

Tillich, P. (1952 Renewed 1980 by Tillich, Hannah). *The Courage to Be*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

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The Emergent Self: An Existential – Gestalt Approach

Peter Philippson. (2009). London: Karnac.

The title of this book '*The Emergent Self*' is reasonably self-explanatory, in that it purports to describe how the idea of a '*self*' emerges from the relationships and experiences through which a being is constituted. The boundaries and contexts that shape this process from the author's perspective are documented and, within the backdrop of much helpful anecdotal case description, an argument is made for the relevance of the sub-title of the book: '*An Existential-Gestalt Approach*'. In so far as the concept of the '*self*' that is articulated is of a transient, indeterminate entity and, at the same time, the book's main thrust is towards making a case for such an approach to the self within the Gestalt therapeutic community, the sub-title can be accepted as a reasonably accurate description of the content, given also that some reference is made to existential philosophy, particularly with respect to the work of Husserl, and (briefly) Sartre.

The first chapter sets the scene by briefly (and superficially) reviewing diverse disciplines that conceptualise the self as '*emergent-relational*', disciplines ranging from existentialism, inter-subjectivity, Buddhism, and neuro-psychology. The second chapter provides the theoretical underpinning of the book. Here Philippson outlines his conception of the '*self*' as a semi-permeable, but boundaried, construct that is always changing. He differentiates between three boundaries through which the self emerges: (a) that which describes the separation of the organism from its environment or what he describes as the '*id boundary*'; (b) that which separates the self from '*other*' or the '*ego boundary*'; and (c) what he describes as the '*personality boundary*' or that which differentiates aspects of the self's potential, and is what provides a sense of continuity. The purposive functions contained within each boundary are respectively: experience, contact and autonomy. The author briefly gives examples of how each of these boundaries might be appropriate in assessing client presentations: the emphasis here is on how fixed or permeable these boundaries appear. There follows a short section on Husserl and the phenomenological reduction. This brief exposition serves to emphasise the importance for the author of '*cultivating uncertainty*' within the therapy room, uncertainty regarding who the two '*selves*' are that are interacting in the therapeutic space. There is also what the author describes in a telling expression as an ongoing dialectic of the client being '*both an individual and a field-emergent in the moment*'.

In Chapter 3, entitled relationship and feedback, Philipppson attempts to provide a scientific explanation for his conceptualisation of the 'emergent self'. Here he appeals to interactive processes that describe evolution, neuro-science and inter-subjectivity, to demonstrate how something ordered (a self) can emerge from randomness and disorder. It is the third of these, inter-subjectivity, that is the most interesting part of the chapter. Following a mundane appeal to the neuro-science of mirror-neurons, he goes on to describe the permeability of the self-concept in a way that reflects the existential understanding of inter-subjective rather than that of those who claim the expression to describe their own version of self-psychology.

The next three chapters (which comprise the major part of the book) look at the implications of this notion of the self as a permeable and constantly emerging and changing set of possibilities for much of the received wisdom of psychotherapy. He tackles first ideas around chaos (or lack of integration), process and structure, including a particularly interesting interpretation of transference, before considering the huge topic of choice, where an erudite discussion of value prefaces scrutiny of issues familiar to the therapy room such as neuroses, shame, guilt, and splitting. The final chapter on death and endings contains an interesting, and even self-conscious, look at the complexity of the meaning of death as well as a helpful pointer to the clinical application of this discussion.

What is missing in this book is a conclusion; where all previous strands are brought together and the reader is left reassured that they have understood the message and can form an opinion on the overall content. I imagine, for the author that the appendix entitled '*Gestalt Therapy and Emergence*' provides not only such a statement of account, but also a place where I feel the real purpose of the book is constructed. Here he describes the work of those who have influenced his work as a Gestalt Therapist and Trainer, and argues the case for the compatibility of his view of the 'self' with both the founders of the Gestalt approach and contemporary Gestalt thought and practice.

Although the view of the 'self' articulated in this book is broadly in accordance with an existential approach, there is disappointingly little reference to, or comment on, the rich philosophical literature that addresses this issue. It seems irritatingly fashionable today to seek validation for the work we do as professionals from the world of science particularly that of neuro-science, and this book is no exception. Such a lack of self-confidence is understandable in a world where little credence is accorded to that which cannot be quantified, and it is helpful when other disciplines reflect our own insights. There is, however, an increasingly slavish rolling out of pseudo-scientific validation where appeal to other, more closely aligned, disciplines might be welcome, for example to that of cultural