

too much about their experience in this light, and helpful to non-existential migrants for understanding those *others*.

The book left me with the sense that it may be beneficial to go into therapy specifically with these questions in mind and particularly, due to a serendipitous Jungian moment, on realising that the author and I were both sitting in Kathmandu airport, at the same time, whilst he was finally editing these lines in April 2009. However, reading the book was almost like going into personal therapy as it raised so many incisive and unavoidable probing questions, which I felt impelled to discuss with several others from a variety of backgrounds. It is very clearly personal work-in-progress for the author, and often those were the bits which were particularly captivating, for instance, the very moving descriptions of an early morning roof-top experience in Calcutta.

It would be challenging for anyone to read this book without asking some original questions of themselves, (What has been lost? What is missing?) and possibly finding some surprising answers (a more fragile sense of self? A homelessness?). So for those of us interested in existential philosophy or psychotherapy, personally or professionally, it is a good read.

Dr Madison's writing is unique and original within the context of psychological literature in that, for me, it had the ability to bring vividly and immediately alive so many dormant memories in an almost Proustian manner; it surprised, resonated and then I often felt the visceral pain of recognition long buried. That description is meant to signify a 'highly recommended' reading label.

The End of Belonging made me feel a sadness and loss which truly was previously unacknowledged and unrecorded.

References

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Linda Stephenson

How to Live: A Life of Montaigne In One Question And Twenty Attempts At An Answer

Sarah Bakewell. (2011). London: Vintage Books.

For my entire adult life I've carried a paperback book with me, usually low-rent – police procedural/crime detection or science fiction – based

on the likely event that 1) I could be stuck in the Underground or a doctor/hospital/airport waiting room for hours; 2) my car breaks down; and 3) I might be so bored at a party I have to escape to the loo. I often leave the house without my glasses (why is everything so blurry?); however, I have never forgotten my book. This compulsion is so extreme, I believe it deserves a citation in the upcoming DSM-V. Recently, however, I've become bored with fiction; instead, my new addiction (which I suspect is age-related) includes history, biography, science, social-anthropology. I'm looking for explanations – from any and every discipline – about the human condition. Naturally, I had to read a book titled *How To Live*.

The above paragraph is a homage, if you will, to Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), nobleman, government official and wine grower, whose 107 explorations of the conundrums of everyday life – such as 'How to be successful and lazy at the same time'; or 'How we cry and laugh for the same thing' – are meandering, quirky, candid, contradictory and immediately recognisable to each generation of his readers. The Austrian writer Stefan Zweig declared: 'Here is a "you" in which my "I" is reflected ... four hundred years disappear like smoke.' Bakewell says that confessional writing had to be invented in order to create 'a mirror in which other people recognise their own humanity'; and Montaigne was that inventor.

Born nearly half a millennia ago, his world is eerily familiar to us: religious schisms and war, extremes of wealth and poverty, lawlessness, looting, brutality (torture and public execution), disease and epidemics. He had the advantages and duties of his class: education (his first language was Latin; he was immersed in Roman classicism); public service (the most amiable mayor of Bordeaux); and an arranged marriage for dynastic purposes. According to the contemporary essayist, Gore Vidal, his most significant relationship was with another public servant, Etienne de la Boétie, whose untimely death prompted Montaigne, aged 38, to retire to his estate where '... he began to make attempts at understanding everything, which meant, principally, the unknowable (so Socrates thought) self'. Experimenting with various literary styles, Montaigne settled on the essay ('essayer' in French, meaning 'to try') – a format which gave him free reign to roam. 'I cannot keep my subject still,' he admitted. 'It goes along befuddled and staggering with a habitual drunkenness.' Yet he believed that 'All subjects are linked to each other'; a discovery, some 300 years later, Freud called free association and claimed for himself. Montaigne was the first to write about the quotidian: how to avoid a pointless argument with a spouse, what to do if accosted by armed robbers, how to deal with a bully and more. Bakewell's literary conceit is to construct 20 chapters that give 20 answers to the question 'How to Live'; and each answer is based on an episode, anecdote or theme in Montaigne's writings. For reasons of brevity, I'll concentrate on the queries that speak directly to *me*; and may, perhaps, interest SEA members, too.

Question.1: How to Live? Answer: Don't worry about death

Death, sudden, premature and inexplicable, was Montaigne's familiar. Boétie died of the plague (with Montaigne by his bedside), four of his children in infancy, and his brother expired after a light blow to the head during a game of badminton. Although deeply influenced by the Stoics, who held that philosophy supposedly prepares us for extinction, Montaigne remained fearful, noting: 'How can we possibly rid ourselves of the thought of death and of the idea that at every moment it is gripping us by the throat?' However, in the aftermath of a serious riding accident early in his retirement, his terror melted away. Semi-conscious, vomiting blood and thrashing in agony, according to witnesses, Montaigne instead recalled feelings of tranquillity, taking pleasure '...in growing languid and letting myself go', sensations he later compared to sliding into sleep. No doubt neuroscientists will assert that his near-death experience was merely the consequence of oxygen-starved, randomly firing synapses. Still, I find his conclusion immensely reassuring: 'If you do not know how to die, never mind,' he wrote. 'Nature will tell you how to do it on the spot, plainly and adequately...' Or, don't bother your head about it. Although notionally a Catholic, Montaigne ignored Christian ideals, and was unmoved by themes of sacrifice, repentance or salvation; he neither feared hell or desired heaven. Dying, he believed, is easy (death has a friendly face, but we can't apprehend it lucidly). Living is more difficult; and he suggests that we would do better to 'slide over this world a bit lightly and on the surface.' Perhaps this advice has implications for psychotherapy; might we be too diligent/inquisitorial in our constant interrogation of ourselves and our clients?

Question 2: How to Live? Answer: Pay attention

Montaigne practiced the ancient dictum, *carpe diem* (seize the day), but in his own contrary way. While advocating lightness, drifting and inattention, he worked hard at plumbing the depths of experience, noting: '...I do not skim it, I sound it.' For example, he ordered a servant to wake him periodically in the night, hoping he could capture his unconscious state as it left him. Equally, he accepted the impossibility of retrieving something as ephemeral as feeling-states (Heraclitus and why you can't step in the same river twice). As if anticipating William James' famous 1890 phrase, 'stream of consciousness', Montaigne mused on how he is carried away by his own unruly thoughts: 'now gently, now violently...every day a new fancy, and our humours shift like the weather.' If thoughts cannot be fixed, neither can being (say the existentialists); and he asserted: 'I do not portray being. I portray passing...from day to day, from minute to minute.' Bakewell pithily sums up this supreme contradiction: 'If you fail to grasp life it will elude you. If you do grasp it, it will elude you

anyway'. Merleau-Ponty declared Montaigne a writer who put 'a consciousness astonished at itself at the core of human existence.' As Montaigne aged, this passion for astonished attention intensified ('the shorter my possession of life, the deeper and fuller I must make it'); living like a Zen master: 'When I dance I dance; when I sleep I sleep', he wrote.

Question 3: How to Live? Answer: Be Born

This is about the absurdity/complexity of being human. Montaigne suggests we ought to cheerfully accept our vanities and foolishness. 'If others examined themselves attentively as I have done,' he wrote, 'they would find themselves, as I do, full of inanity and nonsense. Get rid of it I cannot without getting rid of it myself.' He was psychologically astute, identifying the phenomenon of projection centuries before it had a name: '...we abominate in others those faults which are most manifestly our own, and with a miraculous lack of shame'. He was unperturbed by his carnal nature (although he fretted that his penis might be on the small side and subject to female derision), noting – in anticipation of Freud – that sex is '...the centre towards which all things turn.' Freud never acknowledged Montaigne as an influence; however, according to the American literary critic Harold Bloom, although Freud saw himself as one third of a mighty triumvirate (with Copernicus and Darwin), he 'actually may have made a fourth in the sequence of Plato, Montaigne and Shakespeare'.

Question 4: How to Live? Answer: Read a lot, forget most of what you read, and be slow-witted

I love this, as I worry about my wretched memory. Montaigne insisted that reading shouldn't be a duty; and if he encountered difficulties over texts, '...I do not gnaw my nails over them; I leave them...I do nothing without gaiety.' Exactly my rationale for boycotting (his politics aside) Heidegger! Montaigne's injunction to forget reminds me of Jung, who also advised therapists to forget theory/technique as soon as they sit down with a client. A perceptive and witty writer, Bakewell says of her disingenuous subject: '...he presented himself as floating through the world on a blanket of benevolent vacancy.'

Question 5: How to Live? Answer: Survive love and loss

If Montaigne often sounds cool and detached, he never ceased grieving for Boétie; his genius was to transmute sorrow into literature. When he confesses that Boétie is '...still so lodged in me, so entire and alive that I cannot believe he is so irrevocably buried or so totally removed from our communication', I wonder how we therapists can presumptuously offer so-called grief-counselling.

Question 6: How to Live? Answer: Question everything

Montaigne was a world-class doubter, writing: ‘All that I know is that I know nothing, and I’m not even sure about that’. About himself, he knew even less, marvelling at the ‘assurance and confidence everyone has about himself, whereas there is virtually nothing that I know I know.’ Existential therapists try to practice unknowingness, suspending judgement; embracing tentativeness, etc. We also pride ourselves on our willingness to abandon authority. Montaigne argued that in relationship ‘...nothing certain can be established about one [person] by another, both the judging and the judged being in continual change and motion.’ Nothing is fixed, he argued, least of all our slippery (sometimes lying) self-concept: ‘We only know, I believe, what we know now: “knowing” no more consists in what we once knew then in what we shall know in the future.’ Nietzsche, who detested professional philosophers, finding their abstract systems useless, called Montaigne ‘this freest and mightiest of souls’. Why? Perhaps because Montaigne discovered the ultimate (and only?) truth about existence: ‘Death is indeed the ending of life,’ he wrote, ‘but it is not its objective. Life must be its own objective; its own purpose.’

Marty Radlett

Essential Research Findings in Counselling and Psychotherapy

Mick Cooper. (2008). London: Sage.

When I entered my first psychotherapy training in the early 1980’s, I was introduced to the findings of psychotherapy research. I recall a few points which I found of interest e.g. that no theoretical school had been shown to be superior to any other, and that research findings tended to favor the orientation espoused by the researchers. I was also aware of the conclusion of the Sheffield Research Group, that if therapy is to be of benefit this will be evident by session 14. But, by and large, I came to the conclusion that the massive amount of research which had gone into psychotherapy had yielded little of importance to someone like me engaged in long-term relationship-based psychotherapy. A quarter of a century later I was aware that Mick Cooper was espousing the view that not only has psychotherapy research something to teach psychotherapists, but we ourselves should be engaged in such research. So I was eager to read *Essential Research Findings* in order to see whether I needed to revise my earlier opinion.

In many ways, this book is a remarkable achievement. Mick Cooper succeeds admirably in his principle aim of providing ‘a user-friendly introduction to research findings in therapy’, and also in his further aim of writing a book which is ‘accessible to all and oriented towards practice’. He has done a phenomenal job in reviewing vast amounts of material, which he has digested and integrated, in an attempt to answer various