

BOOK REVIEWS

Socrates in Love, Philosophy for a Passionate Heart

Christopher Phillips. (2007). W.W. Norton. Hardback £14.99.

Socrates in Love: Philosophy for a Passionate Heart investigates the possibility of creating a ‘world of loving today by applying the loving ways of Greeks of old’. Reminiscent of Michael Palin, Christopher Phillips embarks on a global quest that will explore love of family, neighbour, country, and God, in the gambling dens of Las Vegas and other ‘hot spots’ before finally reaching the Hiroshima Peace Park in Japan. The philosophical focus for his travels is the five types of love that inspired Socrates: Eros (erotic), Storge (family), Philia (friendship), Xenia (stranger), and Agape (unconditional). Phillips says that to be successful in this life we need to harness all these types of love in concert.

Phillips is despondent about the state of philosophy in the world. All too often it is regarded as a dry academic discipline, rather than something that is living and essential in approaching the world and puzzling out one’s place in it. He is an ‘*educator*’ of ordinary people and uses the example of Socrates to help teach us how to expand our intellectual and imaginative horizons. In using the vehicle of café society, he brings Socratic discourse to ordinary people and places so they can start to think anew about their lives. Phillips describes this as a type of ‘*love-in*’ and something that originated in his first book, *Socrates Café: A Fresh Taste of Philosophy*.

Phillips’ unconventional title suggests this will be no pedestrian study of Socrates. He disconcerts his reader almost from the start with his mix of unscripted café society dialogues with the prose of Socrates and ‘*great philosophers of love*’. Their commentaries on love pepper the pages of the book and include Bertrand Russell, Simone de Beauvoir, Sigmund Freud, Herbert Marcuse, Martha Nussbaum, and the mystical Rumi, amongst others. When Phillips introduces ordinary people discussing the relevance of Socratic love to their lives he does so with chapter titles that are idiosyncratic: ‘*Where is the Love*’, ‘*Heart Shaped World*’, ‘*Drinking Party*’, ‘*Sex Appeal*’, ‘*If It Makes You Happy*’, ‘*Crazy Love*’.

In ‘*If It Makes You Happy*’ the reader thinks Phillips will debate the question, ‘*What is Eros?*’ Instead, April, one of the café society, fondly reminisces about the ‘*free love*’ generation of the 1960’s, ‘*It is a love, not a sex, free-for-all*’. Disconcertingly, we then find her backtracking and explaining somewhat defensively, ‘*The counterculture was about exploring and experimenting with sex, drugs, the pill, and rock and roll – in the name of a more liberating love – eros.*’ Whilst Phillips is clearly able to facilitate some very frank confessions from his group, there seemed to

this reviewer to be a marked absence of Socratic questioning to open-out the discussion of Eros and take it to a different level of exchange. Phillips sidesteps any further discussion, with April reflecting that she would not like her children to find out how she practised Eros in her youth because she wants better things for them. Phillips moves swiftly on to a short paper introducing Bertrand Russell, entitled '*Making Sex Taboos Taboo*' that briefly discusses whether Russell was a '*sexual libertine*' or not. There is a giddiness about his material that was very distracting to this reader.

In the introduction, Phillips describes an old Greek man who is transfixed by a woman passing out meals to the homeless – many of whom greet her with tight hugs. The old Greek man declares this generosity to be '*the language of love*'. Phillips discloses the fact that the old Greek man is fluent in the '*the language of love*' because he has had his share of heartbreak and tragedy. This is a promising beginning because the old man seems to embody much of what Socratic love is all about. But, sadly, this promising thread is lost in the many diverse and uninteresting discussions that follow. I found these commentaries on ancient and modern philosophers puzzling without more linking and philosophical discussion. It is never an easy task to convey complex philosophical ideas into everyday language and I think Christopher Phillips has been very brave to try, but this was not a winning formula for achieving this. Instead, I found myself wincing with embarrassment.

Socrates in Love: Philosophy for a Passionate Heart provides a sketchy outline of Socratic love that can be read as much for entertainment as for any philosophical discussion. I was not persuaded by the claims Phillips makes for his use of Socratic Method in the Café Society dialogues with ordinary people, but I do share some of his ideals. It is not without some irony that where he falls down is in the absence of method: he does not directly confront others with his intellectual curiosity, or engage in debate to allow them to see their possible shortcomings - and this is a great shame. Nevertheless, at the end of the book, Phillips does seem to have persuaded at least one person to take an interest in philosophy. He pays tribute to Bill, a retired postal worker, who '*never read a word of philosophy*' until he joined café society, but has become so smitten that he enrolled on a college course. Gratifying though this is, I cannot help but think that Phillips' should be reminded of his declared aim to take philosophy out of the lecture room and into ordinary life. Perhaps, in real life he has done this, but fails to demonstrate it successfully in this book.

Socrates is such a unique figure in philosophy and has the ability speak to every generation. I was disappointed that Phillips did not include more of this philosophy instead of relying so heavily on other commentators to enrich his work. I have always felt that it was Socrates' inquiries into ethics that truly showed his originality as a philosopher, '*the greatest of all human goods is to discuss virtue*' (Plato.Apol.38a). Comparing *Socrates in*

Love: Philosophy for a Passionate Heart to other possible books in the same category, I cannot agree with AC Grayling's book cover recommendation, 'that everyone who wishes to better understand love's five great forms should have a copy'. A quick search on the internet can easily produce other books that will engage the reader in a deeper and more thought-provoking discussion of Socratic love.

Reference

Taylor, C.C.W. (1998). *Socrates: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maureen Cavill

Transactional Analysis: A Relational Perspective

Helena Hargaden and Charlotte Sills. (2002). Brunner-Routledge. Paperback £19.99.

This comprehensive book sets out to reveal and expand the significance of the relationship between client and therapist. It does this by providing a theoretical and practical model of relational psychotherapy with an integrative approach grounded in transactional analysis (TA). Helena Hargaden and Charlotte Sills strive, with theoretical assistance and applied methodology of TA, to chart dimensions of uncertainty and the unknown, which they describe as '*deconfusion of the Child ego state*', where they believe the '*self*' is located. The authors have used their experience as practitioners to illustrate their relational model and the book is peppered with clinical vignettes from their client population in an attempt to bridge theory with practice.

The book covers several areas and is separated into four main stages. In stage one - The Approach, the reader is introduced via a story of a client, to the developmental theory of self, aided by several diagrams intended to provide a visual demonstration of theory. Here, Hargaden and Sills highlight the significance of empathy for the development of the 'healthy' self and facilitation of a therapeutic relationship. They describe empathy as '*...a combination of skill and technique and a reflection of who we are and how we are ourselves*' (p.35).

In stage two – *The Dynamics of the Relationship*, the authors examine intersubjectivity in relational psychotherapy with specific focus on the transference relationship about which they propose three categories of phenomena: projective, introjective, and transformational transferences. They describe counter transference thus:

In the relational model of transactional analysis...we think of the therapeutic relationship as the interactional field between two people.