

the ‘real’ reasons for doing this work, for example (pp 268-274); ‘trying to feel good about himself, defending against mortality, to feel important, to distract from his own life, to feel smug and superior, hunger for intimacy, feeling like a martyr, the helper’s high, escape from the mundane, excuse for travel, access to the hidden and forbidden, learn new things, to be creative, rebellious, and to see immediate results’... I found this account to be refreshingly honest.

Jon Carlson’s final chapter tells us that he has been dealing with aggressive cancer and that he might be dead before the book appears in print. He describes his own orientation to practice as based upon Adler’s Individual Psychology, and how Adler was originally concerned with the injustices suffered by people working in the tailoring industry, poor lighting, poor ventilation, long hours... ‘Adler stressed the importance of looking at the entire context in which an individual lives to create a more complete understanding...’ Carlson routinely asks his clients to take up voluntary work, as he believes that focusing on others’ issues, getting outside ourselves, helps us feel better (it’s what therapists do all the time).

The authors make the point that ‘the key feature of significant social action is follow-through – continuing efforts over a period of time so as to build meaningful relationships, provide adequate support, and conduct evaluations to measure results and make needed adjustments that make programmes even more responsive’. For me, I have recently returned to more active political expression. Examples in my life include setting up a psychology course for the Free University of Brighton, teaching Focusing to activists, an arts project called Map of Human Experience, and participation in various democratic social change movements. I have found this energising and inspiring whereas I experience the ‘politics’ within our professional bodies and societies rather disheartening. I encourage therapists who have not been active politically to consider dipping a toe in, and perhaps we can support each other to do this. At the very least I hope to see this, or a book like it, on every training course very soon.

Greg Madison

The Happiness Illusion. How the media sold us a fairy tale.

Luke Hockley and Nadi Fadina (eds) (2015). London: Routledge.

It’s an intriguing title. Not so much because it presents happiness as an illusion. Critiques of the notion that happiness should, or even can, be a sensible goal have multiplied since positive psychology’s inauguration as a corrective to what one of its chief architects, Martin Seligman, thought was the excessive doom and gloom of clinical psychology. Readers of this journal will for example, be familiar with the series of essays of

Emmy van Deurzen collected under the title of *Psychotherapy and the Quest for Happiness* (2009). It was the reference to the fairy tale that intrigued me. The modern study of fairy tales, starting with Propp in the 1930s (Propp, 1968) provides a link between science and some of the otherwise mystifying concepts of psychotherapy such as the collective unconscious. Perhaps it would be a tool for charting what a well-lived life might look like, leaving aside the meretricious criteria of happiness or acclaim.

Sadly the editors chose ‘fairy tale’ for its more prosaic meaning, of a Bowdlerized and euhemeristic folk tale. Not all folk tales end happily, but since the publication of Andrew Lang’s fairy books, the expectation is that fairy tales are for children, and that they end with, ‘and they all lived happily ever after’.

Of course it may have been of interest to consider why we think that children need stories in which an ordinary or neglected person can become a prince or princess with magic powers. But the contributors to this book would probably agree, despite the considerable variation in their topics and their take on them, that we remain vulnerable to dreams of transformation throughout our lives, ever ready to believe that we harbour hidden powers or will discover a pot of gold and that, if we do, it will make us happy.

One chapter, by Ryan Howes, inverts this by studying the mutative therapeutic intervention, the mythical moment when the therapist draws out the hidden splinter that has been poisoning the client’s life up to that moment and, it is assumed, happiness follows. Of course, in a real fairy tale such as *The Snow Queen* by H C Andersen, Gerda melts the splinter of ice in Kay’s heart by her tears of joy, but they still have a long journey to go, albeit a joyful one, before they are done.

Howes’ point, and this is taken up in all of the chapters, is that we should distrust ‘the media’ i.e. makers of television programmes or films (or therapists) when they set out to make us feel good because they are really doing us harm, if only by misleading. We are assumed to be taken in by this (as presumably the film-makers are not) because we have a ‘malaise’ which, oddly enough, only affects ‘the West’. We are being exploited by people who want to make money by peddling this snake oil to us. Like the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, they want to pacify us to make eating us less of a fight.

Part 1 of the book deconstructs films, advertisements, and television programmes to show us these hidden motivators but in doing so displays the enormous potential for these genres to portray ambivalence and ambiguity as well. This is particularly illustrated by Nadia Fadina’s longer essay on androgyny that concludes with an endorsement of C G Jung. The chapter is not quite relevant to the topic of the book, but is packed with interesting examples.

Part 2 of the book focuses more on transformations including two chapters

on fictional accounts of psychotherapy (Ryan Howes on various examples, but especially *Dr Phil* and Joanna Dovalis on *In Treatment*).

Part 3 of the book contains several chapters that cover apparent exceptions to the premises of the book although it starts off with the rom com and why that might make one feel better after a bad day – not, of course, that anyone believes the story any more than anyone mixes up folk tales with historical accounts.

Part 3 explicitly mentions ‘existential’ philosophy on several occasions and, you guessed, it is Kierkegaard who is the influence mentioned, and the Nordic noir that exemplifies existentialism. I agree with the contributors in part 3 who find it interesting that after a bad day we might get surcease by seeing our favourite character going through agonies of self-questioning, only to break the law in ways that they are sworn to uphold. It runs counter to the title of the book, an irony that escapes the contributors. ‘Irony’ was the topic of Kierkegaard’s Masters thesis and was, in many ways, his master theme throughout his writing. Irony led to the taking away of certainty, to a dread that Sartre felt as nausea in association with the nihilation of self-knowledge. This is not a happy state of affairs, and will need another book to account for its popularity in new fairy tales like *The Killing*. But this book did at least give me an insight into why *The Killing* seemed to convey it so effectively. According to Alex Charles, the author of the chapter ‘Sarah Lund and individuated happiness’, the actors in *The Killing* were only given the script for the next episode. They did not know how the whole story would turn out, or whether their character was innocent or guilty. No wonder the series was so gripping. It was, as we existentialists would think, so true to how life is. Only as the last credits role do we know what our actions have meant.

References

- Deurzen, E. v. (2009). *Psychotherapy and the Quest for Happiness*. London Sage.
- Propp, V. (1968). *Morphology of the Folktale*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Digby Tantam

Therapy and the Counter-Tradition: The edge of philosophy

Manu Bazzano & Julie Webb (eds) (2016). Oxford: Routledge.

Therapy and the Counter-Tradition: The Edge of Philosophy is about philosophy and therapy within the counter-tradition. Tradition, or otherwise