

PSYCHOTHERAPY: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

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Keith Tudor is an experienced psychotherapist, lecturer and supervisor with long-standing experience of humanistic therapies. He currently holds a professorship in Auckland, New Zealand. Tudor is explicit regarding his staunch political credentials: he has been a Marxist activist and cites a number of political influences including feminism and internationalism.

This new book sets out to provide an accessible text, free of jargon, with something of an internationalist approach and it easily meets this target. Its core aim is to introduce readers to critical thinking and to encourage us to apply this mindset to all areas of psychotherapy with the ultimate goal of enabling a truly informed and reflexive practice or “praxis.” I relished this concept of praxis as opposed to practice: that our personal and professional development should be deeply rooted in the integration of different forms of experience and understanding.

My criticisms of the book are few; I found it a truly thought-provoking, well-crafted and enjoyable piece, and it appears to join a surprisingly small number of texts blending critical thinking and psychotherapy.

Tudor acknowledges the impossibility of one book attempting to provide a critique of theory, opting instead to provide critical approaches for readers to then extrapolate to their own practice and development. Quite rightly, the distinction between critical thinking and unhelpful cynicism is made early on and the difference between the two becomes more apparent as the book unfolds. Dogmatic thinking is identified as another villain of the piece and framed as the thin end of a fascist wedge. Pleasingly, remedies and alternatives are presented in the form of critical approaches and compassion. Convincing arguments for the use of a two-person psychology are made, and alongside this is a heartening and, to my mind, essential promotion of both practitioner and client wellbeing.

Throughout the book there is a call to broaden our methods of developing praxis from the range of self-development activities to recognising the colonialist threads implicit within the globalisation of Western thinking. There is a move to being truly inclusive of healing approaches that sit outside the Northern, Western traditions, and glimpses into the values of Māori culture are provided to underline this. Tudor is clear that this is not an instruction manual for critical therapy, and I agree. However, I found the book often acts as a good jumping-off point and gives useful signposts to areas for further exploration.

Another distinct theme which grows louder and more overt as the book progresses is the cry for political engagement and activism from the therapeutic community. Ultimately Tudor frames this as a duty, citing the historically rebellious—almost counter-culture—roots of psychotherapy. As someone who came to therapist training after a couple of decades of political activism, I rallied to this battle cry. The point is made unequivocally. In many ways, and especially in the light of current global politics, this does feel like a timely book.

The first three chapters of the book act as a reader, providing a whistle-stop tour through critical thinking and Western academic traditions, the human psyche, therapy, and practice versus praxis. Certainly, through the provision of these chapters Tudor holds true to his aim of providing an accessible text: you would not need much more than an interest in psychotherapy to digest the book. My main criticism, however, concerns the book's ambition to provide

an all-encompassing approach to critical examination: in the early chapters certainly, it feels that deeper foundations in terms of understanding critical thought, therapy and theories on the human psyche are sacrificed in favour of an incredibly broad base.

From chapter four onwards the book seemed to shift gear and I became hooked. The research that has gone into this book is phenomenal and is in evidence through both scene setting and the arguments made. The book really does seek to engender in the reader something of a framework for critiquing every realm of psychotherapy, not merely theory and practice but the training and development of therapists, research, the function and methods of professional associations and communication within these components. Other explorations emerge too, many rooted in how psychotherapists conduct and view themselves, from the “art versus science” debate to the acknowledgement of psychotherapy as a sometime tool of oppression.

As the book considers how therapists come in to being, the processes of training and supervision are debated and held up for criticism. Tudor manages to give a balanced view, recognising the pros and cons of differing stances along with interesting historical detail from the birth of psychotherapy up to contemporary practice.

The book critiques the place of psychotherapy among other fields, and, indeed, its right to be considered a field of its own. There is a suggestion that psychotherapy should seek to return to some of the better parts of its roots, to stand firmly outside medicine and not seek to ape its methodologies, especially as regards research. Tudor provides an interesting and compelling case for returning to practice-based evidence, moving away from the current vogue for randomised controlled trials and other medical models of evidence collection.

Tudor is shrewd and incisive in his examinations, often using specific detailed examples to underline a broader point. His left-wing stance is evident and transparent throughout and as a lefty feminist trainee it made my heart sing to hear a version of the feminist mantra “the personal is political.” From this viewpoint, themes of diversity and inequality are drawn in, leading to an exploration of these issues within the context of psychotherapy. In fairness to Tudor, whilst he wears his political views on his sleeve, the reader is reminded throughout that, in keeping with critical thinking, other perspectives are there for consideration. It is worth noting that, while Tudor wishes to instil some degree of political activism in us all, he stops short of prescribing what kind or in which direction.

Regularly, Tudor explores the socio-political drivers that have led to the current status quo in different areas of discussion. It is this provision of cultural context and the introduction to critical thinking with its emphasis on considering our own individual positions that leaves me feeling this book is of significant value to trainees and experienced therapists alike.

Sarah Cadwallader

Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute, Nottingham, UK

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Sarah Cadwallader is a final year BSc student in integrative and humanistic counselling and psychotherapy. Having worked in the NHS and with the police previously, Sarah has a strong interest in issues of equality and social justice. She is currently working on her dissertation exploring embodied countertransference and the traumatised client.