Book Reviews

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

Models of Leadership

The Myth of the Strong Leader: Political Leadership in the Modern Age

By: Archie Brown
The Bodley Head, London, 2014, 480 pp
ISBN-13: 978-1847921758, price £17.00 (hardback)
Reviewed by: Nick Duffell, psychotherapist, trainer and psychohistorian

Archie Brown is a political historian educated at the London School of Economics, a specialist in Soviet politics, and the author of over 20 books who has consulted with many world leaders. Why should his latest work be of interest to *Self and Society* readers? Besides being a thorough refresher in the last 100 years of world history, it is an intensely human survey of how human societies organize themselves, and, in particular, how narcissism is bound to fail the test of time that relational and collaborative approaches meet. To do this, Brown has to deconstruct conventional ideas of power in ways that humanistic practitioners will recognize, but I suspect will not yet have seen applied to this field; thus, the book's interdisciplinary value is groundbreaking, I suggest. I was captivated and, aided by his easy style, the last page came far too soon for me.

Brown's central mission seems to be to highlight the overrating of charismatic leadership and to champion collective government. But rather than simply assert this, he presents a model of leadership types with, as exemplars, a bevy of world leaders whose motivations, actions and accomplishments he analyses with professional rigour enlivened by entertaining anecdotes. He distinguishes between *redefining* leaders, who rather than capture the centre ground seek to move the centre in their direction; *transformational* leaders, who are able to completely change a context by creating *systemic* change; and *revolutionary* leaders, who bring about a new order, but only through violent means. Lastly, he discusses *totalitarian* leadership – testimony, he asserts, to Daniel Kahneman's phrase 'the emotional tail wagging the rational dog' (p. 293).

On the way, Brown dispels various myths, the chief of which is that domineering leaders effect successful government, hinting that they are also undesirable, except in countries where, like Russia, leaders' strength has for centuries been admired over any other quality. He refutes that the reliability of popular opinion about a leader's actual strength or weakness and that the electoral influence of leaders in parliamentary democracies have been growing stronger, even if their domination over foreign policy has. He finds Tony Blair particularly guilty of misinterpreting these myths, and there are times where it feels as if his despair at Blair's dedication to self-invention in the face of reality was a strong motivator in this book.

While remaining carefully non-partisan, Brown is unable to hide his admiration for Harry Truman, Clement Atlee, Willy Brandt, and especially Mikhail Gorbachev, Brazil's Fernando Cardoso, and Adolfo Suarez. He highlights the latter's steadfast pursuit of his goals, masked by his collegial and compromising style, as he steered the transformation of Franco's Spain into a modern democracy. I was surprised by his knowledgeable respect for De Gaulle, Lyndon Johnson and Deng Xiaoping, described by long-serving architect of Singapore transition, Lee Kuan Yew, as ' the most impressive leader I had met – a five-footer, but a giant among men' (p. 306).

In his penultimate section, 'Foreign Policy Illusions of Strong Leaders', Brown topically suggests the revising of some assumptions about China, stressing their firm but realistic advocacy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states: 'China was opposed to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq but did not wish to take the lead in the campaign against something that was going to happen

anyway' (p. 307).

Brown reserves his strongest censure for domestic politicians: 'In a non-presidential system, a prime minister should have to work hard to persuade colleagues ... on the merits of a policy he or she favours, and not be allowed to pull rank' (p. 340). Harold Wilson, he says 'had enough sense to bow to ... [those] who had deep knowledge and long experience of foreign and defence policy' (ibid.). But 'those prime ministers, such as Lloyd George, Neville Chamberlain, Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, who aspire to equate headship of government in a democracy with personal hegemony, pay a serious political price' (p. 100). Here he is at his most psychological in his warnings about the dangers of egoic motivation. The greatest dangers, he suggests, is when a prime minister is 'desperately anxious to be seen as a strong leader' (p. 340).

'Chamberlain, Eden and Blair all acted high-handedly and kept colleagues inadequately informed about discussions and documents', he discloses. 'Eden was the most guilty of deceiving the British public [over Suez] but he circumvented correct procedures slightly less than did Chamberlain and Blair.' Blair's 'unsubstantiated faith in his own judgment' was a major undermining of democracy in the lead-up to the Iraq invasion, a 'good illustration of *premature cognitive disclosure* [in which] beliefs simplify reality and mould the way in which information is processed' (ibid.).

In his last chapter, 'What kind of leadership is desirable?', Brown passes swiftly over the Machiavellism of the last decade, and quotes Lao-tzu: 'A leader is best when men barely know he is there, not so good when men obey and acclaim him'. He ends by repeating his warning about 'leaders who believe they have a personal right to dominate decision-making'. 'They do not deserve followers, but critics', is his final line.

Why Love Still Matters

Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain (2nd edn)

By: Sue Gerhardt
Routledge, London, 2014, 318 pp
ISBN-13: 978-0415870535, price £13.89 (paperback)
Reviewed by: Dr Maria Robinson, independent consultant, lecturer and author

> Babies are like the raw material for a self. Each one comes with a genetic blueprint and a unique range of possibilities. (p. 32)

This book, now in its second edition, builds on the reality of the above quotation, and also presents those fundamental factors which influence which of those 'unique range of possibilities' is the more likely to emerge as the child grows from infancy into adulthood. Unsurprisingly, given the title of the book, it is the unconditional love of the parent which provides the scaffold on which the child's capacity for relationships, empathy, self belief and awareness come to be built. Gerhardt provides a wealth of research and, in her introduction, insight into how awareness of the power of the emotional life has come to the fore in helping to understand adult behaviour.

It is her own background in psychotherapy which gave her the opportunity to witness both the vagaries of human behaviour and the commonalities in the sources of distress, leading her to delve into the wealth of research which provided, and still provides, ample evidence for the powerful role of the emotional environment in which we develop and, crucially, how that environment helps to shape, literally as well as metaphorically, the baby's brain. What she also stresses is that the baby is not a passive recipient of that emotional environment but is a 'partner' within it, as the baby responds and interacts with its parents and they, in turn, react and respond to the baby's own responses; and so the first and most powerful of relationships is created, and at the same time, those experiences are building on and developing early neural pathways.

We have to remember that the experiences of a baby are dictated by the adults around it, and it is they who provide the quality and tone of the emotional world. It is no wonder, then,

that while early experiences are not 'written in stone', they are still written, and so form the most fundamental of a human being's 'world view'. It is these factors, and the research that underpins such understanding, that provide the power of Gerhardt's book. She is not afraid to emphasize the importance of early relationships and the potential outcomes for the developing brain, and in particular she notes how far we seem to have moved, in our society, from appreciating the significance of pregnancy and birth and the care that mothers-to-be, as well as new mothers, need.

In her preface to this second edition, Gerhardt points to the new and exciting research of what is occurring in the womb, and it is this and other up-to-date research that 'refreshes' the seminal nature of her work. She also indicates that her aim is to 'translate' and integrate the copious amounts of research into an organized whole, and to support this aim she has divided the book into three parts. The first deals with the foundations of brain development, the second with 'shaky foundations and their consequences', and the third part brings together the findings and looks towards the future. She formulates her approach as 'systemic', noting that we live in a world full of relationships, as we continually adapt and respond to what those experiences are and what they mean to us.

In the first part dealing with brain development, there are four chapters, with the first highlighting the impact of the lifestyle of the mother-to-be and her individual perspective about her baby on the foetus itself. This chapter illustrates some of the exciting and also daunting research regarding the interaction between the mother and what is happening to the baby in the womb – especially what is particularly influential to the growing brain. Gerhardt is also very careful to emphasize the complexity of what is occurring – a good example is that of stress. Stress, if caused by circumstances beyond the mother's control, seems to have a particularly detrimental effect, and yet aspects of the mother's diet in the latter stages can seem to mitigate some of these effects on the baby's brain.

Gerhardt is also very careful to point out that an unhappy pregnancy, for whatever reason, is not by any means the end of the story. Many of the regulatory systems she describes are a 'work in progress', and so can be further influenced by what will happen after birth. We have a very long period of helplessness, and it is in this period that nature provides 'space' for the interactions between baby and its environment to continue shaping the rapidly growing brain.

What is also very striking in this chapter is not only the complexities of interaction between mother and foetus – and the stark reality of some consequences, e.g. foetal alcohol syndrome – but that Gerhardt highlights what has been alluded to earlier – attitudes to the pregnant woman. She points out that changes in society almost go against the needs of many pregnant women, not helped by the stridency of the views of some media women, of which she gives an example. These latter seem to want to deny the fact that we are evolutionary beings, and that the needs of women – and men – are not only governed by current social and cultural mores but by factors that are timeless and fundamental to our species.

In the remainder of this section, Gerhardt explores the research on brain development once the baby is born, and the reality that while the baby is indeed a partner with the parents – especially the mother – nevertheless it is the parents who are the more powerful participants. This is because the baby's brain regulatory systems are delicate and in the process of growing, and therefore subject to the vagaries of what caregivers will provide.

This leads me to applaud Gerhardt for tackling difficult issues surrounding this research. The importance of caregivers raises the spectre of 'blame', and sadly this can often confound any debate as to the needs of babies and very young children when discussing the impact of inadequate care. It is as if the feelings of adults are more important than the rights and needs of babies, and yet those adult feelings are the result of what they have experienced in their formative years, and so it goes on. Without the recognition that what we, as adults, do to babies has an impact, then we continue to neglect what inadequate care can do to blight the lives of people if there is no intervention and experience of positive care and concern. As babies we have one of the longest period of helplessness, and this in itself must beg the question of why. Gerhardt posits a possible answer by saying that 'when we are babies, our brains are socially programmed by the older members of our community so that we adapt to the particular family and social group we must live among' (p. 55).

The final chapter in this section leads into the second part, as it deals with 'corrosive cortisol' and the impact of stress on the developing brain. In a nutshell, 'stress shapes the stress response', and Gerhardt provides a wealth of research to underpin an understanding of how the types of stress a baby may experience (which may not be what we understand as stress), and what it can do to the child's own responses, and what can help or hinder. Part 1 essentially provides the 'scientific basis' for understanding emotional development in infancy.

The chapter on stress and cortisol then leads into Part 2

which deals more with the adult disorders, and the links with experience in early childhood. The chapters deal with how experience, for example, can alter brain chemistry, which in turn can lead to adult depression. Gerhardt deals in depth with depression, eating disorders and post traumatic stress disorder. A particularly powerful chapter is the one entitled 'Original sin', in which we are reminded that even the most horrific behaviour has its roots in emotional distress of one form or another. Gerhardt mentions Peter Fonagy, who posits that those who have not had the type of relationships in early life that 'allow them to identify with others' means that they simply do not equate others having feelings, as their own have been totally denied.

Gerhardt also discusses the ideas suggested by Stephen Pinker that somehow genetics are at the root of the matter. Gerhardt discusses Pinker's position regarding his attitude to genetic influences and survival instincts, but points out that much more research indicates that we are far more than our genes. His reductionist viewpoint is interesting, but very much counterbalanced by Gerhardt's careful reference to a much wider range of research and perspectives. The final part of this section deals with types of intervention, and the pitfalls and limitations of too little, too late or simply not enough.

The final chapter in the book deals with Gerhardt's thinking about current parenting practices, the difficulties of women in today's world combining work with parenting, the pressures from other women as well as society, and so on. I am fearful to disagree with her, but I do on one point, in that I don't think men and women are interchangeable, especially in the very first weeks and months of life, when I do think that nature or evolution or whatever has particularly equipped women to understand the needs of the baby. I know fathers do too, but I wonder whether both genders bring something very particular to the needs of the baby.

However, what Gerhardt does emphasize is that the needs of human babies are biological and 'not imaginary nor a propaganda tool for those who want to subjugate women' (pp. 241–2). The way parents respond to their baby's signals influences many important biological processes, and what is hopeful and reassuring is that parents often do just what is needed almost instinctively. It is also when babies are neglected, not 'seen' or attended to, or their needs somehow completely misinterpreted, that problems can arise. Such processes are responsive and capable of adaptation to new and positive influences throughout the lifespan, but nevertheless, as Gerhardt's powerful and well-researched book describes, those early experiences are important, and love does matter. S

Trauma and Experience

Trauma Therapy and Clinical Practice: Neuroscience, Gestalt and the Body

By: Miriam Taylor
Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2014, 260 pp
ISBN-13: 978-0335263097, price £29.09
Reviewed by: Gilead Yeffett, Gestalt psychotherapist

This is a book about trauma and should be read by anyone treating trauma patients. If you are a Gestalt therapist reading this book, you will feel proud to have such a comprehensive approach at your disposal. If you come to it from another approach, you will want to know more about Gestalt. Taylor's remarkable contribution is a reminder that Gestalt theory is alive and kicking, and demonstrating how Gestalt can become the therapy of choice for trauma workers.

But her task did not end there. She has also demonstrated that what the founders of Gestalt theory knew intuitively can be supported by current neuroscientific research. Whilst we must refer to current research in neuroscience in order to challenge long-held and potentially unfounded therapeutic concepts, there is always a risk of reductionism when examining phenomena through a scientific lens only. Taylor works with this risk dexterously, and cautions against 'privileging science over relationship, subjective experience and the essence of human experience' (p. 10). Not only does she remind the reader of the importance of the relationship throughout the book, she has dedicated the third part of the book to it.

Being a Gestalt therapist myself, I have read this book predominantly as written for Gestalt therapists, but therapists from other orientations will find many concepts presented in the book that can be woven into their practices. I would like to address some of these.

Concepts such as relationality, phenomenological tracking – following figures as they emerge – experimentation, creative indifference, organismic self-regulation, co-creation, figure and ground and creative adjustment are just a few that Taylor works with creatively and carefully. I say 'carefully', because some concepts, while being useful to growth, need adjustment in the case of change in trauma without losing their essence.

Perhaps the most challenging of these concepts is the paradoxical theory of change (pp. 23–4). The assumptions on which the theory is based include, among others, the ability to self-regulate, make choices, stay in the here-and-now, and bear pain, and Taylor shows throughout the book how to help trauma patients to develop these skills and capacity.

I enjoyed Taylor's use of *experiments*, a concept Gestalt therapists will be familiar with. In addition to working experimentally with clients, she has also introduced experiments that therapists can try on themselves. By doing these, readers may be able to shift their understanding from an abstract dimension to one that is more tangible, and they may also get a better grasp of the struggle experienced by trauma sufferers (p. 105).

Although Taylor writes about the close relationship between Gestalt and Sensorimotor therapy, and despite the fact that she acknowledges the common ancestry of the two approaches, I felt Sensorimotor theory and practice were somewhat redundant in her book. Tracking, contact and experimentation are, as Taylor writes (p. 6), the ancestors of some of Sensorimotor Psychotherapy methodologies, and if you follow Taylor's guidance through Gestalt Therapy you will be better equipped in delivering better trauma therapy.

In Part 1, the author introduces the Gestalt concept of the *field*, expanding the conventional view on the subject, and considering all the various forces at work. This perspective is relational: it does not see trauma as an internal problem that needs to be removed, but one that invites us to think how trauma may be maintained in the life of the sufferer. In Part 2, Taylor zooms in and considers the actual work with the individual, including hurdles and how to overcome them. Part 3 focuses on the relationship between patient and therapist, which for me carries much of the potential for healing.

Taylor's approach to working with trauma clearly is a Gestalt one, and her book deserves to be called Gestalt Trauma Therapy. For me, her contribution to Gestalt theory and practice is too important to be left for the smaller print. Having followed and implemented Taylor's approach to trauma therapy, I feel I am now on even more solid ground as a therapist working with traumatized patients. ❺

Why Love Matters for Justice

Wounded Leaders: British Elitism and the Entitlement Illusion

By: Nick Duffell
Lone Arrow Press, London, 2014, 367 pp
ISBN-13: 9-780953-790432, price £17.00 (hardback)
Reviewed by: Manu Bazzano

'I hope you're not missing me because I'm certainly not missing you', writes a small boy in a letter home to his mother (p. 80). He is lying. By this stage, the process of disowning one's feelings, essential for survivors of the institutionalized malevolence known as elite education, is complete, and the child is on his way to build a functioning false self, essential in his future life in the high echelons of society. This little-soldier-in-the-making may one day shout irately at his perceived inferiors as 'plebs' from the height of a bicycle seat. He may publicly address in Parliament a woman from the opposition with the phrase 'Calm down, dear', or will do his bumbling buffoon shtick whilst achieving precious little for the town he runs apart, from advancing his own profile. Most therapists will readily maintain that love is important to the development of a healthy human being, particularly during childhood. Many of us received with enthusiasm the publication a while ago of a book that spelled out *why* love matters. Of course, given the views now in vogue – psychotherapy trainees being taught how to *measure* empathy, and so forth – those timid two words *love matters* are beginning to sound seditious.

But is it enough to say that love matters? I wonder how many among us are ready to go a little further than our ritual stint of 'audience democracy' – the indolently benign stance of tapping one's foot in agreement to the tune of worthy beliefs. My guess is: not many. Only very few of us – and Nick Duffell is among them – are geared up to expose the massive financial and institutional interests established on the premise that love does *not* matter *in the least*. Only very few of us are ready to dedicate their life's work to clarify how love and nurture are consistently hindered in order to prop up a pervasive pathology known

as the 'national character ideal'.

One of these giant vested interests is the elite education in Britain's public schools, those gilded factories of snobbery and entitlement that produce our future alleged leaders. In his latest book, Nick Duffell tackles this very subject with courage and tenacity, adding a political dimension to the work he has done over the last 25 years, from ongoing men's therapy groups to forays into radio and TV. This book is also a socio-political counterpart to his previous book on public schools, *The Making of Them* (Duffell, 2000).

Well documented, erudite, suitably fervent in its denunciation of excruciatingly unjust, cruel and psychologically antediluvian institutions, this book is a must read for mental health practitioners, and for those who want to gain a deeper insight into the workings of British society. As far as I'm aware, there is no other psychologist at present who has been able to identify a direct link between the dissociative process a 'boarder' is prone to in order to survive, and the intrinsically dissociative structure of places (for instance) such as the House of Commons.

Indiscriminate in his generosity, the author quotes approvingly from insightful thinkers and practitioners such as Panksepp and Schore, but also from dubious and crankier sources such as Wilber, a self-styled 'philosopher' and a demigod among New Agers.

Throughout the book, Duffell uncovers crucial connections between psychology and politics, two spheres held separate by an artificial barrier. Psychological insight is priceless in helping us dissect the very apparatus of exploitation and the hidden motives behind a vast order of injustice. As Duffell writes, 'dissociation became the unconscious driveshaft of the engine of colonialism' (p. 168). That London and England 'still insist on a special role in Europe' is due to the fact that the predominant idea is still that 'we are a leading world power' (p. 122).

The author understands such delusions of grandeur and entitlement as part of what he calls 'the Rational Man Project', a pervasive and culturally predominant mode that shuns vulnerability and disdains the heart. The culprit here is the culture and philosophy of the era of the Enlightenment, which Duffell sees as a uniformly consistent mode of thinking that has enthroned Reason above all other deities. This is not quite right, for alongside the *Encyclopédie philosophes*, the Enlightenment also produced Rousseau, a philosopher on whose ideas the Summerhill libertarian school of Alexander Neill was founded, to quote one example. A key Enlightenment figure, Rousseau also inspired the equally progressive notion of 'negative education' of Georges Lapassade, and was an influence on the psychology and pedagogy of Carl Rogers. To Kant, by far the greatest philosopher of the Enlightenment, we owe the birth of modern ethics, of the 'mystery of the moral law inside me', as mysterious as the starry sky at night. To see the Enlightenment and 'Reason' as the culprit is to forget that without its influence, we would still be burning witches at the stake. It would be a different matter if the culprit here is *rationalist man*. But the rationalist man venture started way back, with Socrates and the decline of the great tragedians Aeschylus and Sophocles, and continued with Christianity. This topic is too controversial, its implications too vast, to be discussed here. Perhaps the 'rational man project' is another name for positivism and neo-positivism. But then again, Duffell's take on neuroscience, summoned to substantiate his argument, is seemingly over-optimistic, given that the book draws no substantial distinction between the prevalently reductionist version of neuroscience currently in vogue and its more sober and inspiring manifestations. More importantly, however, by assigning the role of the guilty party to an important but rather abstract notion ('rationality'), the issue of class division (crucial in understanding elite education) takes the back seat.

Compared to the overgrown boys that make up the current coalition government in the UK, Obama does look like a true statesman. Yet the author overplays his accomplishments, considering that next to nothing has been achieved by an administration keen on drones, speechifying and the maintenance of the status quo at home and in the Middle East. I am not convinced that, as the author seems to imply, better examples of leadership are on offer in Continental Europe, either.

As an interesting alternative to the institutionalized pathology of the public schools system, the author proposes that 'the stock of boarding schools be recycled and used as sixth form colleges' (p. 334), a public–private partnership example modelled on the Danish *Efterskole* or after-school, with 'per-child subsidy for any form of education outside their immediate control' (p. 335): those who could pay would pay.

As a way of understanding the psychology of our so-called leaders, this book works a treat, and there are some real gems to be found here: 'In Blair' – the author writes – 'I often thought the puffed-up boy was noticeable in how he walked, with his suit buttons determinedly fastened' (p. 104).

Reference

Duffell, N. (2000) *The Making of Them: The British Attitude to Children and the Boarding School System*, London: Lone Arrow Press