Book Reviews

The Counsellor.... as if Soul and Spirit Matter: Inspirations from Anthroposophy

By William Bento, Edmund Knighton, Roberta Nelson and David Tresemer
SteinerBooks
$35.00 (pb)
Reviewed by **John Lees**

This is a rich and varied book. The primary authors are William Bento and David Tresemer with contributions from Edmund Knighton and Roberta Nelson. It looks at an approach to counselling, psychology, and coaching inspired by the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner. It represents what I refer to as the transpersonal stream of anthroposophic approaches to therapy.

The scholarship of the book is broad. At one extreme there are chapters which discuss some general principles of anthroposophy in the field in a way which is accessible to the general reader. They are written in a language which is familiar and easy to follow, and does not require too much in-depth knowledge of the subject apart from a general knowledge of psychology and human development. At the other extreme are chapters which are the fruits of many years research and which I imagine would stretch most experienced clinicians and academics. As an experienced psychotherapy clinician and academic myself who is familiar with Steiner's work, I was challenged by these chapters. For instance, the chapter on personality disorders by William Bento, the founder of this stream of therapies based on anthroposophy, contained an extremely insightful, creative but complex perspective on the problem which I felt I needed to digest, meditate on and then, over a period of several years, integrate into my practice as a result of an ongoing iterative process of reflection on practice in the light of the ideas put forward in that chapter.

The book includes a range of perspectives which are often discussed in the profession in an oppositional and exclusive way. For instance, it encompasses a medically orientated and a humanistic approach, a health-orientated and an illness-orientated approach, a spiritual and a psychopathology approach, an emphasis on cultivating health (salutogenesis) at the same time as addressing illness, a transpersonal and a developmental approach and many more. But it does so in a way which integrates them into an inclusive whole. This capacity to span such different positions, which usually create schism and conflict, intrigued me and was unusual and welcome.

Building on this theme of the breadth of its scholarship the book both scales the heights and plumbs the depths of our existence. The authors discuss the I organization – the part of us which is 'boundaried' but not 'diffuse' and 'has continuity over great spans of time' (p. 30) – which is central to anthroposophic therapy, the relationship between our soul life and the movement of the planets and the abject suffering experienced by many people today. In our struggle to achieve our true human

dignity and potential we have to struggle very hard. Spiritual development is not an easy option. We have to 'polish the rough diamond' by addressing its attraction to 'darkness, bondage, complexity, grief, difficulty, strife, the frustrating crunch of inadequate time, death' (p. 136). Human beings have unlimited potential for further development but the idol also has clay feet. So a central thread running through the book is self-development: what David Tresemer refers to as the need to 'transform the putrid kitchen scraps of our lives into life-affirming compost' (p. 137) in order to develop consciousness of one's humanity (which Steiner, as quoted in the book, set as the essence of anthroposophy).

The book highlights the fact that we are facing a unique and difficult point in history. We are facing the possibility of initiation as a 'global event which can affect all of humanity' but which, 'for those unprepared for it, has spawned increased pathology in every nation' (p. 55). Having said this we can learn 'to see the symptoms of pathology as an initiatory process' which 'can liberate the postmodern human being from the existential despair and dread that accompanies these changes' (p. 55). So spirituality, pathology and mental illness and health are not so far from each other as we think: 'we all have attributes of every personality disorder' and so anthroposophy adopts a 'multi-dimensional approach' which 'demonstrates the fluidity of personality' (p. 167), since personality disorders are just exaggerations of qualities which we all have. In fact the events of 9/11 in 2001 are seen as an important turning point in the lifting of the veil between earthly and spiritual existence since, ever since then, it has become more common for us to see 'the terror that actually does take place across the threshold' (p. 330), to find it more difficult to distinguish fantasy from reality, good from evil. Spiritual awakening in this age is not, in the view of this book, a benign process. It is powerful and terrible as well as opening up new possibilities and vistas in our development: a view which I, too, strongly hold. Many of the people we meet in our consulting rooms are on a 'path' which has become very unbalanced. They are in a sense initiations which have gone awry.

All books have strengths and weaknesses. One strength of this book is the wide range of styles which range from structured thinking with tables and drawings to articles in layman's language. But this can also be a weakness since some people may find that some chapters meet their needs whereas others do not. There are many apposite phrases which are used to describe this book – the notion of 'adaptation to a dysfunctional world', 'individuation as the apotheosis of development'. Indeed, the importance of relationship in psychological therapy is understood in spiritual terms as a means of transforming unhelpful karmic patterns. I wish readers well in their search to find their relationship with the rich harvest of ideas out of anthroposophy which the book provides.

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A Psychology of Human Dignity

By Ad Dekkers (trans. Ed O'Sullivan)
SteinerBooks, Great Barrington, Mass., 2015, 424pp
Price (paperback) £23.44 / $30.00
Reviewed by **Richard House**

> Pathology is healed not only by healing symptoms; it is also healed by conquering or reconquer-ing human dignity. Hence the title of this book.... I myself am always trying to find out more about the kind of self-knowledge that has a healing potential and how the client can be empowered to harness their potential. That is the origin of this book.
>
> (Dekkers, pp. 301, 322)

While I'm not altogether sure about the notion of 'conquering' human dignity (this book is translated from the Dutch – *Psychotherapie van de menselijke waardigheid* – originally published in 2011; but alas I'm in no linguistic position to assess the quality of the translation), I think the sentiment in this opening epigraph will resonate with many if not most readers of this journal. I did a search on the Amazon website for books with the terms 'dignity' and counselling/therapy in the title – and the only other text I could find in print was Susan Levine's (2015) 'Dignity Matters: Psychoanalytic and Psychosocial Perspectives'. Perhaps it says something about the psychotherapy enterprise that explicit reference to human dignity is deafening in its absence – and it speaks to why therapy praxis would surely benefit from some new, erstwhile little-known impulses. For me, the book under review here falls squarely into this latter category.

In his thoughtful and provocative Foreword, which almost warrants a review in its own right, William Bento Ph.D. speaks of Ad Dekkers as a 'pragmatic phenomenologist exploring the life of the soul', and a 'spiritual scientific researcher' (p. xiii) with his 'ground-breaking approach to historical consciousness' (pp. xii, xiv), and the way in which Dekkers and his wife have 'set the foundation for the credibility of Anthroposophical Psychotherapy', with a detailed range of experientially flexible, transformative exercises that 'address the development of soul faculties necessary for... the practice of psycho-therapy' (ibid.). Much of this will resonate strongly with humanistic practitioners, with its reference to the proposition that psychotherapy cannot effect quick fixes to the personality; that psychotherapy is about changing society as well as individuals, and is thus an important political voice in socio-cultural issues; and that as society and humanity evolve, we will need new, historically specific diagnoses and therapeutic interventions – hence the need for a future orientation for psychotherapy (pp. xiii– xiv). Bento also usefully foregrounds Dekkers' emphasis on developing 'imaginative cognition'.

Bento goes on to speak of Dekkers' 'therapy of the soul' (p. xv), and the way in which his anthroposophical psychotherapy challenges the Cartesian–Kantian paradigm that understands the human being genetically, chemically and materialistically, and which therefore generates 'manipulative intervention(s) to change people', rather than creating 'a sacred contract between therapist and patient to undergo a journey of discovery and transformation' (ibid.).

The book's author Ad Dekkers is, then, an anthroposophic psychotherapist (an approach to therapy underpinned by Rudolf Steiner's cosmology and many indications – see guest editorial in this theme issue). Originally trained by renowned anthroposophic writer Bernard Lievegoed, Dekkers is interested in developing new methods of training in anthroposophic psychotherapy (which he has delivered in many countries worldwide), and which A psychology of human dignity articulates in great detail. Dekkers is president of the International Federation of Anthroposophic Psychotherapy Associations and the co-International Coordinator of Psychotherapy in the Medical Section of

the School of Spiritual Science, subsection Psychotherapy, at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland (the world headquarters of the anthroposophical movement inspired by Rudolf Steiner's indications and legacy).

The book is the result of Dekkers' life's work in developing the psychotherapeutic craft in a strongly humanistic way that is enabling of therapist and client responsibility-taking, and which strongly privileges a direct and honest link to day-to-day reality. A feature of Dekkers' approach is the explicit relevance he affords to the larger world situation in which we find ourselves (i.e. the 'society' pole of the self–society couple), in conjunction with one's stage of life.

Dekkers has spent some 30 years developing these detailed yet flexible, psychotherapeutic exercises for stimulating practitioners and the interested lay reader. The book is written very much with the practising therapist in mind.

The book's useful Introduction focuses on the development of psychotherapy as a craft (rather than science, notice), and goes into some detail about the many exercises that are a central feature of the book, and which often take a psychodramatic form (there are over 400 pages to the text, with nearly half of the book being taken up with detailed experiential exercises). We read of the centrality of experience in therapy, of its intrinsically political nature, of psychotherapy as a craft, and of the importance of observation, accurate phenomenological description and thinking.

The book consists of four chapters: 'Perception, Memory, and More', 'Phases of Life: The Focus on Development', 'The Impact of History: The Generations as a Conduit', and 'The Self-Aware "I"'. Throughout, Rudolf Steiner's worldview is woven into and used to illuminate the discussion of the various core themes, and Dekkers stays as true as possible to Steiner's original terms and concepts. It should be emphasized that the book is essentially a study and training text or manual for psychotherapy training courses – though there is much here for more general readers interested in personal and spiritual development, too.

A short review can only impressionistically scratch the surface of this weighty tome – weighty in terms of ideas, as well as in sheer length. I really liked the deep engagement with memory, remembering, perception and observation in Chapter 1, with phases of life in Chapter 2, and with the neglected role of history's impact on the psyche in Chapter 3. Indeed, there is so much wisdom threaded through the text, grounded in some decades of engaged anthroposophical therapy practice, and I believe that practitioners of all orientations will find much to inform and deepen their practice in these pages – not least the deeply respectful and non-hierarchical approach to the dignity of the person. I also like the engagement with the complexity of the therapy experience, and the eschewing of simplistic, reductionist approaches: 'The complicated relationships between situations, events, and memories mean that it is impossible to develop a straightforward view about psychotherapy' (p. 35). And in true humanistic ethos: 'Psychotherapy is not about transferring the psychotherapist's psychological recommendations to the client' (p. 50).

In order to give a flavour of the range of exercises included, here is a selected list of some that might interest humanistic and transpersonal practitioners and trainers (note that there is a total of 48 separate exercises in the book, helpfully tabulated in Table 4, pp. 382–383): The influence of upbringing and school on memory depictions (p. 93); How does wisdom actually come about? (p. 101); Being confronted with your own age (p. 145); Mirroring (p. 157); Lessons of history transferred by the parents (p. 215); What is an 'existential message'? (p. 226); Physical surroundings as a silent co-educator (p. 234); 'I'-development in the course of life (p. 306); The first memory (p. 312); Peak experiences: revelations of the spirit (p. 318); The tension between freedom and destiny (p. 338) – and so on.

A number of ideas and propositions struck me as important: for example, that stage of life and age are vital considerations regarding how to work therapeutically with a given client; that the book is full of illustrative cases that exemplify the more theoretical discussions; and that here we have an approach to psychotherapy that's clearly not well known, and yet which offers perspectives and practices from which all therapists could learn and so enhance their practice. What comes across strongly is that Dekkers is a writer and practitioner of great experience and wisdom, that the book is the fruit of many years of personal and professional experience and development, and that it is written in a refreshingly non-doctrinaire way.

Some possible shortcomings are that as already intimated, the book is long, and hard work to read. I have a strong hunch that I'd have enjoyed the book a lot more had I been a young or mid-career therapist thirsting for new knowledge and approaches, rather than the former therapist that I am. I wouldn't go as far as one Amazon reviewer, who wrote that the book 'fails as a book', and is in 'dire need of an editor or two' – 'you have to struggle to get through the fog'. It really depends on whether one treats it as a book or a source-book; as the latter, it works well and is, indeed, a formidable achievement.

I also have an issue about asking questions – a product no doubt of my own first training in counselling and groupwork with Tony Storey (1987–90), in which asking questions was completely anathema, and was seen as being unavoidably intrusive and therapist-centred. My ex and late Roehampton colleague Val Todd also did her Ph.D. on the place of the question in psychotherapy, and the multiple impact that question-posing has in the work. So I winced somewhat when on page 43 we read that for each sensory area, 'we ask as many questions as possible'. I was left wondering whether the question-posing was far more to do with personal development work for training therapists rather than for client work per se. But it might be that in order to carry out anthroposophical psychotherapy thoroughly, asking questions of clients might indeed be necessary and seen as appropriate, with a thought-through rationale.

I sense that some readers will love this book (it does have pretty impeccable humanistic and transpersonal credentials), and yet others will perhaps find it somewhat infuriating. I hope that this review will have helped the reader to decide into which category she or he falls – and hence whether or not they would wish to read this source-book-cum-training-manual.

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Postformal Education: A Philosophy of Complex Futures

By Jennifer M. Gidley, Springer, Switzerland, 2016, 291 pp
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price (hardback) 93.59 euros, (paperback) 41.59 euros, (e-book) 74.96 euros
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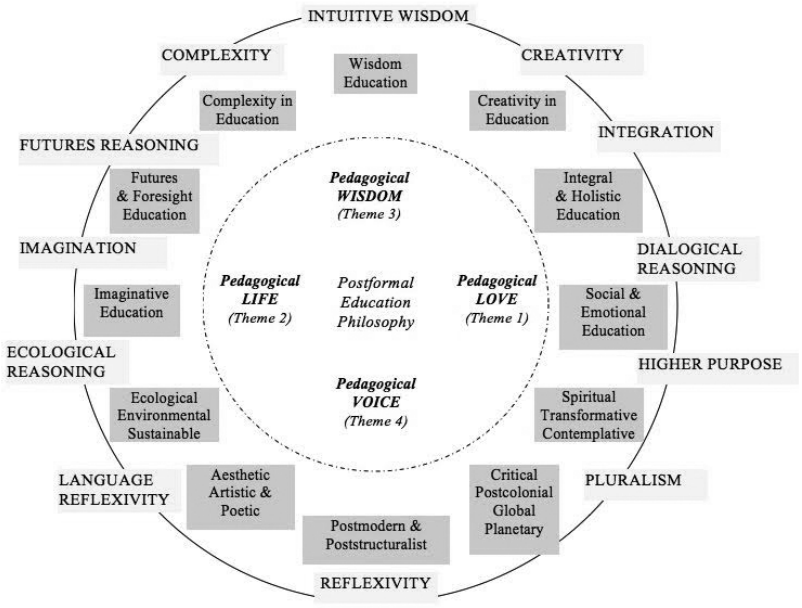
Jennifer Gidley is an Australian psychologist, educator, author and futurist – a global thought leader and advocate for human-centred futures in an era of hi-tech hype and hubris. She is Adjunct Professor at the Institute for Sustainable Futures, UTS, Sydney, former President of the World Futures Studies Federation (2009–2017), UNESCO and UN partner and global peak body for Futures studies. Previously, she founded and pioneered a Steiner school (1984–94), was an academic researcher at three Australian Universities (1995–2012), and is currently a consulting researcher based in Europe.

In her new book *Postformal Education*, Jennifer Gidley argues that, 'What masquerades as education today must be seen for what it is – an anachronistic relic of the industrial past'. Her challenge is how we can co-create radically new forms of education to help young people develop the creativity, resilience, personal leadership, qualities and well-being they need to engage with such challenges as global warming, global uncertainty, complexity and chaotic change.

Gidley explains why the current educational model is obsolete, and is failing both students and educators. She offers a postformal educational philosophy based on her lifelong research evolving educational futures across disciplines as a foundation for educational futures. Teacher educators, educational philosophers, educational and developmental psychologists and researchers will welcome this exploration of transformational psychological and educational theories, designed for the complexity of the 21st century.

The book is structured into four main components where Gidley introduces the latest psychology research of postformal reasoning, explores the educational implications of postformal psychology, connects postformal psychology with postformal approaches to education and, lastly, integrates diverse 'alternative pedagogies', including Rudolf Steiner/Waldorf education, into a postformal educational philosophy.

Figure 7.1: Postformal Education Philosophy for Complex Futures



She emphasizes that postformal education is, '... not about making small changes in an obsolete system, but about co-evolving a radically new education that is complexly human and simply divine'. She offers insights from evolution of consciousness research that illustrate the significance of the shifting global mind-set seeing an integral culture emerging, draws upon adult developmental psychology to theorize a dozen postformal reasoning qualities and engages in the dialogues between these postformal pedagogies, postformal reasoning qualities and evolutionary themes. From these dialogues, she distils four core pedagogical values – *love, life, wisdom and voices* – and places them at the heart of her postformal educational philosophy. She vividly explores how we can strengthen the developing consciousness of young people so that they can develop the passion, the vitality, the wisdom and the courage to face the future ahead.

The book is brought to life through its cross-disciplinary theory, principles and argument. However, for those readers not used to such a scholarly approach, her argument might have been better illustrated by drawing on postformal educational examples of good practice. Comparing an 'industrial' Waldorf/Steiner model with a postformal Waldorf educational model could help clarify what the author means, for example. There is a wealth of emerging examples of postformal education all over the world upon which to draw. Below are just some examples of what I consider to be emerging postformal educational approaches.

Firstly, a powerful emerging learning approach is the use of narrative, story and storytelling for making sense of this chaotic world. This cross-curriculum approach develops emotional resilience, increases literacy, cultivates imagination, wisdom, love and finding voice. A moving example of this was my hearing elective mute Tower Hamlets students telling stories in English as a second language. Consider Georgiana Keable's (2017) storied pilgrimages with teenagers, her Tun Tree story addressing dispossession and her Oslo Storyhuset; all embrace cross-cultural storytelling and community building.

Secondly, the Forest School movement has grown, using the woods and nature for early learning without walls. Children love them. I remember some surprised Oxfordshire infant teachers telling me how on a trip to Norway, 6 year olds were teaching 4 year olds how to abseil down a cliff behind their kindergarten, with no adult in sight!

Thirdly, there is the growth of home education, partly as a response to 'factory schooling'. Our small town of Stroud in Gloucestershire, UK may have up to 100 families home educating, with shared facilities such as co-op allotments, a weekly Forest School, a choir, and shared creative and social activities. Part sceptic, I came across some research that showed home-educated students to be 2–3 years 'ahead' of their state and private-school peers, when editing a home education book (Dowty, 2003).

Fourthly, Ruskin Mill Further Education College near Stroud has successfully pioneered a powerfully transformative form of craft, nature, artistic and therapeutic education for special needs teenagers (http://www.rmt.org).

Fifthly, I worked with a group of 16 and 17 year olds to co-create the Waldorf College they envisioned, based on their analysis of the skills, qualities and knowledge they would need to thrive in the changing world they saw coming. One student, Leo, became highly sceptical on Day 2 of the co-creating workshop. When I asked him what he was passionate about, he said ecological engineering. We discovered that Reading University offered this, so I suggested he ring up their non-traditional admissions tutor. A bit crestfallen but reassured, Leo told me that the tutor had bitten his hand off, and wanted him to come next year with his learning projects portfolio when he was ready! He is now in fact an architect.

Lastly, I have been working with some Norwegian

place-based learning educators, storytellers, eco-preneurs and ecologists who are using their whole fjord, from kindergarten to college, for learning without walls.

Perhaps practical examples such as these might inspire a complementary, follow-up book. However, the pragmatic approach of postformal education philosophy and psychology outlined by Gidley is a very useful resource from which to inquire into emerging experiments in postformal education in order for both students and educators to reflect upon and improve their practice and learning.

A final reflection: the new English GCSE exams grade papers from grades 1 to 9 have come out as I write. Just how meaningful is their distinction between a grade 6 and a 7? Whilst such Gradgrind education keeps filling buckets, Gidley's postformal education philosophy can help students and educators light their learning fires.

Martin Large is publisher and founder of Hawthorn Press, Stroud, UK.

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http://www.rmt.org/.