

Retro Book Review

Implausible Professions: Arguments for Pluralism and Autonomy in Psychotherapy and Counselling (2nd extended edn)

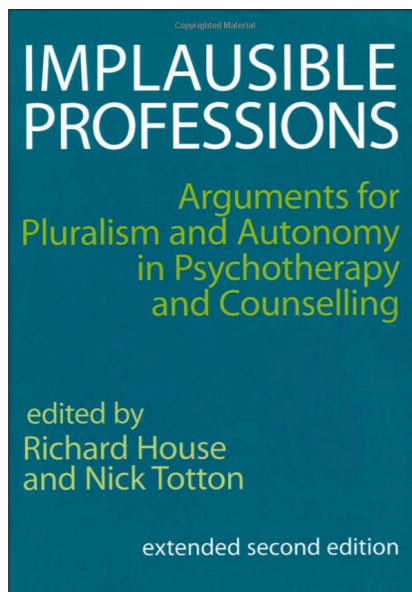
Edited by Richard House and Nick Totton, PCCS Books, Ross-on-Wye, 2011, 388 pp, £20.00, ISBN 978 1 906254 33 9 (orig. 1997).

Reviewed by **Seamus Nash**, UKCP psychotherapist and supervisor
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It has been a very interesting pilgrimage reviewing this 2nd edition of *Implausible Professions*. I was aware of the book when it was first published; however I deliberately let it 'go under my radar', as it were. In reflecting why I allowed this to happen, as I read the book I realised that a major reason was that I would have to engage with the issues that the book was exploring at some point in my career. I received my professional accreditation in 2008 and, having gone through a lengthy training process, I wanted all the trimmings that professional status would give me; reading the book would certainly 'burst my bubble'; so why think about these things *now*?

The book raises the question, do we need statutory regulation? If so, which form should it take? Am I concerned about the growing 'professionalization' and 'commodification' (McDonaldization) of counselling and psychotherapy? Does the assumption that the client is always in a vulnerable position, by definition, and thus needs to be protected by a strictly regulated profession and codes, stand up to deeper scrutiny now? Indeed, has politics anything to do with our profession at all? The reality is that this book, in my view, is *even more* important now than it was in 1997 and 2011. The same issues are relevant, the same debates have happened and are still present, and I have a real feeling – with regards to the book now as much as then – *have we missed the boat*?

My experiences as a delegate to the Humanistic and Integrative section of UKCP soured my perception of my



profession, and led me to believe that politics has an unfortunate and dehumanizing effect upon both the client and the professional. This book explodes the myth (this is a personal view) that politics has no part in our profession or, indeed, regulation. As Peter Schmid entitled his 2012 paper, 'Psychotherapy is political or it is not psychotherapy'. There is a politics of regulation and professionalism – this is what the book acknowledges, so let's get 'real' about it! In addition, as professionalization has grown, so has 'medicalization', and *Implausible Professions* offers a stage for debate about the medicalization not just of client distress, but of our very profession.

Implausible Professions was first published in 1997. Previous reviews of the book offer a fascinating insight into the politics of our profession at the time. David Kalisch wrote that 'overall the case for pluralism and autonomy is well made' (1998, p. 46), and that the arguments against statutory regulation have not been well won. Stalled, maybe, accepted – I'm not so sure. A major strength of the book lies in its capacity to allow the reader the opportunity to explore the pros and cons of this debate at their own pace, presenting clear arguments to aid reflection and decision. It offers a new solution rather than adopting an 'either/or' position, offering the novice and seasoned professional a 'both/and' solution to statutory regulation. This includes a plethora of choices to enable inclusivity of all opinions, alternative complaints processes, peer reviews and networking, and non-hierarchical accreditation, to name a few.

Implausible Professions is structured into five sections that explore, (1) the dynamics of professionalism, (2) challenging the basis of professionalization, (3) from professionalization to pluralism, (4) the philosophy of pluralism and self/peer regulation, and finally, (5) pluralism and self-regulation in practice.

The first section sets the scene with John Heron leading the charge regarding the politics of transference, followed by chapters by David Wasdell on accreditation and its 'shadow', and two excellently written chapters by Richard Mowbray. I felt the passion in the arguments expressed, and the clarity with which they were argued and written. I really enjoyed this section, and it set up the debate nicely. I have acknowledged that I had been neglectful and hesitant in engaging in this whole area after spending years training and achieving professional registration and accreditation; however, this book helped me realise that by not familiarizing myself with the issues, there would surely come a time when I would be required to.

As there are far too many chapters to exude about, some personal favourites are how the concept of a 'rigorous training' is looked at and of how exactly this protects the public (House, Chapter II.2), raising the questions of whether training is really a guarantee of competence. The philosophy of pluralism and its practice are explored in a lively manner by Andrew Samuels (IV.1). For a discussion on the client being 'too vulnerable to choose', see Mowbray (I.3). I would also recommend Nick Totton's chapter on the medical model and professionalization (II.3) and Brian Thorne's 'The Accountable Therapist' (III.1).

For this reader, some questions I would have liked contributors to grapple with and provide thoughts on are: what is the image of the practitioner that the profession and professionalization/regulation are seeking to uphold/promote? Is this consonant with our profession's beliefs and, indeed, of how it sees itself? What is the image of the human being that the industry seeks to uphold? I would have appreciated a deeper look into the assumptions which underlie the images of both practitioner and client within codes of ethics – for example, do codes of ethics promote or reinforce the image of the practitioner as untrustworthy, in need of being scrutinized and controlled and the client in need of protection? I also note that Totton considers psychotherapy to be not just a political but a *spiritual* practice, and I would welcome more contributions that explore psychotherapy as a political, spiritually informed practice. All excellent stuff, however.

It is clear from reading the book that what the authors think is that professionalization and regulation will inevitably lead to institutionalization, sameness, reactive working and upholding the status quo – both inside the professions and without. As Walsch writes, 'he whom the Government supports, supports the Government' (1997, p. 162). In an age in which neoliberal ideas are so embedded into our culture and society, attempting to think from a different perspective is met with ridicule, derision and fear mongering. We, as a profession, need to be careful and astute.

Returning to the word 'pilgrimage'. I used it because a 'pilgrimage' is a journey or a search of moral or spiritual significance. Although a pilgrimage may be thought of travelling to a place or shrine, it can also be thought of as a metaphorical journey into one's own beliefs. I end with some further reflections: What does my profession stand for, and how does it 'stand'? Where is the 'spiritual' in this? What and where is the 'soul' of counselling and psychotherapy, and how is this demonstrated? If codes were built on a trust of the practitioner, what would this whole debate and regulation process look like? Have practitioners truly thought of the various issues *Implausible Professions* outlines? Indeed, how informed are practitioners of these issues? Do you know it all – indeed, are you bothered?

Well, if you're not frightened to look at the assumptions and concerns raised within, and if you're brave enough to explore and perhaps even revise some opinions, even being open to being informed and to be impacted by them, well, this IS the book for you because 'what we resist, persists' (Walsch, 2009, p. 105)

References

- Kalisch, D (1998). Book Review, in *Self and Society*, 26 (1), p. 46.
- Schmid, P (2012). 'Psychotherapy is political or it is not psychotherapy: the person-centred approach as an essentially political venture', *Person-Centred and Experiential Psychotherapies*, 11 (2), pp. 95–108.
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