

content for the est training programme over an intense period of two weeks. As is well-known, there is a significant element of Heidegger's philosophy in this programme, even if moulded from a certain pragmatist understanding that Dreyfus had developed in his reading of the German philosopher. This revelation greatly surprised me, and I mention this here because it reminds me of the need to maintain a sense of care and rigour in not succumbing to Cartesian and metaphysical (that is, technological, calculative thinking) when we aim to bring out and articulate Heidegger's ideas. In Aho's hands, this is not an issue, since his writing carries us along with admirable skill and understanding in a way that one can only come to expect of a Heidegger scholar of the first order.

Mo Mandic

Dante's Deadly Sins: Moral philosophy in Hell

Raymond Angelo Belliotti, 2013. Chichester: Wiley.

I was attracted to this book in part because I have not read any Dante at all. Knowledge of his work is limited to that gleaned from Dan Brown's populist novel *Inferno* and from readings in museums and galleries when visiting Florence. Yet he exists more readily in my consciousness than that limited exposure should justify. Similarly, I have more than a passing interest in morality and intersections with religion and secularity which has emerged since the birth of my daughters, as I find they exist in a world where there is an assumption that religion is the arbiter of morality. Finally, the biography of the author seemed interesting as a former lawyer and now a philosophy professor in the US, something that gave me hope that he could make a heavy and academic perspective accessible, interesting and fun.

Belliotti describes the purpose of the book as focusing "only on the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* and on the philosophical issues of personal responsibility, individual moral desert, retributive justice, repentance and the nature of virtue and vice" (p15) rather than trying to present a reading of Dante's work that is novel. Instead, Belliotti comes from the starting point that while lots of authors have written about Dante's *Commedia*, he has "not come upon a single book that teases out the practical, secular moral implications of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*" (p xii).

The book is well organised. In the introduction he presents an overview of Dante, his life, the society in which he lived, his other works and his death. I found it a good positioning statement as it provides energy and life to the work and its subject. Initially, Dante's *Inferno* is summarised in chapter one, while the following chapter does the same for his *Purgatorio*, with particular emphasis on how Dante differentiates between how those in purgatory and those in hell are dealt with. Chapter three is where the

author attempts to step up in terms of adding more than just descriptive value, looking at vice, personal responsibility and *contrapasso* (the principle that punishment must mirror the nature of the transgressions). Belliotti uses chapter four to examine some of the paradoxical positions within moral philosophy that seemingly equivalent sins are treated differently, potentially based on how Dante related to them, rather than any particular moral position. Chapter five sees an analysis of the seven deadly sins as defined by Catholicism, those of pride, envy, avarice, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth. The sixth and final chapter is the most interesting and relevant to psychotherapy as I understand it, as Belliotti draws ten moral lessons from Dante and projects them onto existential understandings, focusing on “how best to live a good, human life” (p17).

The author only mentions the third volume of the *Commedia*, the *Paradiso*, briefly, in the introduction. In terms of giving an understanding of Dante, I found this a major omission as it details how Dante viewed the rise of the human soul to God, which is important to grasp the wider picture of his moral philosophy. Belliotti argues, somewhat convincingly, that “the metaphysics and the theology of the *Paradiso* are not required for my tasks and might even distract from my message” (p17). There is a potential danger here though, that without that understanding, Dante could be considered to encourage people to act morally as a considered choice rather to act morally as an act of bad faith simply because that is what they are told they should do.

This position, to my mind, approaches bad faith. It is reminiscent of talking to colleagues whose response to the question of whether they would have sex with a client is to say no because a code of ethics says so, which is not a moral nor an ethical position but an abdication of responsibility. Belliotti does not address this and he is correct, that it may have distracted from his message that Dante foreshadowed some existential premises. It is this omission that undermines the authors’s desire to draw parallels between existentialism and Dante, as without the God part as motivator living a good, human life can mean very different things. This may seem a trivial perspective, but in linking to the principle of *contrapasso*, the motivating principles are integral to the “nature of transgressions”.

I feel clearly moved by Belliotti’s work and his subject Dante. It inspired me to buy and read the original and grapple with my own reading of a clearly religious but ultimately provocative work, and attempt to map my interpretations onto what he terms existential thought.

My biggest criticism is that the explicitness of linking and ‘comparing’ existential thought with Dante’s philosophy is so pithy and stands alone in nature. I agree with Belliotti that, based on his presentation of Dante’s work, “Dante’s moral lessons anticipated existential themes” (p150), but I do think there could have been more on existentialism as a diverse conceptual home. That said, I feel like I am acting in bad faith in that request as it is an earnest

attempt to blend religious and secular polarities and Belliotti discloses a lot of himself in an existential fashion, something I am grateful for.

I would recommend this book, with a caveat. I do not think that those who just want a detailed engagement with existentialism need read it. It may be the case that Belliotti does a disservice to Dante's work, something I feel not able to really critique at this moment. The book is well written, enjoyable, clear and well argued in what it does bring, and ultimately the author largely achieves what he set out to – it prompted my thought process and raised enough questions to want to learn more.

Ben Scanlan

The Well Gardened Mind : Rediscovering nature in the modern world

Sue Stuart-Smith, 2021. London: William Collins.

The central message of *The Well Gardened Mind* is that working or being in a garden is generally good for our psychological health and well being. It can be healing for sick, severely injured or traumatised people. The author of this book, Sue Stuart-Smith, is a Consultant Psychiatrist who worked until 2015 in the NHS as a Lead Clinician for Adult Psychotherapy. She is currently a Senior Clinical Lecturer at the Tavistock & Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

The benefits of gardens/gardening accrue from engaging and working with nature on her terms. Gardens cannot be hurried. They develop and grow according to the seasons and weather conditions. We can assist but have to accept our limitations, rather like working with clients. Indeed, gardening can be a spiritual experience, reminding us of our connection to the universe and dependency on the sun, Earth and moon.

She considers that trees provide structure and a sense of permanence, they can make us feel secure and protected. As William Blake said, “the tree which moves some to tears of joy is [for others] only a green thing which stands in the way“ (p265). For some, gardening is just another pile of jobs and demands on their time. As with therapy we have to be open to the experience and for some it will never be their cup of tea.

Stuart-Smith marshals various sources of evidence as to how gardening works for us on a neurological and emotional level to relieve anxiety, grief, trauma and offers transformation and hope. She says, and I agree, there can be a meditative experience when immersed in gardening that enables sorting things in your head while absorbed in digging, pulling up weeds or planting seeds, with attention directed outside oneself. This kind of relaxed immersive attention gives the brain a rest and restores mental energy.