

BOOK REVIEWS

Next time you go somewhere there are a lot of people, shopping centre, gig, club, football match, conference, look around and remind yourself that everyone here, including you, no matter how well they look now will in a comparatively short space of time start to fade, get weaker and most probably endure considerable pain and probably humiliation, before they die. So what do we do with this knowledge? Go for denial, the narcissistic sense of specialness that pretends that it only happens to other, lesser mortals. Being existentialists of course we know about all this. Or do we? What do we really know? What can we know? We may know cognitively, intellectually but what does it mean to really know it? The musician Wilko Johnson knows about it and talks about the elation he felt when he discovered he had terminal cancer. He said *‘Worrying about the future or regretting the past is just a foolish waste of time. Of course we can’t all be threatened with imminent death, but it probably takes that to knock a bit of sense into our heads.’* Is this what is meant by existential maturity? Such things are possible.

This issue we start with five books on this theme, two contemporary and three old. The two contemporary are in the now familiar popular case-study genre, by Yalom and Grosz, and the three old ones are by Seneca, Bradatan and Epictetus and are a reminder of the value of returning to the original texts. Age is not pathology. Following this we have a foray into existential territory, being and doing, by two psychoanalytic writers. Being and doing are embodied in the next book about the ever present issues of love, sex and relationships, and this is followed by a necessary moment of reflection. That is, on the nature of and value of research, which is about when we ask ourselves how we know all this stuff, what makes us so sure. Which brings us to the penultimate book, again from psychoanalysis and is a reminder to remain open to all ideas and experiences. The final book this issue is the 2nd edition of Spinelli’s influential book on existential practice.

Martin Adams

Tales from psychotherapy in practice

On 2nd October 2015, David Taylor, Clinical Director at the Tavistock, was interviewed on the BBC Radio 4 Today programme about the recently announced outcome of a 10-year study into the efficacy of psychoanalytic psychotherapy compared with UK/NHS NICE recommended treatments¹.