

of philosophical thought. Prideaux makes no mention of his importance to the world of psychotherapy. Nonetheless, it was an entertaining and worthwhile read that stimulated new insights for me and provoked many interesting explorations.

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The Existentialist's Survival Guide: How to Live Authentically in an Inauthentic Age

Dr. Gordon Marino. 2018. New York: HarperOne.

Dr. Gordon Marino may not be well known to existential phenomenological practitioners, but he is *bona fide* expert on the writings and life of Søren Kierkegaard and holds an academic position that will sound oddly familiar. Almost anyone who has read one of the many volumes of Kierkegaard's sprawling oeuvre may well have used an edition translated and/or edited by Howard and Edna Hong, and published by Princeton University Press in their familiar two-tone black and colored jackets with a decal of a thumbnail sketch of Kierkegaard in profile in the centre. Marino is the Director of the Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf's College, a liberal arts college in Minnesota in the United States. He is the author and editor of several other more scholarly books about Kierkegaard and existential philosophy, as well as being a veteran amateur boxer and writer on boxing – this latter factoid has some relevance to the book and the review. He is not, however, a psychotherapist or counsellor.

In this highly readable book, Marino combines his years of Kierkegaard scholarship with the pacier and more vivid style of writing that he doubtless employs for his boxing journalism. One imagines that this is a winning combination of styles for the students in his classroom at St. Olaf's and can be helpful in the present age, one that Marino dubs as an Age of Inauthenticity. He employs it in a neatly structured way to explore how the writings of Kierkegaard and other writers, thinkers and philosophers bear the label of 'existential'. Although the likes of Nietzsche, Sartre, Heidegger and even Tillich, May and Yalom are all mentioned, either substantially or in passing, Kierkegaard is very much centre stage here.

The narrative takes the form of seven chapters, each entitled with a single word/theme (with one exception) that is then explored through the lens of Kierkegaard's writings and the writings of others, to bring forth insights into how one might choose to navigate the life of the present age in an authentic and fulfilling manner. These themes include Anxiety, Depression and Despair (the exception), Death, Authenticity, Faith, Morality and Love – all very familiar motifs in Kierkegaard's writing and in the broader existential canon. Interspersed with illuminating examples of these themes from Kierkegaard's writings, Marino uses personal and often painful examples from his own, at times troubled, life. These assist in illustrating how Kierkegaard has helped him not just to build a successful career as an academic but to steer him toward living a good and fulfilling life, away from the casual violence and self-destructive behaviour of his younger years. His candor and openness in this respect turns this book from being merely a collection of 'Just So Stories' – *How Kierkegaard Slayed the Black Dog*, or *How Kierkegaard Conquered My Fear of Tinder* – into a much more personal and poignant exploration of central existential themes as actually lived. There is a certain hokey-ness to the title that undermines the genuine engagement of the themes of the book and the, for want of a better word, authentic struggle that they have involved for Marino.

It is tempting at this point to leave the review at that. A breezy introduction to existential thought through the front door of Kierkegaard, and one of the better examples of the tradition of the great American self-help book – no therapy required, just read the existential canon. As well as being a nice complement to Sarah Bakewell's slightly antecedent work *At the Existentialist Café*, which covers similar ground but with a much heavier emphasis on Sartre, de Beauvoir and French existentialism and was reviewed in this Journal a few issues back. However, this would be unfair on a few levels.

Firstly, Marino has in fact used therapy and several times refers to his ongoing suffering of bouts of depression. He is very complimentary of his time in therapy and views it as an excellent complement to his deep engagement with the philosophical and literary writings of Kierkegaard, naturally, and many others. Furthermore, he takes a clear stance, boosted by his positive experiences in therapy but led primarily by his rigorous application of the lessons of his guide, Kierkegaard, in favor of viewing mental health problems as problems of living and not as medical problems for medicating. He describes his therapy as a time when he was '... taught ... about the matchless healing power of relationships, something easily forgotten in an era of pharmaceutical fundamentalism' (p 28). Marino formulates this stance on the basis of his reading of Kierkegaard and others such as Viktor Frankl that '... psychological suffering [is] not an illness to be passively tolerated, but an action you could perform either well or poorly' (p 30). The pugilist in him, and whatever

ground of Being-in-the-world that this is founded on, may well be drawn to this kind of stoic and macho approach to the private suffering of the depressive. It is an approach that I have some sympathy with myself, having only ever once started a course of anti-depressants, many years ago, simply to throw away the prescription. Perhaps this is a misguided approach but there is in Marino – and perhaps in me – something that wants to feel what we feel, directly, and not to have it medi(c)ated chemically. There is some sense of wanting to feel real whatever that might be, or, again for want of a better word, authentic.

This leads us to the second and main point of contention of this work, the notion of authenticity. It is eponymously central to the purpose of Marino addressing us via this book and, I think he would contend, to the purpose of exposing the work of Kierkegaard to a more general readership. Somehow, the life of Kierkegaard, strange and short though it was, seems to provide for some a kind of template of authenticity. Kierkegaard famously, and painfully, broke off his engagement to Regine Olsen in order to pursue, more single-mindedly, what he saw as his duty to write about and critique the world he saw around him – to be his own person and to address the world as he saw it, on his own terms. Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and perhaps even Kant, provide similar templates for a type of authenticity, perhaps co-terminus with a notion of independence, in the pursuit of the truth of the world and how to forge a mode of Being in the world. This vision is somewhat undermined by the fact that all five of these exemplars, were moderately, or very privileged, individuals able to use financial independence or safe sinecures in academia to insulate them from the mundane world of *das Man* and the quotidian vagaries of earning and making ends meet.

Somewhat unfortunately, Marino also quotes Shakespeare's dictum, 'To thine own self be true' (p 122) as he explores existential ideas about authenticity. He does so without acknowledging that this adage comes from the famous speech in *Hamlet* during which Polonius offers a number of clichéd pieces of advice to the young Hamlet about to leave Denmark for student life in Germany. The speech is often thought to be intended to lampoon the pedestrian-minded Polonius rather than offer a masterclass of granite-hard nuggets of worldly-wise advice to the 'callow' Hamlet. These dicta of prudent living are simply wasted on the incredibly fertile and protean being of Hamlet.

One cannot help thinking that, whatever it is, this thing called authenticity neither Marino nor even Kierkegaard is quite able to encapsulate this notoriously slippery and contentious concept. In an *Age of Anger*, according to Pankaj Mishra (2017), notions of authenticity, forged in the revolutionary and romantic age of nineteenth century Europe, lie at the heart of extremist religious and nationalist movements on the rise in many parts of the twenty-first century world. This raises critical questions as to how we are to address the impetus

of such movements without appearing to fall into the precise trap laid down by the rhetoric of authenticity, whereby to undermine it is to reinforce their critique of the rootless inauthenticity of the cosmopolite. Or, without retreating, as sometimes Kierkegaard threatens to do, into a religious 'arms race' of purity and its toxic partner, sanctimony. Nevertheless, as Thomas Mann (1992) writes in his novel *Doctor Faustus*, about another of those highly complex existential motifs, Freedom, '...we have the word too, it is at our service, don't think that it only occurs in dictionaries and that your idea of it is the only one dictated by reason' (p 102). Authenticity is in the conceptual world as part of our intellectual thrownness. As Brexit drags interminably on, it is worth remembering that underlying it are complex notions of authenticity. Finally, heroic though his efforts are, and highly readable though this book is, Marino and his anecdotes about the fight game do not quite overcome the aporia that one man's authenticity might be another woman's toxic masculinity. Despite these reservations, I will commend this book as a helpful, readable and personal journey into the foothills of both Kierkegaard's bewildering but effervescent writings but also the broader existential landscape.

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Dialogues on the Search for Meaning in Existential Therapy

Ernesto Spinelli & Gianfranco Buffardi. Ed. Paola Pomponi. May, 2019. London: Society for Existential Analysis.

This book is the very first of a hoped-for series of dialogues between existential thinkers and practitioners, edited by incoming SEA Chair Paola Pomponi, who provides an introduction and some concluding observations. *Dialogues* comprises ten short chapters, each featuring a provocation by Buffardi, an Italian psychiatrist, followed by a response by Ernesto Spinelli, a leading existential writer.

The two men engage with a range of topics including humility, cause-and-effect, inter-connectedness, questioning, death, spatiality, figure/ground, identity and art. Each topic proves a fertile ground for exploring a range of existential ideas. Some thinking is original and elsewhere outlines established positions. Each author brings in case and client studies from their work. The book is therefore in the category of how to bring existential theory into practice, in my view an under-served category.

The format feels novel and refreshing. The book is divided into ten standalone and clear sections. The writing maintains a spontaneous and lively tone that is engaging and reflects the conversational character to which the title alludes. This is not a book with explorations of a singular topic in a comprehensive scholarly manner, except that the erudition and experience of the authors is obvious and evidenced by the referencing at the end of each chapter. As a reader, you could make good headway on a chapter and take something thought-provoking from it while waiting for a bus or for a client. For me, overall, it works.

In a sense, the book fails to deliver on its conversational aspiration because each chapter is a single volley from Buffardi followed by a single volley back from Spinelli. Does a series of connected monologues constitute a dialogue or is this as close as we can get to a deep conversation in writing? A more dynamic exchange might lose some of its complexity and profundity – I certainly would not want to read a WhatsApp conversation on paper. The silent listening of one often enables the depth of thought of the other, as any therapist will be keenly aware. Perhaps inevitably, most of the points made by one writer go unattended by the other. That for me is characteristic of conversations, including therapeutic ones. Seeing what the authors attend to is enlightening.

Dialogues is the first fruit of an innovative approach aiming to open out existential thinking to a broader audience. It is self-published by the SEA using Amazon's print-on-demand technology. This technology means copies are only printed when they are ordered. An eBook/Kindle edition is also available. That said, no publisher also means there is no entrenched marketing machine and it will be up to SEA members to spread the word. The book is priced to be relatively accessible at £9.99 on Amazon UK. The authors donate all royalties to the SEA.

I hope that if this series becomes successful, it could 'de-sediment', to use a Spinelli concept, the location of thoughts about existential psychotherapy in authoritative bibles in their sixth edition published by Routledge. The world is constantly changing, speeding up even, and existentialism needs to keep up. This book offers the opportunity to broaden and share dialogues within the existential community. The series could help disseminate fresh thoughts from new people using innovative formats. Perhaps that means introducing video as well as text, spontaneity as well as planning, original rather than long-standing thoughts and hearing from a plurality of community voices, not just a few of the same old faces. I trust that when Pomponi considers future books in this series, she will proactively seek to foster a range of voices from diverse cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, sexualities, genders, ages, abilities, professions and so on.

One of the questions Spinelli asks is whether the structures we inhabit to sustain existentialism truly reflect our philosophy. Spinelli suspects, I