

example of this). If and when the book is given a reprint, the inclusion of an index of terms would be a welcome addition.

We are taken on what feels like a seamless journey from our own already established thinking, wherein the movement between the ontical and the ontological, and from cognitive understanding to attunement, appears effortless. Holzhey-Kunz makes light work of guiding the reader through Heidegger's departure from Kant's emphasis on perception and thought – the fundamental cognitive faculties – to a type of understanding that can be gained by the revelation of internal states through attunement to what Heidegger calls moods. The reader is required to both work hard and at the same time enjoy the journey, as each time we begin to feel we might be lost, the author provides another useful example.

In the latter parts of the text, Holzhey-Kunz draws upon concepts from other existential philosophers, including Sartre and Kierkegaard, and considers these alongside Heidegger's, the psychoanalytic discoveries of Freud and more recent contributions from Gadamer, arguing for the importance of what she calls an existential hermeneutic approach. I found her sections on Sartre, and in particular her explanation of Sartre's Being-for-others and its effect on the individual's experience of Being in the world, a particularly compelling addition to this already scholarly volume. It is, in my view, a must-read for anyone working with patients with whom they feel 'stuck' after common sense, traditional wisdom and empathic understanding have elicited no growth. It challenges most provocatively the well-contested area that existential therapy holds no place for a model of the unconscious and the role of interpretation, and will therefore be challenging on both a professional and – for the reasons mentioned earlier – on a personal level. For those existential analysts who are open to this writing and to having a reflexive approach to their own work and their own being it will, I believe, prove revolutionary in its impact on their ideas and subsequent practices as therapists.

Donna Christina Savery

The Dream of Enlightenment: The rise of modern philosophy

Anthony Gottlieb (2016). London: Penguin Random House UK

Following his first book, *The Dream of Reason*, which covered Western philosophy from the Greeks to the Renaissance, this book outlines the next major flowering of Western philosophy. It covers from the 1630s to the eve of the French Revolution encompassing the philosophy of Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz and Hume. Mostly amateurs with minimal connections to universities, they explored the implications of the new

science, often through active involvement, and challenged traditional teachings and attitudes. They raised questions relevant to us today about the advance of science and what it means for us, our understanding of ourselves and our ideas about God. They also raised important questions about how we should best be governed.

Although they were pushing forward, they were of their time. Gottlieb sets them in their historical context so that we may understand them properly. All were involved in challenging the powerful hold of religion while being constrained by their own circumstances and convictions. How much any of them believed in God is uncertain but they could not explore far without taking life-threatening risks. The last British execution for blasphemy was fourteen years before Hume's birth in 1711. The likelihood of severe punishment for freethinkers was receding during his lifetime but still a possibility. Gottlieb outlines and critiques their arguments, praising where due but also showing where he believes they went wrong in their reasoning.

Descartes, Gottlieb writes, compromised his work by designing proof of the existence of God, which weakened his philosophy and failed to win over the theologians who condemned his work throughout the seventeenth century for not making the mind sufficiently independent of the body. He is criticised for failing to live up to his own aim of scepticism. Descartes saw his metaphysics as a prelude to finding out about the world and much of his life was spent in practical scientific exploration – mostly superseded even if modern applied mathematics is largely based on his invention of analytic geometry. For Gottlieb, Descartes' main legacy in philosophy is the idea of a world of matter out there and a 'private garden' of one's own images, thoughts and impressions which raise the question of how we live in both worlds at once.

Hobbes rational attitude to miracles and prophecy, and his position on materialism which included maintaining that everything is physical including God, took him into heretical territory, although he did not regard himself as an atheist. He suggested a new way to see government, starting not from utopianism but by imagining a lawless world in the face of which life would be 'nasty, brutish and short' (p 39). He concluded that subjugation to a sovereign authority was the solution. He lived through the English Civil War, a chaotic and terrifying time that likely influenced his pessimism and somewhat despotic solution. His theory of state did, however, insist on the consent of the governed and the rule of law and he is now considered a pioneer of modern political philosophy.

Most of the philosophers discussed stayed safe by keeping their ideas obscure or putting them in the mouth of a friend with whom they would not necessarily agree. Spinoza, however, made no attempt to disguise his heretical ideas and attack on conventional religion. Consequently, he was excommunicated and made an outlaw from his family and community.

Nonetheless, he believed in the importance and certainty of God, a conclusion reached through sophisticated reasoning in his *Ethics*. He was supported in continuing his philosophical writing by admirers and pupils, and maintained an active interest in the world of science. He remained an outcast after his death and was only rediscovered in the late eighteenth century by thinkers who wanted to make a religion out of nature, equating God with nature, although this was not Spinoza's position. His philosophy aimed for peace of mind through self-knowledge and divine bliss.

Locke's earlier working life encompassed medicine, monetary policy, diplomacy and government, as well as gardening, which in German eyes (according to Gottlieb) put him beyond the pale – they considered him too down to earth and common-sensical. He in turn had a distaste for the intellectual life and 'learned gibberish' (p 121). His main message was that we must think for ourselves and not trust received wisdom, because others are often wrong. Consequently, he was seen as a defender of the right to rebel, although he would have been shocked by how his work was used to justify rebellions against British colonialism. His writings were key in helping to erase the medieval worldview in spite of Oxford trying to ban his work. He argued against an idea espoused by many contemporaries, that moral principles and religious truths were inborn, implanted by God, since they require exercise of the mind. His close connections with the Royal Society are apparent in their motto 'Take Nobody's Word for It'.

Leibniz aimed to build a complete system of the world, to explain everything. Gottlieb portrays him as an endearing eccentric who sometimes confused his own mind with God's. If he could not think of a good reason why God would do something, he assumed God could not either. This led him into believing we are in the best of all possible worlds, for why would God make any other? His attitude was satirised by Voltaire in his character of Professor Pangloss in *Candide*. Leibniz was a prodigious intelligence and polymath. He made many significant inventions and ideas for advancement in several fields. Unfortunately, much was left unfinished and remains unpublished. He did not produce a *magnum opus* yet some of his ideas have proved invaluable including infinitesimal calculus and binary arithmetic.

Hume came first in a 2009 poll of philosophers who were asked to pick the dead thinker with whom they most identified. Gottlieb suggests that he is admired for his brilliantly unsettling writing, his endorsement of naturalism and his gentle manner of challenging cherished beliefs and modesty. His exploration of the mind led him to distinguish between relations of ideas such as mathematics, where definitive proof can be discovered, and matters of fact that lead to inferences based on experience that could have been otherwise. He suggested our actions are mostly guided by the latter, relying more on instinct and habit than deductive reasoning and that we are closer

in wisdom to animals, who also employ some level of experimental reasoning, than to God. He stepped lightly into delicate territory but Gottlieb suggests that he was less concerned to evade persecution than to avoid offending his devout sister and mother, as well as many of his clergy friends. He preferred to let people read between the lines, or not.

In summary, Gottlieb suggests that instead of calling it the Age of Enlightenment it should really be called The Age of Trying to be More Reasonable, in the face of intellectual orthodoxy, tradition and religious dogma. The thinkers in this book fought for scientific progress, against the power of religious authority, for tolerance of dissent and moves towards democracy. It was interesting to learn of the range of their activities beyond philosophy and I particularly appreciated Gottlieb setting them in their own time and place. This highlighted how easily we can become trapped inside our own current paradigm in spite of our efforts to escape it. This is a witty and engaging read, elegantly compressing a vast range of ideas and developments in thought about us and our world. He plans a third volume that will continue the story with Kant. I hope it is not another sixteen years before it is published.

Diane Pringle

The Death of Desire: An existential study in sanity and madness, 2nd edition

M Guy Thompson (2017). Abingdon and New York: Routledge

Many people come to therapy because they feel they have a medical problem. They also believe that medication will be helpful in dealing with their emotions. Thompson, on the contrary, makes it clear from the first chapter, that he supports the thesis of R.D. Laing that a mentally ill person ‘is not a sick person, *per se*, but [...] is living inauthentically, which means he has become alienated from himself’ (p 8). The seduction to live inauthentic lives is explained by the fact that there are many unsure people, who suffer ‘unremittingly, even catastrophic, anxiety’ because they fear ‘engulfing, implosion, and petrification’ (ibid).

In the second chapter, Thompson identifies three important forms of desire: the desire for sexual gratification, the desire for money and the desire for power (p 22) and observes that desire has been an object of reflection in many cultures. Thompson ends this chapter by presenting the cases of two patients who developed habits in their courtship, which made relationships impossible because they could not tolerate the tension of desiring without permanently possessing the object of their desire.

Chapter three is entitled ‘Ressentiment’. Thompson starts with an analysis of emotions and then turns to four authors to analyse three negative emotions.

He turns to Freud to clarify jealousy; to Klein to clarify envy and to Nietzsche and Scheler to clarify resentment.

Chapter four has the title 'Deciphering Psychopathology'. Thompson credits the philosopher-psychiatrist Karl Jaspers with having introduced in psychiatry the practice of writing down a personal history of psychiatric patients so as to put the symptoms of mentally ill patients within a biographical context (p 70). He credits Freud for going much beyond the approach of Jaspers in that he treated his patients by talking and, even more importantly, by listening to them (p 71). As a consequence, Freud saw the suffering of his patients not as medical suffering similar to having pain in the stomach, but rather as an existential suffering. It was a form of suffering resulting from an unconscious strategy to avoid the suffering encountered in one's everyday life (p 73).

Freud treated hysterics. To learn more about psychosis, Thompson turns to Laing, who was supervised by Winnicott and accepted Winnicott's idea that children need a 'good enough' mother. But, from Nietzsche and Sartre, Laing borrowed the idea that human beings are self-deceiving and hence also deceive others, in particular their children. Such children are then deprived of the opportunity to have an authentic life and instead develop the life of a false self. Thompson illustrates these claims with a beautiful case study.

In chapter five, which has as title 'What to make of an incomprehensible madness', Thompson describes Laing's household communities, of which Portland Road was the most important. Typical of Laing's approach was that patients and mental health professionals were treated as equals. Thompson describes a case in which the patient wanted, and was given, his own room. However, the patient did not eat nor did he keep himself clean. He was close to starvation and was disgusting. After more than four months, where the patient's irrational behaviour had been tolerated, he came down to the use the bathroom. The patient also announced that he was finishing his fastening and started to present another face of his personality: he was 'talkative, cordial, suddenly social and at ease' (p 112). When asked about his previous behaviour, he stated that he had to fulfil a mission, he had 'to count to a million and then back to zero, uninterrupted, in order to finally achieve his freedom' (p 112). Laing's method of total toleration of his psychotic patients provided the cure for this psychotic patient who experienced no more psychotic breaks.

Thompson points out in chapter six that most contemporary psychoanalysts agree that the analysand and analyst also develop a personal relationship. Most analysts try to avoid such personal relationships. He prefers the attitude of the interpersonal tradition of Sullivan, Fromm and others who privilege spontaneity and personal engagement in psychoanalysis. Thompson even claims that the personal relationship (friendship) that patients have

with their therapists ‘is the transformational component of the so-called transference relationship’ (p 131) that is curative.

Chapter seven, entitled ‘Love and Madness’, clarifies the connection between love and madness with the linguistic expression ‘to be madly in love’. Thompson first turns to Freud to clarify the connection between the two concepts. Freud’s first important idea was that falling in love is, in effect, re-finding the first object of love, which was the mother. For this process to be possible, a human being needs to be able to let go of the attachment to the first love object, otherwise adult love will be too much mixed with the guilt connected with the ultimately forbidden incestuous love for the mother. Thompson feels that Freud exaggerated the presence of erotic forces in friendships and familial relationships. Thompson prefers the Greek view where there are four words for four different kinds of love: *eros* (sexual love); *storge* (familial love); *philia* brotherly love; and *agape* (selfless love). He then turns to two dialogues of Plato for further insight into the concept of love. From the first dialogue, *Symposium*, Thompson takes the idea that ‘love is the desire to possess the love object forever and always’ (p 155). The author then shows that the push of human desire to want, and even to feel the need to possess its object, can explain madness, as in the case of Peter, who has no real person he loves but who hears a voice which speaks to him and wants to be his sole possessor (p 156). In Plato’s second dialogue, *Phaedrus*, Thompson sees Plato explicitly connecting love with madness because love can lead to either mania or hubris, both of which make people lose their ability for rational judgment. The Greeks remind us that erotic madness is but one of four forms of madness. The others are: prophetic madness, ritual madness and poetic madness. Thompson then gives as examples of poetic madness Van Gogh, Sylvia Plath, Ezra Pound, Salvador Dali and Edgar Allan Poe (p 161). The idea of prophetic madness led Laing to believe, at least for some time, that ‘a psychotic regression may be an opportunity to take a step forward in one’s spiritual development’ (p 162).

Thompson ends this chapter by addressing the Greek concept of *agapé* or its Latin derivative *caritas*. He sees a connection between *agapé* and sympathy, not to empathy. He points out that in the psychoanalytic literature the concept of sympathy has, mostly, been replaced by the concept of empathy, thereby giving more importance to reason, rather than the heart, in the therapist’s relationship to the patient. Thompson then stresses that for Laing, the relation to the patient required love. To deepen his understanding of the role of love for human beings, Laing studied three philosophers: Kierkegaard, Scheler and Heidegger.

The last chapter is entitled ‘On Sanity’. Thompson defends the thesis that the challenge for human beings is to become who they truthfully are, which requires being honest with themselves. He then turns to Winnicott’s

idea of a true and false self, which Laing also accepted. According to Winnicott, the child is in such dependence of the mother that the child feels the need to please the mother and, from six months onwards, develops a self that is intended to do so. If the mother is a good enough mother, the child develops the resources to become true to itself. Otherwise, the push to develop and hold on to a false self is so pervasive that the child lacks the courage and the resources to face the challenges and responsibilities connected with searching for a true self that will help them develop their authenticity. Laing believes that the struggle between a true and a false self is a process that ‘requires the entirety of one’s childhood, including adolescence’ (p 179). Thompson then relies on three philosophers (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger) to defend the idea that the seduction of a false self is a life-long challenge. Therapy is then the invitation to honesty, which is the best warranty for sanity.

One critical remark: Thompson is not addressing the function of the father, as Lacan does. As I see it, he gives the pain of honesty the task that Lacan gives to the pain of the introduction of the paternal metaphor. Both limit the grandiosity connected with the narcissism that we are all born with.

Thompson’s book *The Death of Desire* is, as my summary indicates, full of insights. Some of those insights are part of the psychoanalytic tradition, some are borrowed from existential philosophy. This book artfully combines the insights of both. Both therapists and philosophers will find in this book a rich menu of insights.

Wilfried Ver Eecke

After Psychotherapy: Essays and thoughts on existential therapy

Miles Groth (2016). New York: ENI Press

Miles Groth brings together a number of essays and collection of thoughts on what he terms existential therapy, explicitly not ‘*psychotherapy* here, because existential therapy is not directed to what has been called the psyche’ (p 80). I must confess to not having heard of Groth before this point, and to a certain degree I am still none the wiser, as the book lacks the archetypal author biography. This stuck with me; my normal approach to a book is to read the back page, on which there is only a photo, and then the biography of the author. The lack of anything of the sort set the tone; for me this was already attempting to shift existential therapy away from the mainstream, and embody the idea that ‘we will have to declare our independence from academic psychology and medical psychology’ (p 23) and more.