

which powerfully and quickly and predictably changes how you feel’.

There are not many books on the existential approach to therapy – in fact, this is the only one I could find on Amazon. Strongly recommended.

John Rowan

Zen and Therapy: Heretical perspectives

Manu Bazzano (2017). London and New York: Routledge

Manu Bazzano’s *Zen and Therapy* is not a straightforward book to review. On the one hand, the author’s intention is clear; Bazzano considers both Zen and psychotherapeutic practice to have a great deal to offer each other and, drawing upon personal experience, spiritual teachings, critical theory and Western and Eastern philosophy, *Zen and Therapy* is Bazzano’s exploration into where the two disciplines both commune and contravene. Over eight interacting chapters, Bazzano skilfully weaves a provocative and challenging discourse deeply relevant to both psychotherapists and Zen practitioners. However, I have come to the view that *Zen and Therapy* is, at heart, a book about getting lost. And, I have realised, with gratitude, that Bazzano’s poetics and philosophical explorations have helped me lose my way.

While not a text on existential therapy *per se*, I consider *Zen and Therapy* the most relevant book to existential psychotherapists that I have encountered in some time. Bazzano writes from and into a rocky terrain where a neat synthesis between Zen and psychotherapy refuses to form. The subheading ‘Heretical Perspectives’ (Bazzano is using the word ‘heretical’ in its most literal form – the choice to abstain from dogma) should be indication enough that this is not a book for those wanting yet another treatise on meditation and therapy, where brain scans and happiness scales affirm the wonders of both. It is a book however, for readers who want to encounter an essential critique of anthropocentric notions of self, from which, in my view, existential psychotherapy is not exempt. It is a book for those who wish to encounter the perplexing spirit of Zen and the chiaroscuro of this practice life. It is most definitely a book for Heideggerian devotees who are willing to have their faith in his ideas challenged. And, it is a book for those who – perhaps tired of the *terra firma* of evidence-based-in-a-nutshell-integrations – prefer instead, to get lost.

An ordained Zen monk, philosopher, prolific writer, lecturer and psychotherapist, Bazzano is well placed to explore the relationship between Zen and psychotherapeutic practice. He writes from the ‘borderlands’ between the two ‘where no checkpoint has yet to be erected and no passport is required’ (p 1). A distinctive characteristic of Bazzano’s writings is the peripheral location he always writes from, refusing to land and settle into

a particular theoretical territory. His transient writing style, while engagingly poetic, might well be confronting for the reader who wants to pin down ideas and exposition. The philosophical complexities that Bazzano seems to navigate with such ease will likely be challenging for those without some prior grounding in Western phenomenology.

In *Zen and Therapy*, Bazzano rejects the subjective reductivism of Husserlian phenomenology for differentialism, a counter tradition perspective, expressed by second-century Indian philosopher Nagarjuna and later, Nietzsche, then Derrida. Bazzano details three necessary aspects of differentialism: valuing appearance over essence, the inexhaustibility and illusive incomprehensibility of life itself and, lastly, an active skepticism and unapologetic perplexity towards the world (pp 7-8). The distinction that I understand Bazzano to be making between phenomenology and differentialism is their differing relationship to the fixity of self – the former reductive to Being and the latter orientated to a process of inexhaustible becoming. It is a nuanced and necessary distinction for existential psychotherapists to consider and one that frames Bazzano's meditations throughout.

Conversing with both Western and Eastern philosophies, the first chapter reminds us of the insubstantiality of self and psychotherapy's collusion with notions of fixed self. As he does throughout, Bazzano drops nuggets of provocation for the reader that they must pick up on their own accord, for example, in the short section on 'doing the next thing' (pp 25-26) he draws upon Zen, Nietzsche and Hegel to contemplate a relation between doer and deed that 'is not based on intentionality but on expression' (p 26), a shift in perception between self and action that 'will bring about a considerable reframing of existential phenomenological therapy as we know it' (ibid). The second chapter explores the relationship between life and death, critiquing Heidegger's notion of being-towards-death. To stare in the face of death until we have somehow resolved our fear of it, for Bazzano, misses the point. In Zen practice, we are encouraged not to triumph over death but to contemplate life's impermanence and the appropriate way to respond in each given moment. Bazzano's reflections remind me of a simple Buddhist prayer: *Death is certain, life is uncertain, what should I do?*

Bazzano's interest in therapy as hospitality was first formulated in his book *Spectre of the Stranger: Towards a phenomenology of hospitality* (2012) which, inspired by Levinasian ethics and Zen practice, navigates the social and political dimensions of hospitality. He returns to this theme in what I consider to be the standout chapter of the book, 'Zen and Therapy: Two expressions of unconditional hospitality'. It is perhaps here where Zen and therapy converge the most in that both aspire to offer unconditional hospitality. Bazzano reminds us:

We become good hosts by remembering that we are guests on earth, by temporarily interrupting the self and our habitual concerns about 'me' and 'mine' and also by reframing our notion of identity, including national identity. We become good hosts by remembering our condition of existential homelessness

(p 44)

However, while there is much for the therapist in this chapter to delve into in terms of the relation between exile and belonging, ethics and citizenship, the reductive, obstructive implications of standardization, as well as a delightful consideration of the therapist as a bodhisattva of hospitality (my interpretation), it spoke to me most deeply as a Zen practitioner, a gentle, reassuring hand on the shoulder, directly addressing the dilemmas I encounter in practice, a reminder not to get too comfortable on the Way. Bazzano writes:

To romanticize the lives of drifters, travelers and people at the margins would mean conveniently glossing over the very real suffering and difficulties these lives entail. Yet at the heart of Zen teachings, as I understand them, we find an emphasis on homelessness (tokudo). The person becoming ordained is said to embrace his/her metaphysical, symbolic and, at times, factual refusal of a permanent dwelling. This does not mean we cannot, or should not, make our home on earth. Nor is it an advocacy of uprootedness and of the spindrift gaze towards the heavens. It is important, however, to relativize somewhat the exaggerated importance our culture gives to territory, dwelling and identity and in, parallel, to notions of ownership, all tied to our Promethean attempts at gaining mastery over a world that is by definition excessive and out of reach.

(pp 43-44)

Both the fourth and sixth chapters address embodiment; the former through an unpacking of the notion of presence within a critique of the sanitized and solidified tenets of contemporary secular mindfulness trends, the latter through our incarnate, interdependent relationship to the earth; an important nudge to the individualistic susceptibilities of psychotherapeutic practice and also a complement to the vital conversations occurring within the growing eco-psychology movement. The fifth chapter, 'Why Zen is Not Transpersonal' offers a much needed corrective to the notion that we, as practitioners, are somehow meditating ourselves to a higher plane of consciousness, transcending every day experiences in contrast to Zen's emphasis upon fully inhabiting them. In this respect, the unconditioned

stillness of *zazen*, or sitting meditation, has more to offer the existential anxieties and enquiries that arise between therapist and client than it does concerns with spiritual advancement or attainments. I am reminded of the time Zen teacher Joko Beck had finished a talk and asked if there were any questions. A young man raised his hand and candidly asked, 'Are you enlightened?'. Her reply was immediate and, to me, utterly delightful. Laughing, she responded, 'I hope I should never have such a thought!' (Caplow & Moon, 2013: p 23).

Perhaps the most philosophically dense and difficult to navigate, the penultimate chapter 'On Differentialism' unpacks the tenets of differentialism further and draws upon Nagarjuna, Derrida and Merleau-Ponty's *incarnate phenomenology* to argue the importance of difference and multiplicity in contrast to a Heideggerian logocentrism that is concerned first and foremost with identity. The final chapter, much to the likely horror of existential psychotherapists who had any appreciation of psychoanalysis siphoned from them during their trainings, Bazzano agrees with Bion that Freud did not, in fact, take the idea of the unconscious far enough and Bazzano turns to it to challenge the neo-positivism that pervades our therapeutic times.

The philosophical density of *Zen and Therapy* might, at times, make it challenging for the reader to reconcile the attitude of 'engaged ambivalence' Bazzano invites us to cultivate, which he describes as giving ourselves 'permission to remain undecided in relation to what is ultimately true while being open to the fluidity of experience' (p 7), with the confident positions and critiques the text conveys. Engaged ambivalence is a courageous and peripheral attitude to take amidst a profession that increasingly orientates itself to the standardizing practices Bazzano is so critical of; within his generous personal reflections, I would have appreciated greater insight into how he has managed to navigate these tensions whilst meeting the 'professional' requirements we are all called to observe. It is an aspect of my own practice I continue to struggle with. Bazzano also seems to convey a hopefulness and positive regard towards psychotherapeutic practice that can seem incongruent with the problems he encounters within the profession; for example, I consider his suggestion that psychotherapy could be the Dharma's *Fourth Treasure* (p 12) an over-inflation, or idealization, of psychotherapy's benefits to society so far.

This review has introduced just a few of the themes Bazzano presents in *Zen and Therapy* that are likely to be of interest to existential psychotherapists, however, through reading and re-reading it, I have become too lost to do justice to the deeply enriching, perplexing insights and disruptions it offers. Bazzano's writing is both refreshing and challenging, and his is a vital voice within existential psychotherapeutic discourse. It does, however, feel pertinent to remind the reader that, accompanying Bazzano's admirable ability to weave and traverse the terrains of Eastern and Western philosophy,

psychology, cultural theory and personal essay, is a steady *Zen practice*. He reminds us that,

The teachings of the Buddha, Zen literature and the Zen tradition give us inspiration. But they are no substitute for the dedicated psychosomatic practice of zazen and the radical ethical practice of generosity

(p 133)

Zen and Therapy is the product of years of dedicated practice and is a generous gift to our profession. It has inspired me to persist with my own practice – as both a psychotherapist and Zen student – as I am sure it will all existential practitioners who are open to allowing counter tradition perspectives to disrupt normative views upon psychotherapeutic praxis. I end with three bows to the author, with new resolve and in deep appreciation.

Rebecca Esho Greenslade

References

- Bazzano, M. (2012). *Spectre of the Stranger: Towards a Phenomenology of Hospitality*. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press.
- Caplow, F. & Moon, S. (2013). *The Hidden Lamp: Stories from twenty-five centuries of awakened women*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Phenomenology in Action in Psychotherapy: On pure psychology and its applications in psychotherapy and mental healthcare

Ian Rory Owen (2015). London: Springer International Publishing

Ian Rory Owen's 300-page book promises to illustrate how phenomenology manifests in psychotherapy; it delivers, as well as expounding the detailed minutiae of how phenomenology is situated as a tradition. As a text it sits as the seventy-ninth volume of a series entitled *Contributions to Phenomenology*. As a concept., I was unaware of its existence, but the placing of the text as part of a series on phenomenology gives an insight into its preferencing philosophical understanding and rigor over the applications to mental health. This is not meant as a criticism, and indeed the book seems to be aligned with Owen's numerous articles in this very journal over the years. However, it is definitely an academic text on Husserl and phenomenology.

The book is laid out in three distinct parts, following a preface and a general introduction (chapter one) which bears the title 'The naturalistic attitude cannot grasp meaning for consciousness'. Owen is clear about his intentions with the book 'written to summarise some key aspects of Husserl's theoretical qualitative methods for making theory, so empirical research