

BOOK REVIEWS

In this issue we are pleased to have a wider than usual variety of reviews. Philosophers will find reviews of books on Heidegger and Husserl while therapeutic practice is addressed in different ways by an accessible new book on existential skills and by a more unconventional and autobiographical study of love and grief. We continue the therapeutic practice theme with a review, which may be surprising to some readers, of a book on CBT. Erich Fromm is usually not considered as one of the major philosopher practitioners perhaps because he straddled so many different traditions. In considering his clinical contribution our reviewer considers this to be a major oversight. Last but not least we look beyond the narrow confines of existential philosophy and practice with a review of the film version of Irvin Yalom's docu-subjunctive-novel *When Nietzsche Wept*. One implication of being-in-the-world is in terms of the intimate connection between the personal and the political. These are addressed in two rather more mainstream books: one on the existential meanings of the way we work at the start of the 21st century, and the other on the culturo-political ramifications of the '*happiness industry*'. Both also employing autobiography to great effect.

We look forward to being able publishing more reviews of media that are outside the usual academic boundaries.

Heidegger and a Metaphysics of Feeling

Sharin N. Elkholy. (2008). London: Continuum.

Sharin Elkholy's book, I think, makes a significant contribution to the exposition and interpretation of Martin Heidegger's work. Her focus, as implied by the book's title, is on the role of anxiety (Angst) as a fundamental mood that attunes us i.e. opens us up, to Being. However, Elkholy also opens Heidegger, particularly with reference to his *Being and Time*, to critical analysis and introduces her own concepts that elaborate on his philosophy. Much of this I found useful and helpful, though I have some caveats to this that I will highlight a little later in this review.

Given the title of this book, I was initially a little wary of immersing myself in what I assumed to be an Aristotelian philosophical approach to reading Heidegger. The problem for me lay in the juxtaposing of '*Heidegger*' and '*Metaphysics of Feeling*', which suggests a reading of Heidegger as one in a long line of metaphysicians. Metaphysics, a branch of philosophy established in the Western philosophical tradition by Plato and Aristotle, is the study of the ultimate ground of reality, what ultimately exists, and is '*first philosophy*', as Aristotle put it. Heidegger breaks radically from traditional Western metaphysics, calling it '*onto-theology*';

it is *not* first philosophy, he claims, because it invokes beings, or *a* being (God, or substance, say) as the ultimate ground, and not Being, which *is* more or most fundamental. To use Heidegger's terminology, traditional metaphysics presupposes its enquiry as ontic rather than ontological; that is, it treats Being as some-thing, or an entity.

Elkholy, whilst sensitive to all this, employs the traditional i.e. non-Heideggerian use of the term '*metaphysics*' to boldly claim that our Western philosophical tradition has been dominated not by reason (or a '*metaphysics of reason*') as its lynchpin, but by mood (or a '*metaphysics of feeling*'). During the time of the Homeric Greeks, for example, we began in a mood of wonder (*thaumazein*) towards things, moving to love (*agape*) in the early Judeo-Christian epoch, and then on to a mood of 'disinterested pleasure', as articulated by Kant in his Third Critique. Elkholy claims that Heidegger's focus is on the mood of anxiety (*Angst*), which gives us a way in to the truth of Being; as she puts it, it is a '*yoking of Angst and aletheia*'. Elkholy argues that Plato's approach in yoking sight to truth, which is an understanding of truth as a correspondence between what we see, on the one hand, and our thoughts and utterances about what we see, on the other, is analogous to Heidegger replacing '*sight*' with anxiety and '*truth*' (in Plato's '*correspondence*' sense) with *aletheia* (which is more primordial in terms of truth as unconcealment). These are interesting ideas, both in a philosophical sense, and from the perspective of therapy, because this underlines how the Western tradition has come to think of truth as an 'external' relation for its verification, agreement and correctness, as well as failing to acknowledge the role of moods and dispositions in the unveiling of truth. The historical character of moods also emphasises the value of Heidegger's later 'being-historical thinking', in contrast to his project of 'fundamental ontology' that takes Being to be cross-cultural, ahistorical, and universal.

However, this is all just one example of the many rich thoughts and ideas that are presented in this book, a short work running to some 134 pages in length and composed of four chapters. The central theme of the book is that the experience of anxiety, when Da-sein stays with it in facing its Being-toward-death, opens it to the '*nothing*' i.e. the groundlessness of its life, such that Da-sein loses (rather than gains, on the standard interpretation of *Being and Time*) its sense of self. In this nothing of anxiety there are no boundaries – its existence is unbounded – and no possibilities are available to it. At this point, Da-sein is '*worldless*' and paralysed, and no self and therefore no actions are possible at all without a world. It is only when anxiety becomes temporalised and yoked to *aletheia* that Da-sein retrieves a world that is grounded in its Being-toward-death and an authentic self in which it relates to others and its possibilities (p.66). These possibilities connect Da-sein to its tradition i.e. being historical, which is its thrown character. Our alternative is to relate to ourselves

inauthentically as ahistorical subjects. Elkholy introduces the key term ‘ontological occlusion’ to identify the phenomenon of a closing of certain possibilities as well as a fitting together of what *is* attuned in a mood that presents other possibilities. Essentially, the term characterises the way in which we are pre-reflectively involved in a community with others through this attunement, but that also is

[t]he possibility of listening to, or caring for someone who is differently attuned and engaged in “foreign” possibilities, that is, someone living in a different world who is not part of one’s *Mitda-sein*, or even someone living in the same world who does not benefit from the gift of the ease of relations that comes with being in an attuned accord with the whole of the being of the world.

(p.132)

This, I think, is a very thought-provoking idea that the author contributes at the end of her book, and which surely invites us as therapists to consider: how do or can we become ‘*mis-attuned*’ to others? Or, alternatively, how do we attune ourselves to others who are from different ‘worlds’? Or, can we stay still (authentically) in the mis-attunement? A wealth of questions emerge from this that could plausibly be the focus of valuable psychotherapy research studies. Elkholy also develops Heidegger’s claim that *Mitda-sein* is inherent to the structure of *Da-sein*, and that it is an essential characteristic of the Being of *Da-sein* that it is constituted in a world of and with other *Da-seins*. This is important, because we authentically ‘own’ our *Mitda-sein* as we become the self that reconnects to the community that shares a common destiny and also to the possibilities that come from recognising the nothing as its ungrounded ground. And this is where Elkholy thinks ontological occlusion comes in: authentic *Da-sein* encounters others in a mood that ‘fits’ them into a common world with oneself. If we did not engage in such a way, we would live in a disconnected inauthentic mode in being swayed by the opinions of *das Man*, or else be lost in the nothing without any way of retrieving our selves in an authentic way of relating to others and being ‘with’ them.

Elkholy drills deeper in elaborating on and, in some sense, attempting to clarify Heidegger’s philosophy and taking issue with a number of eminent Heideggerian scholars on particular points of interpretation. It is here that the author elucidates some finer distinctions for the reader, though the main point that comes through is that other writers succumb to a subject-object oriented reading of Heidegger at certain points in *Being and Time*, and fail to keep in step with an existential or ontological understanding of, say, Being-toward-death. This makes sense, given Elkholy’s way of understanding Heidegger in terms of applying his later work to his earlier writings, rather than categorising earlier and later texts as distinctly

separate phases of his thought. In this, the author is in agreement with Carol White and Reiner Schürmann, who urge a 'backwards' reading of Heidegger.

In terms of the book's relevance to psychotherapy, Elkholy discusses various other additional topics drawn from *Being and Time*, namely, listening; holding open the nothing of anxiety that both allows a space and the opportunity to gain one's authentic self; how a relation to the temporalisation of anxiety takes us towards such an authentic mode of Being; the move from an (inauthentic) 'They' to an (authentic) 'We'; and how a common attunement with a community of others establishes the horizon for navigating the course of our own possibilities as history-making or 'historising' beings. A re-consideration these familiar ideas from *Being and Time* transforms one's appreciation of their importance and relevance to therapy, particularly the way in which Being-toward-death and anxiety, for example, can be understood as a process that an individual continually lives rather than as goals or points to just arrive at.

There are some reservations that I have about this book, however. The ideas presented vary in pace from clear and measured to being brisk and a little difficult to follow, without having to stop and re-trace one's steps in the build up to the final conclusions. However, Elkholy does provide frequent summaries of these steps at convenient points in the text, a welcome lifeline that brings the reader back to the flow of the work itself. These may be helpful for many, but I found these summaries a little too truncated, reducing parts of the arguments that were either contentious or opaque to simple, established statements of fact. The other caveat that I have is that the reader needs to be a little more than a beginner in reading Heidegger. This, I think, is more to do with the particular way that Elkholy reads *Being and Time* i.e. beyond a subject-oriented approach. I mention this because the author intends the first two chapters as introductions to *Being and Time*, when this is perhaps a little misleading.

In conclusion, then, this is a book that I heartily recommend to therapists of a Heideggerian persuasion for its ability to deepen an existential awareness of working with clients. The book is strictly philosophical, but its focus on the changes that are brought about as we face our human fragility in our Being-toward-death yields invaluable insights for us as practitioners.

References

- Critchley S. and Schurmann R. (2008). *On Heidegger's Being and Time*. Routledge: London.
- White C.J. (2005). *Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude*. Farnham UK: Ashgate.

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