

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 sooth 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*,

a little old, leathery and weather beaten.

Why have I engaged in this exercise of the imagination? Well, the Sorting Hat is tasked with reading a student's thoughts and deciding which of the Hogwarts Houses they would best thrive in – Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, Gryffindor or... Slytherin (a slight shudder runs through me thinking of *that* possibility!). Today I am charged with a similar task – having just read *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy: Hogwarts for Muggles*, I am tasked to make a decision as to which class we allocate it to: *Optimum* (Essential), *Bonum* (Desirable), *Acceptus* (Acceptable) or *Krapidium* (I wouldn't bother).

Before I decide, let me review my reading of it. This book is part of a series of books that tries to bring philosophy to a wider audience by linking academic expertise to popular cultural phenomena as varied as TV shows (e.g. *South Park*, *Lost*, *Family Guy*, *24* and *The Office* (amongst others)), films (such as *Terminator*, *Batman*, and *Battlestar Galactica*) and the music of Metallica. It seems to me that this is a fun, creative and worthy endeavour and something that many of us might reflect upon. Many of us are convinced that our discipline can offer a variety of useful contributions to a number of individual and social projects *if* we can escape the image of being stuck in our perceived ivory tower.

So, how are Basham and colleagues trying to do this? In this book, contemporary philosophers and academics draw on the work of a wide range of philosophers, as varied as Plato, Socrates, Aristotle and Descartes on the one hand to Mill, Kant and Gadamer on the other. The various contributions tackle phenomena as varied as courage, the soul, the self, duplicity, friendship, happiness, justice, love and ambition, good, evil, death and freedom. It's a very thought provoking read.

Different authors tackle these topics in a variety of creative and imaginative ways. In the chapter entitled '*Sirius Black: Man or dog?*', Eric Sidel discusses Sirius/Padfoot to illustrate the complexity of mind and body and their relationship to a sense of self and action; Catherine Jack Deavel and David Paul Deavel consider the notion of transformation in a chapter entitled '*Choosing love: The redemption of Severus Snape*'; Ethics is a part of Gregory Bassham's focus in his chapter entitled '*Love Potion No. 9 3/4*'. This heart-wrenching reflection on Merope Gaunt's dilemma asks us to consider how we might have engaged with having the ability to cast a spell and make someone love us rather than suffer the pain of unrequited love, and the ethics of such an act.

Most chapters are useful considerations of philosophical concepts and the ways these are evident in cultural discourse. However, I did have to question two things before deciding where I would allocate them for readers of this journal. The first was that there are times when the chapter author seems to deviate from what I thought was the key task and seems to take issue with JK Rowling as an individual. Not only do I not feel the points

are entirely relevant (she is, after all, not positioning herself as a philosopher), I am always concerned about this shift from consideration of *topic* to reflection on an *individual*. This bothers me in British existential writing and it bothered me here too. I was left wondering ‘So what if a specific author argues in a way we disagree?’ Its the concept that needs debating or challenging, not the person themselves. If the individual becomes the focus of the debate we run the risk of taking a rather tabloid approach to important intellectual topics rather than an academic and scholarly one. This is not a major criticism of the book as a whole but a concern noted in just a couple of places, overall I think the book does engage very well with important topics and concepts.

The second ‘issue’ is that, while enjoyable and engaging, this is not a book for a ‘lazy’ existential therapist who wants their own topics spoon fed to them. While a variety of philosophies and philosophers are present, there is only limited reference to Heidegger (in chapter 17 – *Beyond Godric’s Hollow*) and the book doesn’t reference Sartre, de Beauvoir, Binswanger or Merleau-Ponty at all. For instance, Anne Collins Smith has a chapter entitled ‘*Harry Potter, radical feminism and the power of love*’. This chapter draws on feminist critiques of the Harry Potter books such as those by Schofer, Heilman and Dresang who, apparently, argue that the story is sexist, and Kern Gladstein and Zettel who have written that the story offers a balanced view of the sexes. I was delighted to see these topics considered from a philosophical perspective, although I did miss a specifically existential-phenomenological contribution which I think would have helped enormously. I was particularly surprised at the absence of any reflection on Beauvoir’s work as I would have thought that this would have been an obvious writer to consider. Conceptually, the commentators referenced still seem to essentialise gender rather than think about Spinelli’s recent outline of how gender is an interpretative construct (Spinelli, forthcoming).

In order to explore these concepts so thoroughly, the book draws intimately on JK Rowling’s rich and magical world and this is part of its grip on the reader. We get to meet old friends such as Harry, Hermione and Ron, the rest of the Weasley family and the steadfast Professor McGonagall, somewhat ditzzy Professor Trelawney, cold Professor Snape and of course the wonderful Professor Dumbledore. And Voldemort is ever present as is the dark side of human existence. And I would suggest that the reader does need to be familiar with these characters and the world in which Harry Potter lives to get the most from this book. Without that frame of reference I suspect there would be too much to look up and to be confused by (for instance why would I shudder at the idea of joining *Slytherin*?) Having said that, I imagine that if you have decided to avoid this literary, film and cultural phenomenon for the past decade or more, this book will not tempt you over to the dark side! Maybe one of the other texts in this series will be more to your liking.