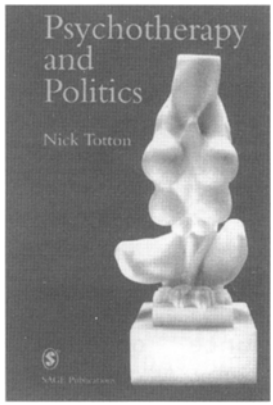
Psychotherapy and Politics

Nick Totton



Sage Publications, London, 2000, £55.00 hb, £18.99 pb

Sage's invariably stimulating book series 'Perspectives in Psychotherapy', edited by Colin Feltham, is certainly fortunate to be graced by this latest addition from Nick Totton, who offers us a *tour de force* of the diverse and manifold ways in which therapy and politics interpenetrate and inform each other. What first struck me on reading *Psychotherapy and Politics* (hereafter *P&P*) was the difficulty in even contemplating how to go about writing a book on this topic. My hunch is that there are very few therapy practitioners who could have made an even passable job at writing a book with such a broad canvas – and in my view Totton has succeeded in writing a very good one.

The book's organising framework is effectively arranged around four themes: psychotherapy *in* and *of* politics, and politics *in* and *of* psychotherapy, and there are useful contextualising summaries at the end of each of the four parts. For Totton, psychotherapy has clearly failed 'to germinate the psychologically necessary changes in our communal climate to create radical social change' (p. 27), and a major and recurrent theme of the book is just how this failure has come about. The central names which recur in *P&P* are, unsurprisingly, Freud, Reich, Jung, Lacan, Marx, Samuels, Rogers and Mindell. The book covers a huge range of themes and 'movements' within less than 200 pages – to give just a few examples, Jung and the Nazis; 1968 and after; Reich's sexual politics; Mindell's Process-Oriented Psychology; Fred Newman's 'Social Therapy' and American 'Radical Therapy'; 'anti-psychiatry'; the Hearing Voices Network; PCSR; Antidote; ecopsychology; psychohistory; gender, sexuality and feminism; hatred, sexism and racism; therapy under totalitarianism; the medicalisation of therapy; therapy's own institutions and challenges to them; the power of the therapist – and most interesting to this reviewer, Totton's discussion of challenges to the therapeutic relationship (including those emanating from feminist therapy), and initiatives which are attempting to pioneer 'post-therapy' practices (including co-counselling).

I think every reader of *P&P* will come across familiar themes presented in new and interesting ways, or topics of which they were previously blissfully ignorant – in my case, I learnt for the first time about Parry's book *Warriors of the Heart* (p. 26), Marie Langer and the Sandinistas (pp. 30-2), the Battersea Action and Counselling Centre (p. 35), Mindell's 'worldwork' (pp. 45-8), the Despair and Empowerment movement (pp. 53-4), the 1969 Platform Group of dissatisfied analysts (pp. 127-9), and Actions-Analytical Organization for Conscious Life Praxis (pp. 159-61). The book covers absolutely cutting-edge questions, like (for example) 'human nature' and the innateness or otherwise of aggression, and Mindell's notion of 'deep democracy' and the limitations of Western 'bourgeois' democracy. Indeed, I would personally have liked to have seen more attention given to analytically inclined and humanistic critiques of modern Western political systems.

P&P is by no means always a cosy read for humanistic practitioners or sympathisers. Totton refers, for example, to the assimilation of the broad swathe of the humanistic therapy movement to the (conservative) status quo – having become, he writes, 'largely conservative or "apolitical" in their approach, professionalised psycho-technicians' (p. 27); and rather more cuttingly, 'By the 1990s, of course, many humanistic therapies had hung up their leathers and bought pin-stripe suits...' (p. 4). Elsewhere, we read that 'like many other humanistic approaches, both TA and Gestalt have quietly dropped their heritage of radical social analysis and concentrated on a technical, professional identity' (p. 69); that humanistic therapy has learnt a lot from feminism and politics without contributing much to them (pp. 80, 100); that some humanistic therapies have adopted the conservative analytic view of homosexuality (p. 85); that the Rogerian emphasis on self-transformation overemphasises the effectiveness of personal volition (p. 135); and last but not least, he refers to 'the widely held but deeply problematic [voluntarist] view that we create our own reality, choose our own experience' (p. 25).

Not that *P&P* is disproportionately hostile to humanism: many aspects of the analytical field come in for at least as much critical scrutiny – witness, for example, the no-punches-pulled discussion of Jung's involvement with Nazi ideas (p. 20). Totton repeatedly demonstrates the admirable quality of taking nothing for granted - of not leaving any sacred cows undisturbed in their slumbering complacency. And while I found myself not always agreeing with the examples of humanistic flakiness that Totton did identify (e.g. in his strong criticisms of Fromm's work), I did unreservedly welcome his challenging approach, which cannot but lead the engaging reader to think through and substantiate their own positions on fundamental philosophical issues (after all, 'Without contraries is no progression', as William Blake so poignantly wrote).

Following 'the 11th September', I was particularly struck by several highly pertinent quotations – first, from Hannah Segal - 'First we project our destructiveness into others, then we wish to annihilate them without guilt because they contain all evil and destructiveness' (p. 89); and Arnold

Mindell - 'By diagnosing terrorist behavior as inappropriate, deviant, sociopathic or psychopathic, psychology and psychiatry lull the mainstream into deeper complacency... The terrorist arises in all of us when we feel unheard or unable to protect ourselves' (p. 91). It's perhaps a sobering commentary on the degree to which 'emotional intelligence' and psychological insight have signally failed to infiltrate the world of international politics and the imaginations of its principal players that current world events (notably, the 'war on terrorism') have unfolded, and continue to unfold, in the way they have done.

It borders on churlishness to mention omissions, given the extraordinary range of material that Totton manages to cover – but there might have been at least a mention of the extraordinary history of the so-called (Anna) Freud/ Klein Controversies within British psychoanalysis half a century ago, the UK community psychology network, the *Psychology-Politics-Resistance* initiative based on Manchester Metropolitan University's Psychology Department (Ian Parker), the respective histories of *Changes* magazine and the *Asylum* magazine (for a democratic psychiatry), the rapidly emerging academic field of critical psychology, the Kleinian-analytic literature which offers specifically Kleinian interpretations and analyses of politics and culture (e.g. C.F. Alford's work), and international initiatives on large group approaches to conciliation and conflict resolution founded in Carl Rogers' philosophy. The existence of some of these initiatives does suggest that radical activism in and around psychology, psychiatry and therapy might not be quite as moribund and ineffectual as Totton occasionally implies.

Yet if these arguably significant omissions *had* been included (and there would *always* be arguments about what should and shouldn't be included in a book such as this), then many of the discussions of important and complex issues would be even more clipped or dense than they already are (e.g. 'racism' gets just over a page, and 'power' just over two pages). So in this sense, perhaps Totton just couldn't win here, given the length of the book; and faced with the choice of either yet more material or longer, more in-depth commentaries on the selected themes, I believe he has struck just about the right balance.

In sum, then, *P&P* is a highly impressive achievement: a model of economy and succinctness, it offers an informed, intelligent synthesis of often disparate but invariably interesting and stimulatingly presented material, elegantly organised into a coherent framework which cannot but leave the reader far more informed about the complex interpenetrations of politics and therapy than before they had read this important and highly topical book.

Richard House

Amendment to our information about April Ryedale's book *Risking Wisdom,* reviewed in our last issue:

The book *Risking Wisdom* costs £7.

The paper back containing all three books - *the Wisdom Trilogy,* which we showed in the illustration, costs £12.20.

Publisher: Fountainhead Press, Stroud

Surviving Complaints Against Counsellors and Psychotherapists - Towards Understanding and Healing

Edited by Roger Casemore

PCCS Books 2001 £14 pb

This book is a collection of fifteen individual contributions by mainly established counsellors, nine of whom are or have been closely involved with BACP, mostly with its Complaints and Professional Conduct Committees. It does, therefore, read like many articles in the BACP journal, somewhat cold and distant, with the exception of the chapter by Nick Totton of IPN (the only significantly humanistic view) and two anonymous chapters by a client who raised a complaint and by a counsellor who was complained against. The book is divided into three broad sections:

·Experiencing the process of a complaint and survival advice for counsellors.

·Understanding the process, boundary issues, styles of conflict and their resolution.

·Guides good practice, how to avoid being the subject of a complaint.

Sadly, I was disappointed by this book, more for what it left out than what it covered. If I'd just heard I'd been complained against and sought support and a survival guide here, then only a couple of chapters would have been direct help and comfort. There is some helpful advice on what not to have done, partly of the don't make mistakes and keep strict boundaries' variety, but this can impose a stifling of creativity and risk-taking. This book is useful to supervisors and especially administrators of counselling agencies, training institutions and complaints committees. For the plain counsellor it's about understanding complaints as such, but the 'surviving' and 'healing' aspects in the title are something of a misnomer.

What is largely lacking are good clear case studies and vignettes; and where these are given they are often incomplete, so how a complaint arose is described but not its resolution.

'The Victim's Tale' chapter is the only written by an aggrieved client, a case of such extreme boundary breaking by a counsellor that it seems he was far more unbalanced than the client. The experience of the abuse and the client's bewilderment, disempowerment and distress are harrowingly described, but the case is so extreme as to provide little learning material for the reader. The vast majority of complaints aren't of this severe nature. Furthermore the client did not raise a formal complaint against the counsellor, so there are no descriptions whatever of what it's like for a client to go through the process.

What is missing are live descriptions, from clients and counsellors, of a spectrum of complaints, ranging from simple mistakes and dissatisfactions to major unprofessional conduct, the type of actions even the reasonably competent and diligent counsellor fears doing more by chance than by intent. Nor do we hear of the reactions of clients whose complaints are rejected by complaints committees. Obviously confidential material must be protected, but surely several of the authors from within the BACP must have access to material from which to produce disguised or illustrative case studies from the client's perspective.

The second chapter, the personal experience of a counsellor complained against, well describes the emotional experience of receiving 'that letter', but again nothing is said of experiencing the process itself, of attending the complaints hearing; or even of the nature of this particular complaint or its outcome. This is the only other example from the horse's mouth. Could not the editor have found counsellors who'd be willing to write, anonymously, of their experiences of being complained against?

The remaining two chapters in the first section do give good practical guides for the individual counsellor and for trainers, though the handling of complaints against counselling agencies is covered in the second section.

Michael Jacobs contributes a thought provoking chapter on the underlying psychodynamics (without being 'psychodynamical') of how clients can feel cause for complaint due to 'negative therapeutic reactions' to well-intentioned interventions by the counsellor. This gives some insight into the counsellor's worst nightmare (?) of clients acting out vindictive and wounding impulses towards the counsellor by raising a complaint. Unfortunately, the several contributors who have experience of managing complaints within BACP say virtually nothing of how such clients and their erring counsellor (or, indeed abusive counsellors and victimised clients) can be handled with appropriate respect and consideration. The complaints process is not seen as any sort of real opportunity for understanding, healing and even reconciliation. Several of the following chapters, on the adversarial nature of complaints procedures, boundary issues within

organisations, and the challenge of being complained against, mostly shirk the issue of the over-the-top complainant or abusive counsellor rather than addressing it. Nick Totton stands out as a nearly lone voice in tackling the scapegoats and sacred cows clearly alive in many complaint processes. He describes how IPN (the Independent Practitioners Network) strives to handle complaints in a more real, healing and humanistic way, an approach that acknowledges that feelings are involved, rather than just skills, knowledge and codes. He affirms that 'a complaint is therapy conducted by other means' p102. The IPN approach is the polar opposite of BACP's (and more recently UKCP's) complaints procedures, thought BACP's new Ethical Framework does show some signs of softening. But it's to be regretted that a more middle-way approach, such as AHPP's use of mediation and of supportive facilitators for the client and counsellor, is not discussed. Indeed the use of mediation is scarcely mentioned.

The later chapters on avoiding a complaint by monitoring one's competence and grandiosity, on living with uncertainty, using supervision and such give some good sound advice. It would have been helpful to have had some tips on recovering from mistakes and slips to avoid an escalation of client dissatisfaction to the point of complaint, rather than simply avoiding mistakes. Surely some of these well-known contributors could own-up a little more to their own difficulties and near misses. After all, we all learn more from our mistakes than our successes. The differences between mistakes and oversights, ineptitude, incompetence, poor practice, malpractice and misconduct warrant greater discussion.

Despite its shortcomings and omissions this is still a useful book for anyone in the counselling field, where much is written on ethical practice and dilemmas but little on the consequences of getting it seriously wrong. For those who administer complaints it's a worthwhile companion to the often quoted Complaints and Grievances in Psychotherapy by Fiona Palmer Barnes. This book's main failing is that it's a collection of papers rather than structured and linked chapters. It seems a rather lazy way of producing a book on what is essentially a topic full of interrelated issues. The fragmentation of the book into different separated views unhelpfully parallels the divisions inherent in the complaints process itself, that the therapeutic relationship splits into an adversarial client and counsellor, recourse to BACP, AHPP, IPN or other quasi-parental bodies, the process itself, satisfaction and hurt, winning and losing, sanctions, shame, anger, etc., etc. Several chapters overlap and would have benefited from co-authoring. A dialogue between Nick Totten and some of the BACP oriented authors might have been insightful. Some of POPAN's material is usefully quoted (Prevention of Professional Abuse Network) but a chapter by them would have been valuable. A few statistics from BACP are included, but a breakdown of their complaints by type, outcome, sanctions etc., etc. could well have been included. A closing overview and summary by Roger Casemore as editor is badly needed.

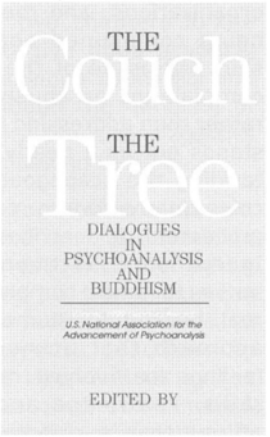
Tony Morris

The Couch and The Tree: Dialogues in Psychoanalysis and Buddhism

Winner of the 1999 Gradiva Award
US National Association
for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis

Edited by Anthony Molino

Open Gate Press, 2001. £12.95



Anthony Molino, an Italian writer and psychoanalyst, provides a very readable and essential introduction to the fascinating collection of essays that demonstrate the cross fertilisation between Psychoanalysis and Buddhism. The dividends of this volume are clear for psychoanalytic practitioners. However, it provides for transpersonal and integrative psychological practitioners a particular view of the encounter between spirituality and grounded psychological practice, which can only further enrich mutual understandings.

It is something of both a truism, and a characterisation to see psychoanalysis as at best, disinterested, and at worst, hostile to psychological explorations of the spiritual domain. What unfortunately remains true in the practice of many orthodox psychoanalysts is, as this book remarkably reveals, is not and never has been true of psychoanalysis itself. This may partly reflect the tensions between a more open-minded North American approach to spirituality and an essentially conservative British one. The book is given added breadth by including Jungian perspectives within a broader analytic-psychological sweep.

Part 1, entitled *Foundations,* explores from a histographical vantagepoint some significant essays written from both sides of the psychoanalytic-Buddhist conversation into the relationship between theory and practice. Beginning with Joe Tom Sun's *Psychology in Primitive Buddhism* 1924, readers will find contributions in this section from Karen Horney, Erich Fromm, W.Van Dusen, Harold Kelman, Alan Watts, D.T. Suzuki, Jack Kornfield and others. Here we are given direct access to Shoji Muramoto's translation of the controversially famous *Jung-Hisamatsu Conversation* of 1958.

Part 2 of the book explores several aspects of *Contemporary Researches.* In the section on meditation writers explore the similarities/dissimilarities between the analytic practice of free association and Theravadan mindfulness, Zen Koans, and Tibetan practice. This section includes one of the last recorded conversations between Anthony Molino and the Psychoanalyst Nina Coltart, recorded shortly before her death. In the section *Critical Perspectives* Adam Phillips, one of the few British psychoanalytic contributors addresses the confusions in definition of self. The section *Theoretical*

Reflections includes a three way conversation between The Dalai Lama, the Psychologist Joyce McDougall and the neuroscientist Francisco Varela, the subject being: *is there an unconscious in Buddhist Teaching?*

My praise is reserved for an outstanding section in Part 2, entitled *In Practice.* Here three psychoanalysts discuss some candid and stimulating personal examples of how they have struggled to remain open to the larger spiritual dynamics operating within a particular psychoanalysis. One of the many gifts of this book for me lies in Stephen Kurtz's illuminating connections between the Buddhist notion of *no-self* and Lacan's instinctive suspicion of the *ego*. He notes that the distinctive thrust of Lacanian psychoanalysis lies in its practices that aim at decentering, rather than reinforcing, of the ego. Herein lies, Kurtz suggests, the fundamental tension between Lacanian and orthodox psychoanalytic ego psychology.

Alvin Marcetti

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