeking to move away from the secular conventional stance of counselling toward a more creative and holistic way of being with clients.

Judy Gaskell