Book Reviews

Edited by **Manu Bazzano**, Book Reviews Editor

Erratum

There was an unfortunate omission in the first piece of the Book Review section in the previous (Summer) issue (pp. 69–71), 'Do not Eat Soup with Chopsticks'. The piece was a review of the book ***China on the Mind*** by **Christopher Bollas**, Routledge, London, 2012, 158pp, ISBN: 978-0-415-66976-4, and was reviewed by **Manu Bazzano**. The editors wish to apologise to our readers for the mistake.

When the Facts are Not Friendly

Cracked: Why Psychiatry Is Doing More Harm than Good

By: James Davies
Icon Books, London, 2103, 336pp
ISBN: 978-1848315563
Reviewed by: Dr Diana Voller, Chartered Psychologist & Integrative Psychotherapist; Lecturer and Supervisor at the University of Roehampton

As psychotherapists, we are in the habit of trying to look at all sides of an issue, particularly the shadows. This latest book by James Davies takes a contemporary look at the shadow side of psychiatry, and develops one aspect of the bigger issue addressed in his earlier book, *The Importance of Suffering: The Value and Meaning of Emotional Discontent* (Routledge, 2011). Davies' position on the medicalisation of emotional distress is clear, but this book is much more than a new millennium version of Laing's anti-psychiatry movement. Despite the title, it's not actually anti-psychiatry at all, but a constructively critical exploration that seeks to de-mystify the foundations of that profession in a widely accessible way, much as Jeffrey Masson (1989) did twenty plus years ago, in *Against Therapy*, his equally controversial challenge to the Zeitgeist of psychotherapy at that time.

Brilliantly timed to coincide with the publication of DSM-V earlier this year, Davies draws on his psychotherapeutic training and anthropological pedigree to make the point that, in terms of cultural influence, the new DSM is very much more significant than merely a revised edition of a diagnostic manual.

Of course, if you will excuse the pun, it's Davies' and Goliath's task. The wider audience at which this book is aimed (priced at just £10.99 for 336 pages) means that it reads like a cross between a thriller and a thoroughly researched academic meta-analytic paper – so very different in terms of content, style and readership from the DSM (at £85.36 for 1000 pages – up from 130 pages in 1952).

It's like a Dan Brown (2004) thriller in the sense that our hero, academic Dr James himself, goes on a quest, criss-crossing the Atlantic, braving all weathers, sleepless nights, obstructive institutions, and key figures, both sinister and candid, to crack the psychiatric code that invisibly infuses not only the DSM, the pharmaceutical giants and health institutions in general, but also how we all actually feel about having feelings – the holy grail at the heart of this story being respect for the dignity, and the subjectivity, of human emotion.

This makes it sound like a conspiracy theory, but the book is more a journalistic research work that clarifies the foundations of psychiatry. It demonstrates that, like religion, psychiatry is based on a well-meaning attempt to articulate phenomena which are only partially apprehended. Like religion, despite the very profound contribution it makes to the quality of millions of people's lives, it can take on an energy of its own; and like Dan Brown's *Opus Dei*, it can be interpreted in such a way that it

results in equally disastrous consequences.

In contrast to a novel like *The Da Vinci Code*, this story isn't fiction, but it's rather based on real-life research data, with real-life implications. The facts here are not friendly, but nor will they probably be news to most *Self & Society* readers, either: for instance, the book describes how the DSM continues to evolve, based on the belief of a small group of psychiatrists – not that there is necessarily anything wrong with that, but what Davies points out is the reification that has quietly occurred whereby this agreement between professionals is confused with what constitutes the scientific evidence, as the format of DSM implies; so this illusion of reality then creates a new reality of its own, quite abstracted from the source. Our intrepid explorer goes on to attempt to penetrate the complex relationship between research and funding, psychiatric profession and pharmaceutical industry, exposing myths and finding evidence that the only discernible benefit for the 47 million prescriptions that are handed out for anti-depressants in the UK each year is almost all primarily due to the placebo effect.

So we know the plot, and it's clear who the goodies and baddies are in this story, but is there a happy ending? Perhaps that doesn't matter so much as the fresh perspective the book throws on a well-known theme – in this case, the anthropological context which highlights 'the crucial role of culture in handling people's distress' (p.278) in a post-religious, secular, capitalist society.

The book doesn't offer any easy answers, but Davies makes a plea for more humility, transparency and training within that profession, openly attempting to seduce his readers away from our society's love affair with and idealisation of the medical model in science. It is an accessible and well-informed counter-balance to the DSM-V, which attempts to inform the general public about how mental health is being construed. It is particularly timely, since everyone (not just the one in four who could now be DSM defined as having a mental disorder, or psychotherapists or psychiatrists) is going to be affected, and should be able to have a say in the cultural construction of mental health.

Self & Society readers will have their own perspectives and views, and are particularly well placed to wade in – as a colleague recently pointed out, books such as this one are just the beginning of the story; and given what James Davies has brought to light, the really interesting bit is what happens next.

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Forgiving the Unforgivable

Spectre of the Stranger: Towards a Phenomenology of Hospitality

By: Manu Bazzano

Sussex Academic Press, Brighton & Portland, 2012, 164pp

ISBN: 978-84519-538-0

Reviewed by: Caroline Brazier, author and course leader of the Tariki Training Programme in Other-Centred Psychotherapy

One cannot discuss *Spectre of the Stranger* without talking about the process of reading it. This is a book which should be read very fast and very slowly. Fast because it is poetic. The prose carries one, the reader, along like a flowing river of sparkling images and colourful references. Its pace infects and entrances, even to the point where sometimes precision gives way to music which soothes more than it informs. Slow because its tightly worked sentences each bear reflection way beyond their duration on the eye. Pithy and concise, they cut into commonplace thinking with new configurations of ideas, creating a rich embroidery of quotable passages so beautifully crafted that I found myself, against my general preference for protecting the pristine pages of a new book (and this edition is beautifully produced on quality paper), constantly defacing the text with underlines and comments as I tried to hold on to particular phrases for future reference.

Drawing on a wealth of culture and study, Bazzano shows himself familiar with the legacy of ideas from the classics, Eastern and Western, as well as contemporary psychology and philosophy. The text is rich in allusion. Its references are rarely explained, so whether this book works for you will, in part, be a function of your own background in the wide spheres of Western, Buddhist and religious philosophy, and, in part, of your willingness to dwell in not-knowing. Yet for those with at least a smattering of knowledge of these areas, its broad-brush

inter-weaving of themes from these diverse arenas is both satisfying and challenging.

Not-knowing is a recurring theme in the book, so in many ways the slight intangibility of the writing reflects Bazzano's thesis that we only come to a point of being true alive in the fleeting, ever-changing presence of the mysterious other. Recognising this unknowing is the goal: 'The more she loves, the less the lover knows her beloved'. (p. 40) Or: 'Among all illusions, believing that I *understand* another is perhaps the most insidious' (p. 21). The other, being the absolute unknown, invites encounter, and only in that moment of encounter do we discover, albeit momentarily, our existence.

The book is also a playful exploration of Bazzano's Buddhist roots. By teasing out artificiality, he grounds his argument in the recognition of the truth of impermanence and the delusion of identity. Buddhist philosophy addresses the space beyond the self and the reality which defies the human attempt to confine it, seeing the self as a conditioned structure, held by an illusory world of appropriated experience, and ultimately a falsity; a manifestation of deadness. Buddhist practice involves the dissolution of this identity, opening the mind to unstructured otherness both by deconstructing the sense of personal entitlement and by welcoming the embrace of the other, the unborn and the measureless.

The first part of the book, the largest of its three sections, explores the construction of identity as a retreat from otherness. Grounded in Western philosophy as well as Buddhist, Bazzano's attack upon the human tendency to grasp at experience and create solidity out of ephemera reflects Buddhist notions of attachment, the obstacle to enlightenment. All is ultimately in flux, uncontrollably other and infinitely disturbing. Out of this meeting emerge Bazzano's virtues; the naked encounter of flawed humanity breaking through to creativity and ethicality in the spotlight of the moment. This encounter-based psychology is inseparable from the spiritual imperative. Its form of ethics, based on meeting the stranger, is literal and ubiquitous – an ethics based on *recognition* in that moment of meeting rather than rationality and calculation. In this exploration, Bazzano flirts with the religious and the secular through the medium of the poetic. In the last section of the book, he returns to this theme in its pure symbolic form, leaving the reader hanging in a web of unsettling ideas. Though ultimately embracing the secular, Bazzano's rejection of the metaphysical owes most to the practice of not-knowing. Un-knowing cannot by definition be defined, and the categorisation of the metaphysical is inappropriate to his thesis, but equally utilitarian or materialist analyses fail to hold up. Poetry emerges in close proximity to a secular spirituality, but it is ethics which form the core of this exploration: an emergent phenomenon which cannot be condensed into a repeatable rule-book. Thus, for example, in discussing forgiveness, Bazzano suggests that whilst the rational may limit relationship to bargains with justice, a poetic interpretation of the other in their full humanity can open the heart where the mind might close in calculating caution. He says: 'Rational forgiveness can excuse only what is excusable and in doing so demonstrates the moral superiority of those who forgive. Forgiveness born out of poetic vision forgives the unforgivable. One often ends up loving the person one has forgiven.' (pp. 34–5)

It is, according to this book's hypothesis, through encounter with the other that we come into our full alive presence. The retreat into habituation leads to the creation of rigidity, a false certainty and the fortification of identity. This realisation, however, poses problems for the theorist who *de facto* records ideas, thus freezing them in time. How does one create a philosophy which is not a philosophy; fluid, not fixed and open to infinite re-creation in the unfolding process of experience? The author writes, 'Even radical philosophy, initially conceived as exploration, ends up bolstering metaphysics and regales us with an edifying new system.' (p. 45) But can one avoid falling into this trap in writing a book on the subject? Perhaps only by creating the hall of mirrors, which this book often comes to resemble. What rescue the reader from philosophical ossification are the unpredictability, alterity and elusiveness of the text.

In the second part of the book, Bazzano turns his attention from the individual to the collective. This move is not surprising from a Zen Buddhist, for Buddhist philosophy suggests that the illusory creation of identity is a process which unfolds under its own momentum. This process need not be seen as attached to the individual people who identify with it, but rather is capable of being applied to the group as much as to the person. In this section, collective identities such as nationalism are examined through a series of philosophical and theoretical windows. For example, drawing on the ideas of Regina Schwartz (p. 77), Bazzano discusses at length how Biblical precursors forged the idea of a chosen people on notions of covenant, territory, kinship, nation and memory, showing how these illusory vendors of collective identity manufactured a sense of superiority and entitlement

in the population encircled by their remit. The story is shaped to suit the victor. It creates the identity, and never does justice to the unfathomable truth: 'Giving solidity to the past is not only futile; it also betrays the past' (p. 87).

Mostly supported by the panoply of Western philosophy and political theory, the imperative of social order reiterates its litany of membership, defined against the inadmissible other – the refugee, the asylum seeker and the homeless. Modern societies conspire to close their borders to migrants and the dispossessed, vilifying them whilst opening those same borders to capitalism. Yet it is, Bazzano suggests, only in meeting such dispossessed that we fully become ourselves. The radical transformation of society which such an invitation proposes takes the author into discussion of social order, attitudes and even to advocating a policy of open borders (p. 103). Whether, however, his commitment to Justice (p. 90) is as philosophically justifiable in this context can be questioned. Surely this virtue owes more to a theistic structure of thought and an assumption of superior objectivity capable of making judgement than to the free-ranging post-phenomenological enquiry which Bazzano otherwise engages?

So are ideas really best explored in poetic philosophy, or does the rarefied style mislead us into a confusion of mirrors? Would the purpose of communication, itself essential to the encounter with other, be better served by more down-to-earth language? Such questions are perennial, and the paradox of writing about what cannot and should not be limited by words is not unusual. The wordless path of Zen has spawned many books, and the artist, asserting originality, is often as much embedded in a tradition, albeit avant-garde, as the ordinary person. The book, as its subject, is a process and not a conclusion. As Bazzano plays the trickster card, the reader is left to muse on the conundrum. Whatever their conclusion, however, I feel confident in speculating that their journey will have been a rich one. ❹

Getting It Right

Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False

By: Thomas Nagel
Oxford University Press, New York, 2012,144pp
ISBN: 978-0199919758
Reviewed by: Alex Gooch, teacher and writer

Naturalism holds that the real truth about the world is revealed through the natural sciences. The most widespread form of naturalism is materialism, the account of the world according to which the only thing that's *really* real is matter in its lawful motion, and the only finally true explanation of any phenomenon is an explanation of that phenomenon in terms of matter in motion.

The materialist world-view has rooted itself so deeply in our way of thinking that for many of us it presents itself as common sense; it seems simply obvious and self-evident that things are, when it comes down to it, really just arrangements of matter. However, in *Mind and Cosmos* Thomas Nagel sets out to challenge this world-view and to demonstrate that when you think about it, it isn't so self-evident at all.

The crux of Nagel's attack on materialism is the simple but compelling observation that, yes, admittedly, the world does indeed include physical, tangible, measurable objects, which can clearly and properly be described in terms of matter and the laws of physics; however, the world also contains other, apparently very different kinds of things, such as thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and so on – things that he includes within the umbrella category 'consciousness'. The materialist account claims to be the true account of *all* things. Can materialism really, satisfactorily, accommodate phenomena such as thought and perception? Or does it proceed and make its universal claims by simply ignoring the phenomena of consciousness, and self-delusively pretending that thoughts and perceptions, not being material, are not 'real' things at all?

It is a compellingly simple question, and one for which it's difficult to find an answer within the doctrines

of materialism. Of course, materialism confidently claims that it can indeed incorporate the phenomena of consciousness into its grand explanatory project, by making use of the mechanism of evolutionary theory, and in particular evolutionary psychology. The materialist can claim, for example, that the apparently 'mental' or 'interior' phenomenon of sexual attraction is fully and exhaustively explained by the purely material phenomenon of an evolutionary drive towards genetic reproduction, hardwired into the human brain. However, this is hardly a satisfactory answer, as it fails to recognise the evident truth that the thoughts and feelings involved in sexual attraction, or any other 'interior' experience, are non-physical, and yet they are things in the world.

Early in his book, Nagel lands another strong blow against the materialist-evolutionist story of origins by pointing out just how heavily this story relies on sheer coincidence. To cast his argument in slightly different terms, when we are being told a story, we, the audience, have a right to expect that each significant event related in the story will be causally explained by previous events in the story. Any event that happens in a story must be one which it is (at least in retrospect) reasonable for us to expect, given what has gone before. When the prince shows up at Cinderella's house, he does so because she left her slipper at the ball, and because of the events thereafter. It's reasonable to expect that he *would* show up at her door, given the story so far. If he simply appeared on her doorstep at the end of the story by chance, the story would feel inadequate, as the reader's legitimate expectations of the narrative would not have been met.

As Nagel points out (explicitly borrowing a critique from the intelligent-design camp, whose positive doctrines he does not endorse), there is nothing in the materialist-evolutionist story of life on Earth which make it reasonable for us to expect that life should emerge from inert matter in the first place – or, life having so emerged, that it should come to take such astonishingly complex forms as, for example, DNA. When asked *why* these events occurred, materialist-evolutionism has no real answer except 'chance' or 'coincidence'. This is a degree of reliance on coincidence which would put Dickens at his worst to shame, and when we become aware of it, the materialist-evolutionist story starts to look rather less common-sensical than we thought – and less satisfactory as an explanatory narrative.

Mind and Cosmos deserves credit for having the courage to raise fundamental questions about an interpretation of the world which has ascended to the throne of generally accepted 'truth' – and not only for raising these questions, but for raising them convincingly. By the end of the book, Nagel has raised genuine suspicions about the legitimacy of materialism's claim to the throne.

However, what Nagel shares with his naturalist, materialist, evolutionist opponents is an avowed realism, a commitment to the fundamental assumption that *there* is a story, there is one singular *really true* truth about how things actually are, and that the business of human inquiry is to keep trying to match our words and concepts and ideas to this independent external reality until one day we finally *get it right*. His attack on materialism is thus carried out in the name of realism, and takes the form of a corrective from within. He is committed to the realist project; he believes that materialism has taken realism down a blind alley; hence, in *Mind and Cosmos* his assaults on materialism are intended to serve the cause of realism by putting it back on course.

For all the courage and analytical acumen displayed in *Mind and Cosmos*, the realism which motivates and underpins this work looks both quixotic and rather quaintly old-fashioned, in the light of broader contemporary thought. Nagel makes little effort in *Mind and Cosmos* to justify his realist faith, and effectively disregards the whole movement in modern Western thought, arguably beginning with Immanuel Kant and reaching full maturity in the twentieth century, which has abandoned the grand project of finally pinning down the one true truth, and sought different conceptions of the relationship between thought and world.

Perhaps the realists are right. Perhaps the day will come when we finally do hit on the conceptual description that truly mirrors a truly independent external reality. Perhaps there will be fireworks and trumpets in the sky; perhaps on that day we will finally and decisively be relieved of the background vertiginous doubt that whatever beliefs we cherish and pin our hopes on may tomorrow turn out to be untenable. But one suspects otherwise. One suspects that the functioning of realism as a philosophical faith depends, like so many other faiths, on an indefinite postponing of its final consummation. *Mind and Cosmos* closes with the words, 'the human will to believe is inexhaustible' – and the book itself stands as an unintentional testimony to this.

Feeding Sophie

Derrida: a Biography

By: Benoit Peeters (translated by Andrew Brown)
Polity, London, 2013, 700pp
ISBN: 978-0745656151
Reviewed by: Manu Bazzano

The revolt of May '68 officially started at the Sorbonne in Paris on the 3rd of May with a demonstration of protest against disciplinary measures taken against a number of students. Soon, the whole Latin Quarter was in uproar; weeks of chaos followed, and travelling became difficult. Many times during those heady weeks the philosopher Jacques Derrida had interminable nocturnal strolls until daybreak with the novelist-playwright Jean Genet, both lost in affable and profound conversation. Derrida later remarked: 'Genet, in those streets without cars, in this completely immobilized, paralysed country, which had run out of petrol, kept saying: "Ah, how beautiful! Ah, how elegant"' (p. 196).

This superb, highly readable and insightful biography of one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century is full of such anecdotes. Here is another: having just published in an academic Journal at the age of 34 an influential essay on Levinas, *Violence and Metaphysics* – subsequently to be a chapter in his seminal *Writing and Difference* (1978) – Derrida got invited to a conference in Berlin. Sam Weber, the person who went to meet him at the airport, not knowing what he looked like and imagining some kind of rogue, a 'revolutionary philosopher', mistook a film producer (sun glasses, velvet shirt, thriller magazines under his arm, surrounded by fashionable girls) for Jacques Derrida. On the way to the hotel, the fake Derrida asked about the swimming pool; 'What swimming pool?', Weber said. 'And anyway you won't have time for that; the conference will start right away.' The equivocation cleared, Derrida later asked Weber how he could have possibly mistaken him for the other guy. 'Well ... you know', Weber mumbled, 'the philosophy of the future... ehr ...violence and metaphysics...', to which Derrida, clearly annoyed, replied, 'Violence, maybe but brutality?!?'.

Ordinary, everyday fragments emerge in the pages of this book alongside remarkable philosophical insights, depicting a philosophical life cultivated in a climate of deep friendships, open, honourable conflicts and passionate debates. Many of the interlocutors are friends (and foes, one turning into the other and back) met along the way – many of them unknown, some of them eminent thinkers (Sollers, Kristeva, Ricoeur, Althusser, Foucault, Levinas, Blanchot, Lacan, Cixous... the list could go on), all influencing each other, all having an impact on one another, all loved with tremendous loyalty and touching tenderness, some mourned by Derrida with sincerity and kindness in his moving eulogies (2003). As in the days of the Epicurean school in ancient Greece, the very practice of philosophy emerges from these loving and fiery encounters as an endeavour steeped in friendship. Quite a lesson for our contemporary milieu, arguably steeped in stolid alliances and fake, anodyne pluralism (especially in the field of the psychological therapies) motivated by the unspoken terror to utter anything remotely different, of being, God forbid, singled out as a non-joiner to the chorus of universal conformity. An audacious *non-joiner* is what Jacques Derrida was all his life – not out of pride but out of refinement and sheer rigour of thought, an attitude due to a joyous and restless capitulation to what his friend Genet often called 'the fever of thought'.

The 1960s and 1970s in France constituted a unique *philosophical moment* in history, reverberating for decades to come – a moment legitimately comparable to the blossoming of German idealism at the beginning of the nineteenth century and to the great Greek schools of antiquity. Derrida attracted bile and vilification from Cambridge's airless chambers, with stuffy professors jolted into consciousness from their self-referential, self-congratulatory slumber in order to line up in procession and attempt to deny the *enfant terrible* of 'French theory' the honorary degree. Frighteningly ignorant, dull-witted scribes in the British dailies felt entitled to pour scorn the day after his death. Enter one Johann Hari of *The Independen*t newspaper:

> his writing is wilfully obscure, and at times he lapses into gibberish. But in fact, once you learn how to boil down his prose, his ideas are fairly simple - and pernicious ... Derrida was the mad axeman of Western philosophy.... The deconstructionist virus has swept through the humanities departments of universities across Europe and America....

– and so forth (Hari, 2004).

What is true of Nietzsche is also true of Derrida: both thinkers deconstructing the flimsy nature of the self and

dismantling the edifice of Western knowledge; we are still busy catching up, trying to absorb their profound relevance and thorny influence of their life and thought in philosophy, psychology and in the world of therapy.

He was born, like Camus, in Algeria, prone to 'nostalgeria' and complex feelings of home, exile and belonging; expelled at the age of 12 with all other Jewish students and teachers from the Lycée Ben Aknoun, and enrolled at an improvised school for the Jewish community, recognising already then the 'malaise' that was to accompany him all his life, the unwillingness to be part of the 'communitarian experience':

> On the one hand, I was deeply wounded by anti-Semitism. And this wound has never completely healed. At the same time... I could not tolerate being 'integrated' into this Jewish school, this homogeneous milieu that reproduced and in a certain way countersigned – in a reactive and vaguely specular fashion... – the terrible violence that had been done to it. This reactive self-defence was certainly natural and legitimate, even irreproachable. But I must have sensed that it was a drive [*pulsion*], a gregarious *compulsion* that responded in truth to an expulsion. (p.21)

Immersing himself in literature – Gide, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Valéry, Camus – the most formative readings for the young Jacques (or Jackie, as he was then) turned out to be the letters of Antonin Artaud, an anti-Gnostic *par excellence*, an innovator whose presence changed poetry and theatre. I had nothing to say, Artaud had declared, and yet I am inhabited by a passion to write, to create. Derrida, too, felt, at the age of 15, that he *had* to write, 'writing passionately without writing, with [a] sense of emptiness' (p. 28); he felt *protean*: he could take any form, write in any tone: 'I said to myself: I can write everything and so I can't write anything' (p. 29).
In one of this first published works he combined a sophisticated reading of Husserl (whose *Origin of Geometry* he translated into French, prefaced by a lengthy and original piece on phenomenology), with an appreciation of James Joyce, creating exciting and surprising parallels between the two. If Husserl seeks to 'reduce or impoverish empirical language methodically to the point where ... [it is] transparent', Joyce brings out 'the greatest potential for buried, accumulated, and interwoven intentions' (Derrida, 1989: 102–3). These two seemingly opposite tendencies were to accompany his work throughout his life – an ambivalent and spirited liaison between phenomenology and its lyrical *double*, resulting in a subversive, moving and ironic *exploding* of philosophy into literature: *The Postcard* (1987) and *Glas* (1990) are two celebrated example of this, the first with its opening 200 pages consisting of love letters addressed to no one in particular; the second written in two columns, with the left devoted to a reading of Hegel and the right devoted to a reading of Jean Genet.

In 1962, during his early days in France, his sister and her family fled Algeria during the conflict which left 400.000 dead, and went to stay with him. Derrida often took the children with him to Paris. Martine, who was eight at the time, later recounted:

> Sometimes, he'd have to leave us for quite a while inside his 2CV, in the courtyard of the Ecole Normale Supérieure – or maybe it was the one in the Sorbonne? He told us that he was going off to feed 'Sophie the Whale' with tins of sardines. He asked us to be patient, as 'Sophie' was quite prickly and he was the only one she would allow near her.... It took me several years to understand that Sophie was philosophy. (p. 121)

Reluctant to join Marxism at the time when it was de rigueur among intellectuals, Derrida shocked everyone by publishing *Spectres of Marx* (1993) in the 1990s, when even mentioning Marx was frowned upon. His later years were marked by a re-discovery of the sacred as emergent from phenomena rather than obeisance to institutionalised sacredness, by a courageous commitment to emancipatory politics and to deeply unfashionable themes: forgiveness, hospitality, otherness – all taking on board yet radicalising the teachings of Levinas, Jankélévitch and others. To this later period belongs his luminous reading of Kierkegaard, *The Gift of Death*, a ground-breaking interpretation of religion and ethics at a time (which is still very much our own time) of the selling out of genuine ethics and spirituality to the pressures of conscience, reputation and box-ticking.

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Counselling Psychology: A Humanistic Incursion into the Psychology Profession?

Therapy and Beyond: Counselling Psychology's Contributions to Therapeutic and Social Issues

By: Martin Milton (editor)
Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, 2010, 320 + xxvi pp
ISBN: 978-0-4707-1548-2
Reviewed by: Richard House, S&S co-editor, Independent Practitioners Network, University of Winchester

Counselling Psychology (hereafter, CP) is a fascinating phenomenon within the psy field, being a comparatively recent development (in the UK) in the world of professional psychology, and undoubtedly the main conduit for humanistic values and practices within the mainstream Psychology profession. For this reason alone, it should surely be of particular interest to readers of this journal, as it arguably inhabits one of the poles on the spectrum between professional(ised) and 'post-professional' humanistic praxis. Researchers into professionalisation as a process would certainly find a very interesting case study in the way in which CP has developed out of what was previously a Psychology field dominated by a modernist, positivistic worldview. Debora Diamond tells of how CP began when a groundswell of clinical psychology practitioners wished to move away from medical models of treatment (p. 141), and that it can be seen as 'a reaction to the somewhat mechanistic view of human beings inherent in more traditional psychological paradigms' (p. 144).

This is a long book at over 340 pages, and it covers a very wide range of material and themes. It's important to be aware, first, that the CP line offered in the book is very much a University of Surrey one; and while one might expect this to possibly place some limits on the diversity of the collection, I experienced great diversity in the many and various contributions. According to editor Martin Milton, the book aims to take stock of this new profession, 'its current body of knowledge and array of practices and to look at innovative and potential new developments' (p. xxv). Emmy van Deurzen, in a contributed foreword, certainly kicks the book off with some choice quotations, referring to feeling 'jaded or battle-fatigued when constantly contending with increasingly tight professional boundaries and regulations' (p. xv), and arguing that 'we are witnessing... a process of one-dimensional professionalisation which is more interested in quantitative than qualitative outcomes...' (xv–xvi). And more poignantly still, 'if we become... too enamoured of evidence-based practices that merely cloak human understanding in an external mantle of knowledge..., we can get too involved with research and technique and lose sight of what really matters' (pp. xvii, xvi).

The book is organised into three parts: Section 1, 'The Fundamentals of Counselling Psychology', looks at philosophical pluralism (Donal McAteer), existential-phenomenological approaches (Elena Manafi), research (Deborah Rafalin), challenging 'psychopathology' (Milton et al.), an evolutionary framework for therapy (Frances Gillies) and ethics (Camilla Olsen). Section 2 then looks at 'Models of Practice', including a chapter on humanistic approaches by Heidi Ashley, as well as chapters on psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural and existential orientations. Finally, Section 3 takes the step into the wider world, with a chapters looking at pain, sport and exercise, race, sexuality, religion and spirituality, the media and the natural world.

A feature of the book is the way in which many of its contributors go to great lengths to specify what it is that makes CP distinctive from other psychology sub-disciplines – for example, Milton foregrounds its postmodern, multi-modal and holistic ontology (p. xxiii), its relational and dialogical nature (p. xiv), and its understanding of oppression and exploitation (p. xxv); and later, we see highlighted CP's adherence to pluralism and

difference; its adherence to Humanistic Psychology and existentialism-phenomenology, and its contextualising of being; its focus on well-being and flourishing rather than 'psychopathology'; its seeking of *understanding* rather than explanation and universal 'truths'; its privileging of idiographic uniqueness as opposed to nomothetic generalisation and standardisation; its commitment to curiosity and not knowing; its privileging of *process* in the therapeutic encounter; its constructive challenging of the status quo; and its methodological pluralism and openness to all paradigms. CP also has a strong commitment to evidence-based practice, which might be one area where its philosophy and praxis might be ripe for some radicalising; but nonetheless, this is a very impressive list of humanistic credentials. Strawbridge and Woolfe are also quoted as writing that Counselling Psychology 'is not just a psychological activity, but a cultural enterprise' (p. 65).

I would particularly like to highlight Chapters 2 and 11 (Manafi on existentialism-phenomenology), 4 (Milton et al. on psychopathology), 8 (Ashley on humanistic contributions to pluralism), 16 (Coyle on religion and spirituality) and 18 (Milton on the natural world). In Chapter 2, Manafi offers a compelling *tour de force* of the place of postmodern, deconstructionist thinking in CP at its most radical – thus, for example, difficulties of living are no longer conceptualised as residing within human beings (i.e. intrapsychically), but rather, 'in the space in-between, on the "bridge" that connects the person to the world' (p. 26), thus moving beyond concepts of 'mind' and towards the idea of the *whole human being's* relation to the world (p. 31). Here, then, is just one of the many places where humanism and existentialism can meet and fruitfully inform one another in a direct challenge to the taken-for-granted assumptions of modernity. For Manafi, 'Our lives have become so entangled in artificial divisions that they separate us from each other, our bodies, subjective experiences and consequently our sense and understanding of wellbeing' (p. 30), and she makes a strong case for the importance of Merleau-Ponty's important notion of embodiment (pp. 33–4). For Manafi, then, CP crucially 'takes us beyond the consulting room by appreciating and working with the multiplicity of "being-in"' (p. 34). In her Chapter 11, Manafi cites Jung's famous view that in client work, one needs to put one's theories aside and just 'be' (p. 172); and she strikes a strongly humanistic note in quoting philosopher Robert Solomon, that 'it is our passions, not our reason, that constitute our world, our relationships with other people, and consequently, our *Selves*' (p. 175, Solomon's italics).

I equally enjoyed Chapter 4 on psychopathology, which demonstrated to me without question that CP (certainly in its more critical incarnation) is radically anti-reductionist, anti-individualist and anti-medical model in a way that will be conducive to most if not all readers of this journal – as they put it, 'querying the categorization of distress' (p. 62). For these authors, modernist therapy, which focuses on 'altering behaviour patterns and belief systems', has major shortcomings (p. 64) – not least, the way in which an inadvertent circularity means that 'the therapist finds the "disorder" that they hypothesize to be there and attempts to impose these on the client in a form of intellectual colonialism' (p. 65), thereby 'diverting attention from socio-cultural factors in the genesis of psychological distress' (p. 63).

Ashley's Chapter 8 makes the important point that CPs are not humanistic practitioners per se, 'for they navigate different models' (p. 125), with a pluralism of 'competing therapeutic models, each potentially with something important to contribute' (p. 125). Linked to this is the view that Mick Cooper has emphasised, that 'a humanistic attitude can be taken to all therapeutic encounters' (quoted on p. 127). This raises highly complex and contentious issues, however, that merit far more searching examination than is offered in the book.

Chapter 16 refreshingly looks at religion and spirituality, intelligently pointing out, *inter alia*, that modernist kinds of discourse are entirely inappropriate for engaging with what 'the spiritual' might consist in (p. 263), that practices like mindfulness-informed CBT could be seen as 'a psychotherapeutic colonization and over-writing of a spiritual practice, stripping it of its spiritual context and orientation' (p. 265); that beliefs and experiences that fall outside of orthodox religious frameworks 'should not automatically be considered as implying psychopathology' (p. 270); and (perhaps more controversially) that religious and spiritual issues should become a routine aspect of client assessment procedures (p. 272).

Finally, in his Chapter 18, Milton looks at the natural world, with arguments that will resonate with many *S&S* readers – e.g. that compulsive consumption 'can be a way of managing the pain of dislocation from our bodies, the world and from each other' (p. 298), and that what Milton terms 'environmentally aware therapy' might not only question our everyday assumptions about 'developed' urban life, but might even lead CPs 'to question why therapists limit their practice to hour-long sessions behind

closed doors away from nature' (p. 301; cf. Lucy Scurfield's article, this issue). Nick Totton's important work on 'wild therapy' is surprisingly not quoted in what is an otherwise impressive bibliography.

In Chapter 4, Milton et al. maintain that while CP has its roots in modernist therapeutic approaches, 'it is evolving and modifying itself in light of the changing cultural context within which it is situated', with CP seeking understanding 'without the certainties of modernist assumptions', and 'developing more liberatory notions of psychological difference and emancipatory forms of applied practice' (p. 65). This is all very well and commendable, but perhaps a key question remaining to be addressed is the tension, and even contradiction, between a CP approach which claims to be humanistic to the core, and a 'profession-centred' mentality (and CP certainly claims to be 'a profession') that might struggle to remain authentic in a conventional 'modernist' professional context. Relatedly, there are also strident voices within mainstream (Clinical) Psychology who would collapse CP into Clinical Psychology and so possibly eradicate the one strong humanistic influence that does exist in conventional Psychology.

This otherwise admirable book might have spent more time addressing these tensions, then – and only on the final page (p. 312), in Milton's Afterword, do we start to hear concerns about the HPC regulation of the CP field and their compulsory state-defined 'health professional' identity, for 'These new statements about the psychological professions set precedents, benchmarks that may not always be helpful' (ibid.). Perhaps in his next book, Martin Milton might address these key issues, for a deepened exploration of the place of CP in late-modern psy culture would certainly be most welcome. ❺

Self and Society

The breakdown, the marvel, the end of the line,
The waiter, the gosling, the value of time,
The waste of the water, the post of the ghost,
All names that reveal, that hide, that deride,
As they move, as they chime, as they twist and deceive,
With a time, with a locus, a metre, a tide
In a sigh, in a sight, in a plea, in a light -
Perhaps they are One, as they take to the sky,
Perhaps they are all that they seem, that they be,
So the screen on your desk is a bee in the pane,
Is the weight of the world, is a sign in the road,
Is the eloquent sigh of a faraway train,
And each of them, all, is a way to the cry,
And each of them, all of them, I, I, I, I.

John Rowan, 2013
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