

Book reviews

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Trauma, Truth and Reconciliation: Healing Damaged Relationships

Edited by Nancy Nyquist Potter. Oxford University Press. 2006. 314pp. £29.95 (pb). ISBN 0198569432

This is a philosophical look at a subject of intense interest to psychiatrists. The thirteen authors include seven philosophers, two theologians, three psychologists and six psychiatrists, several doubly qualified. Some chapters are unashamedly theoretical; use of conditional tenses is quite refreshing as a change from medical books.

Potter, the editor, introduces the topic of the healing power of forgiveness and reconciliation, including the vexed issue of the morality of forgiving someone with no remorse. Brendel, considering the implications of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) for psychotherapy, looks at the way that apology can be an important first step towards repairing a damaged relationship. Krüger writes about forgiveness and reconciliation from a South African perspective. She regards Desmond Tutu's *ubuntu* theology as having been a guiding force in the work of the TRC. Zachar, also considering the TRC from a psychotherapeutic perspective, argues that it had a legitimate purpose in the management of both individual and societal rage, and that the experience of rage is related to a desire for justice. He deals with the different problem of prescribed forgiveness. How the philosophical approach to the concept of truth helps us understand the notion and role of truth-telling in our lives is linked by Mitchell to the work of the TRC.

Political reconciliation, the process of building healthier relationships among citizens formerly estranged through conflict or repression, is discussed by Murphy. Psychotherapy can help to clarify past events and explore feelings but cannot provide reconciliation, according to Spitz, who elaborates how truth and trust are required. Rawlinson discusses the moral significance of the act of forgiveness. The hypothesis of Glas is that the description of the dynamic of evil helps us to understand forgiveness and

reconciliation, and that this is useful for the work of the psychiatrist. 'It is characteristic for forgiveness to have insufficient grounds; this is not a weakness but indicates forgiveness's power . . .' Verhagen develops a relational model of forgiveness involving both victim and offender.

How forgiveness may reinforce gender stereotypes and uneven power relations is discussed by Lamb. Perring states that truth-telling is an essential ingredient in the healing process and discusses consumer/survivor movements in psychiatric care. 'Change the story, the future changes' is central to work with aboriginal people in Canada, according to Mehl-Madrona who cooperates with community elders in psychotherapy.

This book is recommended to those who want to take one of the fundamentals of our work a bit further.

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Asylum to Action: Paddington Day Hospital, Therapeutic Communities and Beyond

By Helen Spandler. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2006. 176pp. £25.00 (pb). ISBN 1843103486

I was pleasantly surprised and excited when asked to review this book. Initially apprehensive, I found the experience enriching, not only in expanding my limited knowledge about therapeutic communities but also in awakening a sense of intrigue and curiosity.

Asylum to Action provides a glimpse into history, of the rise and subsequent demise of the Paddington, a therapeutic community set in London in the late '60s/early '70s. The author, Helen Spandler, is a Research Fellow in social work and has published in other areas of mental health. *Asylum to Action* is a summary of her retrospective work on Paddington. She is

clearly very knowledgeable and passionate about the research she carried out into the history of the hospital. This is conveyed within her narrative and she achieves a good balance between giving factual information and providing a forum in which to pose questions and allow productive debate.

The book is divided into thoughtful chapters. It begins by giving a history of the formation of therapeutic communities in an era of anti-psychiatry, social ideals and a rise in patients with mental health problems using their own voices to promote change.

The Paddington appears to have been an idealised experiment into health democracy and libertarianism, at a time of immense political struggle within the healthcare system. When faced with uncertainty in 1972, a tremendous effort by the Paddington's staff and patients prevented its closure. It provided a foundation from which patients gained more rights in treatment choices and allowed for an escape from traditional medicalisation and labelling. Unfortunately, it also portrays a very real situation where power struggles, a lack of boundaries and regulations and the extremes of political correctness can lead to corruption and destruction.

In contrast to other literature on the Paddington Day Hospital, Spandler challenges the negative accounts. Rather than purely lingering on its downfall, Spandler reinforces its achievements as a therapeutic microcosm that provided benefits to its

