

entertainingly. Roger Scruton describes her as underrated and I think he is right. He says it may be partly because she has focused on the unfashionable (in academic circles) question of the nature of Man. I think we could usefully include her in existential studies as a critical friend with much to offer.

Her book is dense with an abundance of lines of thought and careful argument and counter argument and I can only give a brief insight into aspects of its contents here. I recommend it as a very good read. It extends existential thought more deeply into moral philosophy and although called a philosophical essay is as much a contribution to psychology. Importantly, it suggested new ways to think about my clients – representatives of the majority who like us make everyday ‘enormous mistakes’.

How To Survive The Titanic, Or, The Sinking Of J. Bruce Ismay Frances Wilson. (2011). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Ismay as the owner of the Titanic travelled on its maiden voyage and acquired instant notoriety for jumping onto one of the last lifeboats.

I started reading this for personal interest. My maternal great grandfather was a ship's captain in Liverpool in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and was shipwrecked many times, as was common then. It is included because of its relevance as an exploration of more everyday wrongdoing – an ‘enormous mistake’ made in a moment of extreme stress. Contemplating this brings us back to ourselves, and our clients, it may be hard to imagine being Fred West but we can easily imagine being Ismay.

Wilson gives us a thoughtful probing of both Ismay's personality and the difficulties of living on after you've let yourself down terribly in your eyes and those of others. His jump was not an illegal act nor wicked (in my view) but a betrayal of two codes of honour – that women and children should be saved first and the owner/captain should be the last to quit, going down with the ship if necessary. It was a case of what Midgley describes as the ‘deep, pervasive discrepancy between human ideals and human conduct’ (Midgley, p 73).

A somewhat ‘kangaroo court’ was held immediately afterwards in the US and another more measured (but probably biased) one later in the UK. People were mesmerised by the hubris and hyperbole about Titanic being ‘unsinkable’, they believed Titanic was itself a lifeboat so it became a huge media story.

Witnesses' narratives of events were muddled and contradictory. Confusion was hardly surprising given the shock, chaos and trauma of the sinking. Wilson lists the ‘factual’ causes of confusion – we all know there were insufficient lifeboats but may not have known the Marconi room, where several iceberg warnings were received, was owned by Marconi Company whose staff were not under the command of the captain hence messages

were not automatically relayed to the bridge. Plus the Captain didn't trust this newfangled technology preferring instead to rely on his experience. The star witness was an uncommunicative Ismay who seemed to be trying neither to incriminate nor justify himself. The public and the press wanted a villain to blame and Ismay was the perfect choice.

The Titanic sank in April 1912 when Ismay was 49. He 'carried on living, keeping out of the way' (p 261) according to his granddaughters who described him as 'emotionally inhibited...inapt for normal family and social life... a corpse' (pp 262 & 268). He had always been a loner and became more so after the sinking although he continued working in various directorships, set up a pension fund for maritime widows and gave generously to charity. He lived on unforgiven for 25 years.

Wilson suggests no one survived really. Many people behaved at least as 'badly' as Ismay and some much worse: women in half empty lifeboats who refused to return to save drowning men, men who dressed as women, millionaires Mr & Mrs Duff Gordon accused of bribing the crew to not allow anyone else in their lifeboat capable of holding 70 people (Ismay took the place of just one person). Wilson concludes he was 'an ordinary man caught in extraordinary circumstances, who behaved in a way which only confirmed his ordinariness. Ismay is the figure we all fear we might be. He is one of us' (p 282).

The Psychology Of Feeling Sorry: The Weight Of The Soul

Peter Randall. (2012). London: Routledge.

Randall, a retired psychologist, focuses his exploration of wrongdoing on betrayal and the possibilities for reconciliation in personal relationships. Over nine chapters, each with a summary, some with implications for practice and illustrative vignettes, he explores aspects of his central theme including conscience, religion, vengeance, shame, guilt, criminal offending, spirituality, empathy and forgiveness and how these may be explored in therapy.

His title refers to the age-old concept of being burdened by one's sins and to the notion found in many religions that at death the soul will be weighed and if the unreconciled bad deeds are heavier than the good ones the soul will be consigned to hell. These ideas persist, I have known avowed atheist clients admit to a fear of some form of existential punishment because of unconfessed wrongdoing.

While not religious himself Randall's aim is to explore the psychological processes and role of religious teaching in creating this weight. His interest extends beyond psychology because for many people religion provides a moral benchmark against which they critically judge their behaviour. Consequently, his analyses consider religious beliefs along with gender, age, background and personality when considering how these factors

influence responses to wrongdoing, remorse, revenge and forgiveness.

He begins by exploring what is known about the structure and development of conscience and how differing styles of parenting and religious teaching shape this. He says, aside from psychopathologies associated with diminished or absent development of conscience, few of us can 'claim to have escaped the discomfort of being sorry for wrongdoing' (p 27) and the more we feel this the more likely we are to avoid the experience by inhibiting future wrongdoing.

Having established the source of the weight and its spur for resolution – as he says 'the main driving force is that of conscience... there is no morality without conscience and empathy for others is its fuel' (p 229) – the rest of the book deals with the topics we frequently encounter in therapy, especially clients dealing with relationship breakdown.

He points out that vengeance, as I think Partington came to understand, often differs from the original wrongdoing only in the sequence of events and because it is a response rather than the original act. Such behaviour invariably hurts the vengeance seeker as much as the perpetrator. He wonders what makes people seek such a pyrrhic victory and sets out exploring the predictors of vengeance and what factors may make someone step back to consider forgiveness, one of which may be the wish not to bear the weight on their soul from refusal to forgive. This is important because the healing that can come from acknowledging guilt (perpetrator) and turning from a life of grudge bearing (victim), neither of which positions leave much space for a 'feel-good' factor, is likely to benefit mental health and quality of life.

He finds that vengeance although generally thought of as a bad idea is the instinctual response of many people to betrayal, and while dispositional vengeance diminishes with age males have a greater predisposition. Also, vengeance comes easier to those who accept religious doctrine without question and to certain psychological personality types, particularly psychoticism and narcissism. On the other hand, people find guidance and help from religious teaching, as Partington did from Buddhism and the Quaker movement.

His research confirms that whether the aim is to repair or to split with dignity it is necessary both for the 'victim' to incline away from vengeance and towards forgiveness, which requires a capacity for empathy. And that a powerful influence on the probability of forgiveness is a contrite apology from the offender that includes understanding and remorse for harm done and expressed intentions of restitution. If this cannot free the victim from their vengeful ruminations and protestations of harm done for whatever reasons (which may include inability to empathise) then he advises realistic therapy goals are for reducing negative emotions rather than reconciliation.

In delineating shame from guilt he shows how a path through these can

lead to remorse and healing, noting that while direct reparation may not be possible indirect reparations can soothe and eventually free shame-bound individuals. Presumably Ismay was attempting this but his already withdrawn personality and public opprobrium made it impossible to really achieve.

Randall describes forgiveness as not a 'dewy-eyed' return to the previous status quo but as 'frequently hard headed and decisive' (p 185) and leading to a new beginning. As with Partington who challenged herself and her own behaviour in relationships as one way to release herself from the pain. She was denied contrition from the Wests but she did find healing and release through admitting her own shame and failings. It was also important for her, as Randall notes, to be open to finding we have 'more in common with the perpetrator than we may be comfortable with' (p 194). For Partington Quaker teaching facilitated this breakthrough.

While I found some material unsurprising (eg evidence that grudge bearing is bad for your health and well being) there was content I found useful and thought provoking and I appreciated his wisdom and wish to look at the subject through a wider lens than usual by taking into account the effects of religious belief still present in our secular society on attitudes to shame, vengeance, remorse and forgiveness. We may be less avowedly religious but increasing numbers of people say they are spiritual and his chapter 'religion, spirituality and remorse' may be helpful in more accurately understanding and exploring the world view of clients whether religious or spiritual or neither.

He concludes saying that like G K Chesterton (the Catholic writer) he is of the opinion that 'we have to be certain of our own morality because ultimately we must suffer for it' (pg 235). It is not the behaviour of others but our own shame and guilt that puts weight on our souls.

'No ear can hear nor tongue can tell the tortures of the inward hell'

The Giaour, Lord Byron.

Diana Pringle

The Ultimate Harry Potter And Philosophy: Hogwarts For Muggles

Gregory Bassham. (2010). Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons.

As I sit here in the impressive buildings of Regent's University London, surrounded by its impressive architecture, creaky wooden stairways and students all around, I can almost imagine myself as the Sorting Hat in the Great Hall at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. I can stretch the metaphor a little, some days I *feel* like the Sorting Hat *looks*,