Human Being to Human Bomb – Inside the mind of a terrorist, **Russell Razzaque** Icon Books £12.99 (pp 215)

Suicide bombing has become an all too frequent item in news broadcasts around the world today. To combat this, and other terrorist incursions into our otherwise 'ordered' lives, a 'war on terror' has been in progress since 2001. In his book, 'Human Being to Human Bomb', Russell Razzaque is attempting to take another approach to the problem, which is to try and understand the motivation behind suicide bombing – to explore the mind of a terrorist. I was pleased to be sent this book for review as I believe that it is important to look beneath the surface, beyond the simplistic solution to a complex set of problems in order to make sense of what is going on in the world at the moment

The book opens with some autobiographical background, outlining Razzaque's own introduction to radical Islam in his first year at university. He, himself, seems to have successfully resisted the temptation to become involved with the groups who he describes as using the universities as a recruiting ground, but he doesn't go into what enabled him to do this. I can understand that he might not want to be seen to be making himself superior, but it would have been good, at some point in the book, to have a description of the kind of person(ality) who doesn't become a terrorist – by far the majority I assume.

It is useful to have the background in Muslim history, which is also included in the first chapter although I think it would have been good to link this more to the individual psychology of the terrorist. Razzaque also includes his own perspective on 9/11 and 7/7 before going into a more conventional introduction to the book as a whole.

Chapter 2, 'The Conveyor Belt', explores the lives of the bombers who took part in 9/11 in the US and 7/7 in the UK. He begins with the UK conspiracy, even though it came after the American event, and describes the lives of the four UK bombers in some detail. It's not absolutely clear where he's getting his information from, but you do get quite a detailed picture of each person and their family background. The overall sense of this chapter is that it re-creates the atmosphere of the two conspiracies, in Germany – for 9/11 and the UK – for 7/7. It does tend to dot about a bit and, on first reading, I found this confusing, but later on it made sense as a narrative device. It does give quite a lot of useful background to the events

that led up to these two terrorist incidents and to the family and cultural backgrounds of those involved. It also, however, highlights the difficulty of psychological explanations of historical events, that is to say they explain quite plausibly, but they're not so good at predicting.

The next chapter, 'What lies Beneath', begins more hopefully, with an example from Mary Ainsworth's work. The 'Strange Situation' is a test which Ainsworth designed in order to determine the attachment style of infants. Razzaque concludes that the 'insecure avoidant' attachment style is more frequently found in Asian and Muslim families and is the result of 'relatively distant parenting'. This isn't intended to be an academic book so I wasn't expecting references etc, but the explanations of the psychology given here are very general. While I would probably agree with Razzaque's overall conclusions, the generality of this section doesn't sound as convincing as it should. At first, Razzaque explains the distant parenting style as a consequence of Asians and Muslims living, as immigrants, outside their normal extended family system, but then he also concedes that disturbed attachment patterns can arise even amongst the traditional Asian community in its own country of origin. He then talks in terms of absent or distant fathering, which is a commonly held cause of emotional disturbance in young men, although not always linked to attachment style, which tends to arise much earlier in a child's development. Razzaque then applies the psychodynamic theory of narcissism to the suicide bombers, which again makes sense, but could be better argued. The most convincing is Adorno's concept of the 'authoritarian personality'. The brief account presented here made me want to go and follow this up as a useful way of making sense, not only of suicide bombers, but other examples of disturbed thinking which seem to be becoming more and more part of our everyday experience.

This chapter, which is divided into sections, then has a section which explores the influence of Muslim households in the West on the children who are brought up within them. The difficulties it outlines are undeniable, but they don't entirely explain why they should lead to a person becoming a suicide bomber. And yet it would be unfair to criticise Razzaque for not being able to make a clear linear connection. He is, at least, engaging with possible influences on the process of a human being becoming de-humanised through vulnerability and idealisation. All fundamentalists should really think about this process even if their particular brand of thought has less serious consequences than those under discussion here.

The next chapter, 'The Pied Piper', gives some interesting historical and psychological background to some of the key figures in Islamist terrorism, notably Syyid Qutb, who Razzaque considers was sexually repressed, Abdullla Azzam and, of course, Osama bin Laden. It is certainly interesting to see that the latter was not simply a 'one-off' character in the terrorist drama, but one in a line of Islamic thinkers of the 20th century. It's also interesting to relate these people's political/religious beliefs to their psychology.

It's also interesting to get from the next chapter, 'No Smoke Without Fire', a different perspective on the history of the Middle East, which may inspire me to read further about the subject. On a mass level, it explains some of the social influences, and possibly therefore the psychological influences, on young Muslim men.

The final chapter summarises the process by which young men, who are already vulnerable, can get sucked in to the extremist activity including suicide bombing. Razzaque introduces his Ideological Extremism Vulnerability scale (IEV) which, he says, is derived from Adorno's F scale (used to measure authoritarianism), and Rokeach's Dogmatism scale. I imagine that if a person completed this questionnaire honestly, it would probably reveal a tendency towards ideological extremism, but statements such as:

'Sex crimes, such as rape and attacks on children deserve more than mere imprisonment; such criminals should be publicly whipped, or worse.,'

which respondents are asked to rate on a six point scale according to the level of their agreement or disagreement seem somewhat crude.

All in all, I find the book is a worthy attempt to get underneath the account of terrorism encountered in the popular press, but it fails to deliver as a serious psychological investigation. That said, I'm glad I read it.

David Hare is a counsellor in private practice

'Well, No-one's Ever Complained Before', **Judith Stewart** (pp 112) Pub Element Books Ltd 1989 (Available second hand from Amazon)

Right from the word go, this small book on the popular subject of assertiveness presents itself as an easy access introduction to the subject. It doesn't make big claims about how much it will change you and is obviously aimed at those people who would be scared of a weightier, more academic publication. Judith Stewart is a freelance trainer and writer working in the field of assertiveness, counselling and interviewing technique. She draws you in with her fun illustrations and narrative style, presenting the techniques and theory in the form of a series of dialogues between a couple called Helen and Mark, who would like to become more assertive, and their mysterious friend Chris, who keeps popping up to act as teacher and instructor.

As an introduction to the subject, I found this format worked well. The dialogue is somewhat contrived in places, as the author tries to package the theory in an acceptable way. The somewhat meteoric success which the couple achieves is also unbelievable. The style does, however, keep the content simple and easy to grasp and Helen's notes, at the end of each chapter, helpfully summarise the main points.

The first chapter sets out the three ways we can all handle confrontational situations, either aggressively, non-assertively (passively) or assertively. Mark is identified as someone who acts aggressively and Helen as one who acts non-assertively. We are told the importance of 'knowing what we want' and we start with a list of our rights, beginning with the 'right to say no'.

Chapter two then starts a series of practical examples by outlining how we could return faulty goods in an assertive way. We are taught how to use 'fielding' and 'broken record' techniques to help us stick with our agenda while making the other person feel heard. We are also introduced to relaxation exercises and some body language training.

The book then outlines, chapter by chapter, a series of other common scenarios and describes how to handle them in an assertive way. These include saying no, reaching a compromise and dealing with conflict. Further techniques are outlined, including 'negative assertion' agreeing with criticism if it seems valid, but without compromising self-esteem. Mark and Helen rise to each of these challenges remarkably well, getting evermore assertive and happy as they go! The book closes with chapters on relationships and interviews, where we learn about anger management and more about the important subject of self-esteem.

This subject can be presented in a number of ways and to different depths. I think this book covers the easy to read, introductory end of the spectrum well. It will suit people who are not academic or familiar with reading study books, but are interested in assertiveness. It will help them understand sme of the basic concepts and hopefully, with some practice, help them to believe in the value of such training.

With this in mind, I would like to compare this book with 'Asserting Yourself – a practical guide for positive change' by Sharon and Gordon Bower. This is a far more extensive look at the subject which doesn't allow you to watch other people trying out assertive exercises, but turns the spotlight on the reader and, through a series of exercises, helps him/her to analyse situations in which they might have been assertive, but haven't. This data is then used to help the reader formulate 'scripts' which are planned and practised statements which can be used in a given situation to 'negotiate a positive change or satisfactory resolution'. This is the heart of the book and is described in great detail. Chapters are also written on the subjects of self esteem, coping with stress and simple assertiveness exercises.

As a whole package, this book feels far more complete. Key elements of the text are the same, but, along with the text this time are lots of exercises to enable the reader to analyse their behaviour and relationships. People learn in different ways and I am sure there is value in both approaches. A successful outcome though is dependent on a person clearly identifying what is happening to them at key moments and then successfully implementing positive changes.

The theoretical perspective of both of these books is clearly cognitive behavioural, encouraging the reader to analyse their automatic thoughts and core beliefs with the aim of modifying these with structured exercises and assignments. 'No-one's ever complained before' addresses its issues as and when they arise in the story and is therefore quite simple. The technique based book addresses the problems in a more systematic manner. Both books encourage role play and also explore how we present ourselves, giving advice on posture and the way we speak.

I haven't really used self-help books before and have had a rather negative view of them, thinking that they often make big claims, but rarely deliver significant change. Reading these two books has helped me get past this initial scepticissm and see that real understanding and insight can be passed on in this way. Both books do this well. The narrative book, as I've said, does this in an easy to read style, some of the advice on dealing with criticism, bordering on common sense. The technique based book covers a lot more ground, but requires much more application to work through the material to pick out the specific points that are particularly applicable to you.

I found that doing one of the exercises made me realise that I am more assertive than I thought I was and helped me get the issue I was concerned with into perspective. Some of the key lessons on 'fielding' and 'broken record' were also helpful.

To sum up, there are a few points I would like to make. I have discovered that, in self help books, there are different approaches and different depths at which they work. This is helpful for individuals for their own use and for counsellors and therapists to recommend to their clients. However, it is worth considering John McLeod's comment that all self-help books have the same basic limitations. They offer a form of therapy which is devoid of the therapeutic relationship and assume that the same techniques will be effective for everyone who experiences a particular problem. Nevertheless, I would recommend this book to both counsellors and their clients.

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Practising Existential Psychotherapy – The Relational world. **Ernesto Spinelli** Sage Publications 2007 (pp216)

Having read, and been ambivalent about, 'The Mirror and the Hammer', I wasn't sure whether I would like this book. I was, however, drawn towards reading it, particularly as an example of the phenomenological approach to psychotherapy, which combines an intellectual rigour with a relational perspective. My problem, after all, with 'The Mirror and the Hammer', wasn't so much with Spinelli's critique of the psychotherapeutic status quo as with his somewhat unsubtle and egocentric way of expressing his challenge.

'Practising Existential Psychotherapy' confines itself, for the most part, to the presentation of a comprehensive account of the thinking behind the existential model, together with a practical and focussed introduction to its practice. The book is divided into two parts. Part one 'Theoretical Underpinnings', gives a summary of existential theory and its relationship with psychotherapy and part two, 'A Structural Model' is a very practical account, including exercises, of the application of the theory in the therapy room.

'The Philosophical Foundations of Existential Psychotherapy', the title of the first chapter, are known to be theoretically and emotionally challenging. Introducing the existential phenomenological model to my first year diploma students brought back memories of teenage years spent in fetid bedrooms reading Camus and Sartre; not really understanding, but being depressed by the experience. As Spinelli himself observes, the English language doesn't lend itself readily to the expression of the key concepts of existential theory'. Doubtless the post-structuralists would draw some interesting conclusions from this observation, but I'm not going there!.

Nevertheless, in this opening chapter, Ernesto Spinelli manages to convey the foundations of a complex philosophy in an accessible, and yet comprehensive manner. The chapter is built around what the author describes as 'The three Key Underlying Principles of Existential Phenomenology'. Relatedness is by now familiar to those who are practising psychotherapy and counselling in a humanistic and relational context. It is also being increasingly recognised by other modalities as an essential component of the therapeutic process. Nevertheless, it is good to see the support for an inter-subjective approach and to see the separation of subject and object, still so much a part of contemporary thinking, being soundly challenged.

The second principle of 'Existential Uncertainty' is again an intuitive part of most humanistic thinking. The tension between certainty and uncertainty is recognised by most humanistic practitioners as a given of living as a human being on this planet. I particularly like the way the author deals with the objection that:

'Surely there must be some certainties in life, even if they are, to quote Woody Allen, "Death and Taxes"' Spinelli concedes that:

'…it is certain that all human beings must be able to breathe, take in nourishment and excrete waste products if they are to continue to exist'

He goes on to say that:

'Acknowledging this, existential phenomenology nonetheless argues that each human being's *lived experience* of such certainties is open to multiple possibilities – and hence remains uncertain.'

The third principle – 'Existential Anxiety' is especially relevant in a climate where millions of pounds of government money is being

directed towards the reduction or eradication of anxiety in order that those suffering from it can be 'helped' off the sick list and back into productive employment. Instead of seeing anxiety as an evil, a problem to be mastered by means of control techniques, Spinelli embraces anxiety as an inevitable concomitant of freedom. I love the quote from Kierkegaard:

'Freedom's possibility announces itself in anxiety.'

Spinelli goes on to say that existential anxiety is 'neither avoidable, nor is it an aspect of pathology.'

It is interesting that Spinelli attributes such widely accepted 'pathologies' as

'obsessive or compulsive behaviours, phobias and addictive disorders' to the attempt to resolve what he argues are the inevitable existential anxieties of living as a human being.

In the next chapter Worldview, Spinelli comes up against one of the linguistic difficulties. So he comes up with his own word, 'worlding' to express the idea of each individual's process of living as a human being in the world. The act of reflecting on this process transforms it, according to Spinelli, into a 'worldview' which, whilst more fixed than the continuous process of worlding, nevertheless represents the individual's subjective perception of the world based on their experience of it. Existentialist therapy argues that sometimes worldviews can become fixed, or sedimented, and it is the task of therapy to explore and question these fixed views. Other important issues explored in this chapter include choice, freedom and responsibility. I particularly like the exploration of these concepts within the framework of authenticity and inauthenticity. Students often express concern about the apparent amorality of the existential approach which is addressed admirably in the last section of this chapter.

The last chapter in the first part of the book focuses specifically on the application of existential ideas to psychotherapy. Here there is a hint of the Spinelli who wrote 'The Mirror and the Hammer' – a slightly broad-brushed critique of other psychotherapeutic models, but it doesn't pre-dominate. The key feature of this chapter is its focus on the therapeutic relationship and the qualities of the therapist, and modes of thinking, which go to create that relationship. The chapter also deals with the existential psychotherapist's approach to conflict, symptoms and change. The latter, Spinelli suggests, will happen for both client and therapist as a result of the therapeutic relationship rather than from the techniques which the therapist might have used in the work.

The second half of the book is intensely practical. The overall feel of the existential model is uncertain and unstructured, but Spinelli argues that the therapeutic work needs to be contained within a structural model. He divides therapy into three phases – Co-creating (the 'therapy world'), exploring (also 'the therapy world') and closing it

down. What I like about the second part of the book is that it includes exercises that can be used in a training setting to explore the points that are being made about the practice of the therapy. These could also be used by a more experienced therapist reading the book. The first chapter of the second half focuses in detail on the process of the client arriving in the 'therapy world' exploring such issues as the therapist's initial greeting to the client. There are many different styles of doing this which vary across the spectrum of therapeutic model. I found myself, as an experienced practitioner, thinking more carefully about the way I greet clients in their first session and, indeed, in my reading of the subsequent chapters on exploration and closing down, the whole way I conduct myself as a therapist. This is not to say that I'm going to become an Existential therapist overnight, but I think it's good for all of us to think about what we do and Spinelli's writing, even at its most critical, towards other forms of psychotherapy, certainly has the effect of making us do this.

In conclusion, I would certainly recommend this book, to students of psychotherapy, trainers on integrative courses and especially to experienced practitioners.

Geoff Lamb

Self & SOCIETY LETTERS

Letters for the next issue of S&S should be with the editor by July 21st. Ed.

Dear S&S

So good to read Asaf's regular column in the May-June edition – lucky client to have a therapist who's prepared to 'sin', ie to love, to offer *real* relationship, which means being up for suffering loss.

I remember as client poo-poohing the idea that the ted I was taking home with me be reduced to a 'transitional object' – well, he may have been that, but he was a whole lot more, enabling my heart to open, to risk loving.

What I'm discovering about the conundrum of loving is that intimacy depends on feeling safe *enough*, hence my instinct, also, to self-protect. To merge implies there are boundaries to cross, or dissolve; in terms of human relationship I need to know of their existence even when I am in the midst of being 'we.'

In Asaf's last paragraph, the word 'alienated' jumped off the page – is to hold at distance to alienate? Am I not constantly coming and going, opening and closing, the spaces within each relationship never static, driven by needs, desires, a trillion unconscious impulses? Both as regular and as fluid as the tide?

Jane Barclay