

Perspective

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Against Assisted Suicide

Tiger Mom and Humanist Dad

Bane of Technology

Dissolving the Problem of Consciousness

REVIEWS

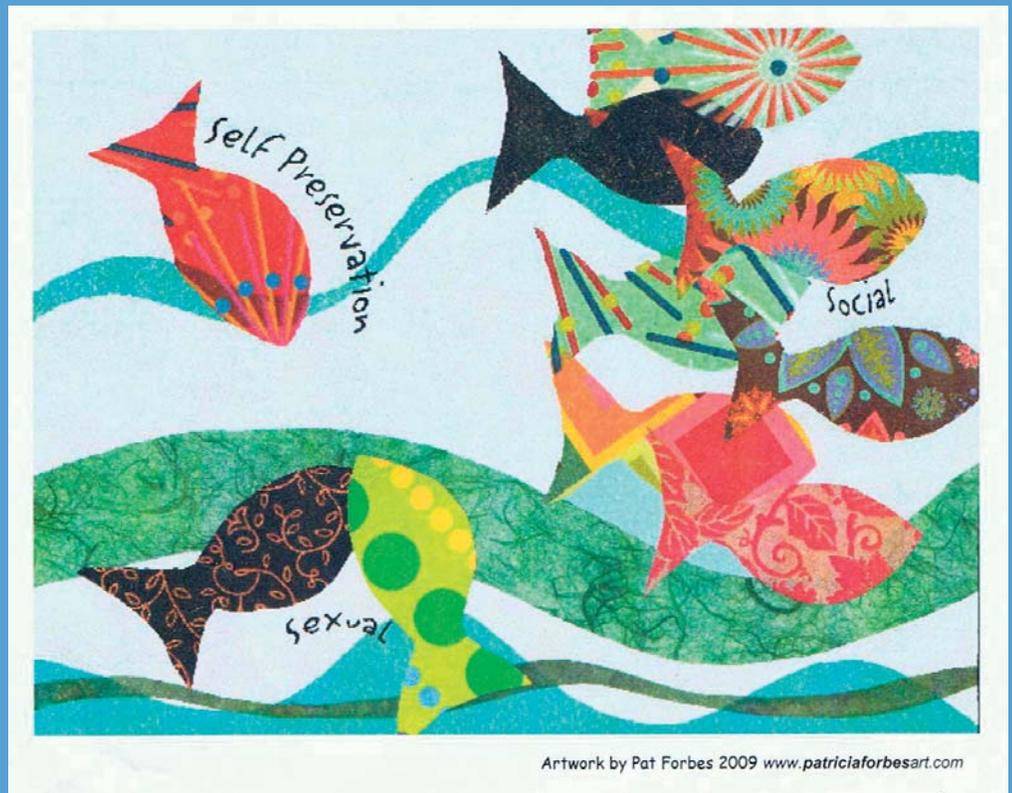
AWAKENING TO AWE
BY KIRK SCHNEIDER

WORDS AGAINST THE VOID
BY TOM GREENING

SPIRITUAL ENVY
BY MICHAEL KRASNY

THE SORCERER'S DREAM
BY ALYSA BRACEAU
(DREAMSHIELD)

THE ORIGIN OF A PERSON
BY ALVIN MAHRER



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AHP PERSPECTIVE

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Before you submit your letter of application, you should be familiar with the responsibilities and expectations of being a board member. The basic term for an "at large" board position is three years. If a board member becomes an officer, his/her term could be extended. Primary responsibilities of "members at large" involve attending two board meetings per year (two to three days each), maintain regular internet contact with the board, and participate in whatever projects or committees you might choose. It is the responsibility of each board member to pay for his/her travel, room and board at the meetings, and maintain Internet service. The average expense to be expected per year ranges from \$1500 to \$3000 depending on airfare to the meetings and any personal or career variables unique to your circumstances (lost working days of income). (If AHP relates to your profession, expenses may be tax-deductible.)

If you are interested in being considered, please submit a letter of application to the AHP Board of Directors. Thank you for your time and interest in pursuing this process. Send applications to the Presidents: cuferguson@aol.com & chip@wakinguptogether.com

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AN AMAZING REGIONAL CONFERENCE

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The Schedule:

9:00 AM Opening

9:15 to 10:45 **(MINDFULNESS IN COUPLES THERAPY)**

Diane Gehart, PhD, licensed MFT, Professor @ CSUN, Specialty: Post Modern Therapy

11:00 to 12:30 **(PARENTING)**

Ginger Clark, PhD, Psychologist, Coordinator of MFT Program at USC: Specialty: Humanistic-Existential Therapy

12:30 to 1:30 Lunch Break (Cafeteria in the Satellite Student Union or Cafes in the neighborhood)

1:45 to 3:15 **(GAY AND LESBIAN COUPLES)**

Greg Henderson, PhD, licensed MFT, Adjunct Professor USC: Private Practice, Beverly Hills

3:30 to 5:00 **(NAVIGATING THE BREAKUP)**

Stan Charnofsky, EdD, Psychologist, Coordinator of MFT Program at CSUN: Specialty: Humanistic Therapy

5:00 to 5:10 Closing and Certificates....

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DATE: Saturday, June 4, 2011

TIME: 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM

PLACE: CSUN Satellite Student Union

COST: \$95.00 for the whole day (AHP MEMBERS: \$90)

THE PROGRAMS will be held in the Multi-Purpose Room--a new, state of the art building in the satellite student union, corner of Zelzah and Lassen. If an attendee is a student at CSUN, his or her parking pass for Summer Session will permit parking in the G-9 lot near the building. If not a student at CSUN, parking on the street (Zelzah) is free and will not be a problem on Saturday. A parking pass may be purchased at the kiosk on Prairie Street for \$6.00. Signs will be posted to Multi-Purpose Room.

Cut Here-----

Mail To: Stan Charnofsky

**CSUN, Dept of Educational Psychology & Counseling
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ADDRESS: _____

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Questions? Call: Stan Charnofsky (818) 677-2548

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Journal of Humanistic Psychology
Vol. 51, No. 1, Winter 2011

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— Kirk J. Schneider



KIRK SCHNEIDER

“I Tramp a Perpetual Journey”: Walt Whitman’s Insights for Psychology . . . *Doxey Hatch*

Lessons from an Existentialist: What Rollo May Taught Me about Power in the Classroom . . . *Michelle M. Merwin*

Dialogical Constructivism: A Relational-Existential Approach to Psychotherapy . . . *Alexandra L. Adame and Larry M. Leitner*

A State of Readiness: An Exploration of the Client’s Role in Meeting at Relational Depth . . . *Rosanne Knox and Mick Cooper*

Humanistic Psychology and the Mental Health Worker . . . *Elliot Benjamin*

RETROSPECTIVES ON HUMANISTIC LUMINARIES

Thomas Szasz: Philosopher of Liberty . . . *John Breeding*

Buber, Heschel, and Heidegger: Two Jewish Existentialists Confront a Great German Existentialist . . . *Maurice Friedman*

Editor’s Commentary

Our winter issue begins with a fascinating analysis of the relationship between Walt Whitman’s poetry and contemporary psychology. In this pioneering piece, Doxey Hatch shows why Whitman should be recognized as much for his illuminations of the human condition as he is for his marvelous turns of phrase. Hatch, for example, shows how Whitman rejected mind-body dualism in favor of a holistic perspective resonant with contemporary physics; how he connected self-esteem with the embrace of the cosmos; and how he

featured sexual egalitarianism, multiculturalism, and postmodernism as essential elements of a thriving consciousness.

In “Lessons From an Existentialist,” Michelle Merwin invokes another iconic figure to help guide and inspire—Rollo May. Deriving his discoveries from both the literary classic and the clinic, May offered profound insights that have aided many on their diversified paths. In this candid and eloquent essay, Merwin shows how May’s view of power in particular has assisted her to transform her ability to

teach. While ostensibly aimed at educators, Merwin's review of May's ideas on "exploitative, manipulative, competitive, nutrient, and integrative power," can be helpful to anyone who cares about healing and transforming the world.

Next we turn to three articles that attempt to heal and transform therapeutic processes. In Adame and Leitner's essay, "Dialogical Constructivism: A Relational-Existential Approach to Psychotherapy," the table is set for an expanded understanding of practice. Instead of focusing predominantly on either the individual or relationship, Adame and Leitner contend that optimal healing is often a dialogical interchange between both. In this way, their worldview not only echoes the prescient Martin Buber, with his "I-Thou" relationship, but also the recent trends in existential-humanistic and intersubjective therapies. It seems that we are now coming to a very fruitful convergence in depth-humanistic practice where each of the major paradigms are recognizing the core value of the dialogical, yet from slightly different angles. The next step perhaps is to examine more closely the significance of these seemingly minor differences, and to tease out their respective strengths.

Roseanne Knox and Mick Cooper carry the question of relational depth into a very important arena of psychological investigation—the client's role in the facilitation of that depth. In this illuminating paper, Knox and Cooper detail the nuances of readiness, vulnerability, and decision-making that lead clients to accept the challenge of relational depth, and the therapist characteristics that appear to facilitate it. Learn more about the personal motivations that can lead clients to express sadness or fear, and the perceived changes in their therapists just prior to or in association with these outpourings. In "Humanistic Psychology and the Mental Health Worker," Elliot Benjamin takes us in an entirely different yet related direction. Benjamin's focus is on how depth-humanistic practice can take place in the conventional mental health setting where standardization and medicalization tend to be the standard fare. This article is a significant articulation of both the challenges and possibilities available to those within conventional mental health who are willing practice from a humanistic point of view. I hope practitioners of all backgrounds will recognize the instructive findings in this report.

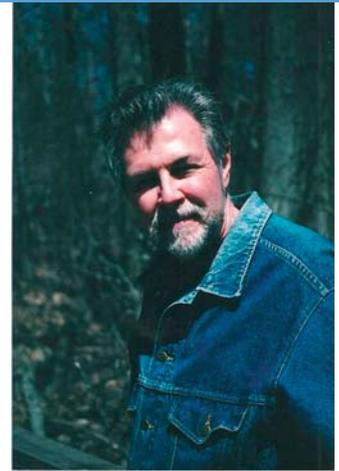
Next we present two retrospectives on humanistic luminaries—the first on Thomas Szasz and the second on Martin Buber, Abraham Heschel, and Martin Heidegger. In a stirring tribute to his mentor, John Breeding commemorates Thomas Szasz's provocative legacy upon the occasion of his 90th birthday. Szasz, a trailblazer of psychiatric freedom and longstanding JHP board member, is vividly and lucidly portrayed in this appreciative tribute. In "Buber, Heschel, and Heidegger: Two Jewish Existentialists Confront a Great German Existentialist," Maurice Friedman provides us with an "inside" glimpse of three philosophical titans as they grapple with the implications of Heidegger's Nazi past. While this article is by no means the last word on this conundrum, it is a rare and intimate revelation that can only strengthen our investigative resolve.

In closing, I would like to bring readers' attention to the following announcement from JHP author Mick Cooper (also author of "Existential Therapies" [Sage, 2003] and Professor of Counselling at the University of Strathclyde). Currently, Mick is undertaking a review of research evidence on the effectiveness and efficacy of existential therapies. If you know of any relevant research – whether published or unpublished – using controlled, observational or systematic case studies designs, please email him references at mick.cooper@strath.ac.uk This is a highly important undertaking around which I strongly hope our community will mobilize. Speaking of Mick Cooper, I'd like to take this opportunity to announce that Mick along with Rich Hycner and Orah Krug have agreed to join our editorial board. As intimated above, Mick is a prominent existentially oriented scholar from the U.K. who I think will add immeasurably to our depth-humanistic perspective at JHP. Rich Hycner has written significant works in the area of person-centered, Gestalt, and existential psychology including "The Healing Relationship in Gestalt Therapy," one of my personal favorites, and has been a very active presenter for many years both here and abroad. Orah Krug is my superb co-author of our recent book "Existential-Humanistic Therapy" published by the American Psychological Association, a co-founder and current training director of the Existential-Humanistic Institute, and a major voice in contemporary existential-humanistic theory, training, and practice.

— KIRK SCHNEIDER

TO BE OR NOT TO BE: Dissolving the Hard Problem of Consciousness

— Brad Hunter



BRAD HUNTER

People who claim to be materialists and scientifically oriented, sometimes contend they don't much believe in anything that cannot be touched, tasted, smelled, heard, seen, or at least measured. And yet everyone—even rational materialists—seems to believe in 'I'. (And cyberspace!) But it doesn't take an awful lot of mindful investigation to soon discover that this 'I' isn't exactly located anywhere; nor does it seem that it is ever exactly absent anywhere either. Upon closer examination and further investigation this 'I' doesn't seem to have any discernable qualities whatsoever! Sure, the *sense* of myself in body and mind generates some images, apparent psychological qualities, and this physical sensation of 'me' seems to be imbedded at a cellular level. But I must admit that this whole sense of 'I' can shift quite dramatically dependent upon an infinite variety of internal and external circumstances; not to mention how this sense has been deconstructed and reconstructed countless times over the years.

In the meantime, this 'I' itself is like the horizon; every time we try to move toward it and take hold, the 'I' seems to recede and reveals its formless nature by denying any grasping and evading any reliable and fixed conceptualization. The word itself is so narrow that it threatens to vanish altogether into nothingness. The ancient Buddhist saying "The eye cannot see itself" could be rendered as well as "The I cannot see itself." The "I" is as ungraspable and

unknowable—objectively speaking anyway—as the next moment which has not yet come into being. And it's the 'come into being' of the "I" that is precisely one of the deep roots of our suffering!

The "I" does not exist in the context of our usual meaning of 'to be', as a *thing* in a world of other things. But we can't exactly say that the "I" does *not* exist either. *Something* (for lack of a better term) is aware of moment-to-moment experience. But whatever this mysterious something is, IT certainly seems to recede from any attempts to contain, name and identify IT. IT is already 'there' so-to-speak, in the timeless cutting edge of this instant, *before* experience is even recognized. The general, unquestioned assumption most of us have, is that this perceiver is the 'me'—my conceptualized personality view. But is this even possible? Is it a concept or some intrapsychic image that sees and hears and feels, some homunculus within the skull or heart?

Take a deep breath, soften your gaze for a moment and try to set aside, just for a few seconds, the various mental images you have of your 'self'. Try to *just look* at this page in a practice of radical phenomenology, dropping concepts of self and other, inner and outer, here and there. . . . In this *just seeing*, we can only interject an 'I' through some very quick mental gymnastics and sleight of hand (which is exactly what we tend to do moment to moment, without even being conscious of it). Obviously there is

awareness. We do not die or fall out of existence by setting aside our self-concepts for a few moments. (To be quite honest, perception of the world is infinitely clearer and closer to the truth when not clouded by my own preconceived notions about the world and my own being-in-it.) But we are fast approaching the kind of place that Wittgenstein pointed to when he said, "of that which one cannot speak, one must remain silent." So we have replaced "I" with 'awareness', but are still begging the question: "What is exactly is awareness?" When asked a similar question, the meditation master Ajaan Chah laughed and replied, "Awareness isn't even *is!*"

Before we fall completely into silence—or nonsense, or psychosis—let's return for a moment to this whole existence thing. If we deconstruct the word *existence* into its roots of 'ex-istere', perhaps this might give us a shift in perspective. Even though this root meaning 'to be out of' also begs the question of "out of *what?*" maybe we can turn our view around from the 'ex' to this unknowable What. I said previously that the coming-into-being was a root of our suffering. What if Sartre had it backwards and his statement that "existence precedes essence" is the inverse of reality? Might it not be closer to experiential truth to say that Essence precedes existence?

Looking again at the *Mysterium Tremendum* of "I am", could we say that the AM precedes the "I"? To put it in rather awkward language, is it possible that we already are the AM of Being, and self-construction projects and attempts to solidify a 'me' (or to become a not-me, or a different kind of me) are not only doomed to perpetual failure, but also contain the seeds of constant disappointment and existential angst?

The ego-mind immediately reels and cringes in protest (and self-defence!): "But surely letting go of the solidity of "I" is the road to madness!" This person would frame it a little differently: It is precisely our clinging to the delusion of this too too solid self and the constant renovation of our ever-unsatisfactory and unreliable self-images that causes so much of our existential suffering.

But ego continues to rage against the dying of the light! Does this mean that all of my self-improvement and human potential programs are pointless and only contribute to my general dis-ease? If I am constantly looking toward some ideal perfect 'self' in the future, then the answer is yes. If however, the growth and change work I am involved in helps to open the constricted heart, soften the hard edges of a crusty and defended personality, dissolve obstructions and hindrances, if this work is more of a letting go into the unknown, than a gaining & getting in line with some preconceived agenda, then it can serve to facilitate peace and release from anxiety.

There is nothing wrong with having a sense of self. In fact, having a fairly healthy and integrated sense of self is essential for engaging in any practice or investigation that is deeply transpersonal. But there is a great difference between recognizing that we carry this sense of self

within and mistaking this sense and the image(s) for the sum total of who and what we are. Our personality and our sense of self is more of a How than a Who; it translates into our experience of being-in-the-world and our ways of being-in-the-world. Stumbling over imprecise language once again, our being- (which is really our constant becoming) is not our True Being.

So, if we are already There, how do we get there? And if we already Are this unknowable Essence, how do we come to know it?

Paradoxically, we 'get there' by way of body, breath, and awareness that can settle into deep stillness, by *not* striving to get anywhere or yearning to become a someone. We come to know through the gate of unknowing stillness, by letting go of our clinging to the things that we *think* we know, by investigating through the radical phenomenology of mindful, direct perception, beneath the radar of intellection and

conceptualization. As a contemporary meditation teacher put it, "We back our way into Nirvana." This is a process of on-going relinquishment within a safe meditative space.

There is an old Zen saying that, as soon as you open your mouth, you are wrong! I hope you will forgive my shameless wrong-doing here. All words and concepts can be ultimately misleading and misrepresentative. I have tried in vain to paint a watercolour portrait on Niagara Falls; perhaps you can catch a glimpse of the awesome flow.

To be, or not to be—
May we lay the entire question
To rest.

With metta,

BRAD HUNTER began working in the area of death, dying, and bereavement in the early '70s. During this same period he has cultivated a formal meditation practice and in more recent years has begun to guide others. He also combines mindfulness, hypnotherapy, and energy healing practices for therapeutic work in London, Ontario..



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TIGER MOM AND HUMANIST DAD

— David Ryback, with Gracey Ryback

Last night I watched the old movie, *Parenthood*, starring Steve Martin as a neurotic father of an even more neurotic young son. He coaches his son's baseball team, puts him on second base and his son misses catching a crucial pop hit. "Why did you put me on second base?" wails the son, putting his father into paroxysms of existential parental guilt. The father walks on eggshells trying to boost his son's fragile self-esteem, while the son cries at the slightest challenge. One young lady in this movie takes photos of her sexual exploits with her no-good boyfriend at home and the photos mistakenly find their way to her mother, who is also beset by existential anxieties about her own mothering approach. The father's younger brother is an inveterate gambler who collars their father for \$26,000 to save his life from those who aim to collect this debt. And so on. In other words, here's a typical picture of American child-rearing practices, especially if you live in California.

Now comes Amy Chua and her book, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, who espouses a take-no-prisoners approach to getting her two daughters to study for hours on end, practice their piano or violin lessons for hours as well, and eschew anything that might be fun, such as TV, video games,

sleepovers, socials, etc.

Timing is everything, and Chua has come with her extreme approach just when there are so many questions about the effectiveness of education, America's place in the world order, and our floundering economy. We're desperately looking for answers, and here is one that, if not fun or sensitive to feelings, at least seems to work. According to an evaluation of 15-year-olds in industrialized countries by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Program for International Student Assessment, the Chinese lead the world in reading and math scores, with the U.S. finding itself in the middle of the crowd.

Ms. Chua, 48, is no slouch, taking hours to work with her two daughters on their studies and music despite her busy career as law professor at an Ivy League university. She is no dummy, in other words. But she is a product of her Chinese culture, though she herself was born in the U.S.

So why am I writing this? Because as a humanistic psychologist, I'm eager to take a look at this take from a perspective that values free choice and sensitivity to feelings—also because my 13-year-old daughter is the product of a Tiger Mother, whose approach is so heavy-handed and seemingly cruel that I thought she might benefit

from some sage counsel because of her harsh treatment of our sweet-hearted and sensitive daughter. There are the hours of working on math exercises and hours of painstaking piano practice over which Tiger Mom reigns with harsh expectations, day in, day out. When I first heard of Chua's account of such a tendency, I was very relieved to learn that there was a name and protocol for this approach. I was then amazed how accurately she was describing what I thought was a somewhat extreme take on parenting. Amazing, I thought. This is an honest-to-goodness approach to education that has a strong cultural underpinning and seems to work for the bottom-line results. What would Maslow have to say about this? I already know what Skinner might say.

There's no space to go into theoretical diatribes here, so what's the bottom line? Well, one response might be from my daughter, Gracey, the subject, or should I say object, of the Tiger Mom approach. Focusing on this topic on her blog, she posted the following points.

What tiger pups cannot do:

* *choose their own extracurricular activities* ("Mom, I want to join Reading Bowl." "NO! I teach you read fine!!")

* *get any grade less than an A*
 (“Mom, I got an 89.” “YOU FAIL-
 URE!! I disown you!!!”)

* *not be the No. 1 student in*
every subject except gym and drama
 (“Mom, I broke both my arms in
 gym.” “So? Beethoven never stop!
 Practice piano two hours!!”)

* *play any instrument other than*
the piano or violin (Um... what
about cello?)

At least Gracey’s sense of humor
 remains intact.

I asked Grace to contribute her
 thoughts on this divisive topic.
 “What will you do with your own
 children when you’re a mom,” I
 asked.

“I’d use a kinder approach,”
 says Gracey, “with my own kids,
 because I feel a little bit dam-
 aged after my mother calls me
 garbage or tells me I’m a failure
 as a Chinese daughter. My mom
 constantly tells me to look at my
 other Asian friends, to see how
 they can get 95+ grades in every
 class or how all of them are play-
 ing various musical instruments in
 the All-State Band. After this, as a
 conclusion, she tells me to think
 about what I have accomplished
 that I can say was a success in life.
 Top 25 in the 5th grade math tour-
 nament? First place in an event at
 the Science Olympiad? But, after
 this ego-boosting pep talk, I feel
 like my life has been completely
 pointless.

“Sometimes, instead of other
 kids bullying me, it’s my own

mother. It makes me feel less
 confident that I can do something
 and do it right. Tiger Moms don’t
 really encourage you to do things;
 they force you to do it correctly.
 After the yelling and screaming
 and threatening, when I finally ac-
 complish my goal, I wonder, ‘Why
 couldn’t I do it myself instead of
 putting stress on other people?’

“I think Tiger Moms’ main
 purpose is to get their children to
 do well. Underneath all the drama,
 my mother’s main purpose is to
 get me to do well. And this is a
 kind thing to do, even if you’re
 bringing them down to get them
 to do it, insulting them. The main
 purpose is to do whatever it takes
 to get the results.

“When she calls me garbage, af-
 ter a certain number of times, you
 begin to believe it. You feel kind
 of hopeless—like you’re a failure
 and you can’t do anything up to
 standard.

“I think, for Chinese mothers,
 this is the way you show affection
 to your children. In the long run,
 I understand where my mom is
 coming from. When I grow up to
 have my own house and family,
 my Tiger Mom just wants me to
 live a good life, have a nice house,
 and have a good job that I enjoy.
 As she always says, ‘Success comes
 before work only in the diction-
 ary.’

When I asked Tiger Mom how
 she felt about this after having
 time to think about Chua’s book
 and seeing interviews of her on
 TV, there was no backing down
 on her extreme attitude, even
 when asked about its effects on
 her daughter’s self-esteem. She
 regretted not being able to be
 stronger (i.e. more demanding and

insistent) and was sad to see Ms.
 Chua back down on her rigorous
 approach in response to TV inter-
 viewers when cornered regarding
 her “cruel” tactics. I could only
 conclude that there would be no
 movement in terms of consider-
 ing the negative effects. Her mind
 was clearly made up, and a rigid
 stance was her only response to
 consideration of negative effects
 on Gracey’s psyche.

I was reminded of some research
 revealing that some attitudes are
 genetically determined. Accord-
 ing to research by James Fowler
 of the University of California,
 two well-studied genes “help
 control the levels of serotonin . . .
 that influence brain areas linked
 with trust and interaction.” Such
 people “tend to be more sociable.”
 On the other hand, University
 of Illinois Professor Ira Carmen
 studied a counterpart, geneD₄DR,
 which involves regulation of the
 neurotransmitter dopamine which
 might “be linked to the need to
 impose order on the world.” After
 two decades of work on 30,000
 twins from Virginia, John Alford
 of Rice University concluded,
 when trying to understand fixed-
 value systems such as we’re dis-
 cussing, whether those of Tiger
 Moms or humanistic psycholo-
 gists: “These views are deep-seated
 and built into our brains.”

Such research helps me under-
 stand how Tiger Moms hold so
 fast to their approach, despite
 social pushback as to its alleged
 cruelty, and how we humanistic
 psychologists are so certain that
 Tiger Moms are clearly in the
 wrong, despite statistics marking
 the educational success of their
 children.

I cringe at the Tiger Mom

approach. I guess that visceral reaction may be genetically determined, according to the research I've just mentioned, as the serotonin coursing through my brain leads me to reasonable consideration of Gracey's feelings. And Gracey's mom is certain and immovable as to her extremist approach, as the dopamine in her system demands a certain degree

of personal control in her experience of life. What's clear is that neither of us is likely to move from our respective positions, despite the eloquence of experts to the contrary.

Meanwhile, Gracey continues to deal with her parents' differing views, enjoying her casual and humor-tinged approach to life, until she's reminded by the harsh criticisms of her mother that it's time to get back to work.

*DAVID RYBACK is the author of **ConnectAbility: 8 Keys to Building Strong Partnerships with Your Colleagues and Your Customers** (McGraw-Hill) and heads EQ Associates International in Atlanta. He can be reached at 404/377-3588.*

GRACEY RYBACK is in her last year of middle school and contributing author of this, the first English publication in her young life.

A Case Against Self-Assisted Suicide

— Len Bergantino

One of my skills as a clinical psychologist is to get deeper quicker and get to the rock bottom heart of the matter while doing so.

Somewhere between 1993 and 1999 I consulted at a nursing home with the elderly who were disabled enough that they weren't coming back to any degree of normalcy.

My job was to knock on the room door and introduce myself and do one hour of psychotherapy per week with them, albeit I only stayed two weeks.

On the first week, I knocked on an African-American woman's door and opened the door while saying, "I am Dr. Bergantino. I am your new psychologist." Immediately, as she had had a stroke, with a dislocated tongue, she said, very, very slowly and with great difficulty, "I want to kill myself!" I said, "Let me try this one more time," and I went outside the room and

knocked again on the door and while entering said "I am Dr. Bergantino, your new psychologist." Again, she said in exactly the same manner, "I want to kill myself!"

I sat down beside her on the bed and said, "Lady, if you to kill yourself, you have come to the right guy! Jack Kevorkian is a personal friend of mine. All I have to do is spin twenty cents in that telephone and you are dead. (This was prior to Kevorkian's incarceration.) She said, "What's your hurry?"

The thing is, a less-skilled clinician might have felt she really wanted to kill herself, and yet when I pushed her to the wall (even with no apparent reason to me as an outsider why someone in her condition would want to live) there it was at the deep levels after her first two demands of me were to help her kill herself—when I pressed her to the limit, she wanted to live!

Further, a medical doctor not trained by such people as I was (Milton Erickson, Carl Whitaker, or Jim Simkin) with somewhat unusual and bizarre responses, might have felt they had made a "good faith effort" and think the woman actually wanted to commit suicide. Therefore, this small sample statistic of one on its face justifies the law being rather safe than sorry, as even the best clinicians cannot say for certain that they know a person wants out.

*LEN BERANTINO, ED.D., ABPP, is in the private practice of clinical psychology specializing in telephone psychotherapy or supervision. He is a diplomate of the American Board of Professional Psychology and a licensed psychologist in the states of Arizona, California, and Hawaii, and he can work with those who call from one of those three states or internationally (1)310-207-9397. He resides in West Los Angeles, California. In addition to being trained by Milton Erickson, M.D., and Carl Whitaker, M.D., and other world-renowned therapists, he has authored 80 publications and the book **Psychotherapy Insight and Style: The Existential Moment**, 1981, Allyn & Bacon, Boston.*

THE BANE OF TECHNOLOGY

— Stan Charnofsky

Like the weather, no one can stop it, a satellite soaring into the cosmos, unlimited, destination anywhere. Of course no one wants to stop it—medically, electronically, biologically, astronomically, the gains stun the world's cultures. A man on the moon! The discovery of hundreds of exo-planets circling distant stars. Vaccinations that inhibit childhood diseases. Images on miniature handheld computers. Text messages flung a thousand miles away, returned in seconds.

Progress is inevitable—though the potential to blow the planet to oblivion tags along. In addition to the self-destructive aspects of advanced and novel inventions, there are subtle, ubiquitous, oblique negatives to runaway technology.

When at a musical event recently where a trio of talented guitarists were on stage taking turns performing, I was amazed and annoyed to see one of the three hold up her hand and excuse herself because her cell phone was playing a disparate melody. I realized yet again that someone miles away can invade, intercept, and trump someone in the room. It is an offense to me and those present.

There is a powerful message herein for psychology.

BE PRESENT

Carl Rogers may have been the first to stress the importance of being fully present with a client. Hardly anyone now disputes its critical value for therapeutic movement.

Once a client of mine told me after only three sessions that she was terminating. When I asked why, she said that in New York she had been in psychoanalytic therapy with an analyst who had no distractions in her room, almost no pictures, no music, nothing to contaminate the deep disclosures coming forth. Here with me in Los Angeles there were posters and photos and artwork on the walls, and I had disclosed more to her about myself in these three meetings than her analyst in New York had in two years (although she assured me that my revelations had not taken away from her own issues). She couldn't quite handle all that and had to move on.

I wished her well and told her that I understood. For me the whole world is part of the therapy. Anything may stir a feeling, give birth to an insight. My own self-disclosure may enhance a therapeutic bond, create a kind of camaraderie, and noise, music, art, even interruptions are part of life and the microcosm that a therapeutic encounter represents.

But here we are in the 21st century bombarded every second by distant interrupters; not the same as in-house, environmental stimuli. One thing that makes current technological innovations unappealing is that a whole generation of folks is developing tolerance for distance over presence. In other words, young clients today do not know how to be fully present. In my college classes, I have a rule in

the syllabus that no texting is permitted, and recently in response to the proliferation of web-surfing and Facebooking no computers are to be open during class. Every other student walking on campus is plugged in to a cell phone. Being with oneself no longer seems to be an option.

EMPATHY COUNTS

Because of technical requirements that all therapists must honor for third-party payments to occur, the DSM categories need to be cited for every client, with correct diagnostic codes and correct procedure codes. (Dr. William Glasser, the renowned psychiatrist, recently told me that the DSM is a hoax, unhelpful in actual therapy, and a tool of the insurance industry; not many therapy professionals agree.)

Though diagnostics is another area of technological advance, believed to permit appropriate treatment for familiar, recognized symptoms, it is still important for our profession to hold on to the uplifting notion that every client is unique and not easily categorized. Indeed the brilliant Spanish cellist Pablo Casals once noted that each person is a "one-of-a-kind marvel."

The pressure to come to a swift diagnosis and label a client "correctly" is likely to go head-to-head with what we know is vital in a client-therapist connection: empathy.

Empathy is a human characteristic, as far as we know not found in other creatures, and a trait that

all newly trained therapists are expected to develop. However, if we sit in front a client with a mindset of “what do I call this person’s presenting issues?”, then the empathic element will likely shrivel, and certainly be noticed by the client. It is hard to be deeply caring and technologically focused at the same time.

I side with the existentialists in declaring that I do not want contaminating prior information to mar my initial connection with a client. Yet I am keenly aware that almost every agency my students encounter asks for extensive intake data. I caution my students to comply with the requirements, since those agencies will be supervising, granting hours, and evaluating them, but also express my hope that every student will hold on to the uniqueness of their clients, and have what Rogers cited as a non-possessive love for each of them.

We cannot feel exactly what a client is feeling, however it enhances the therapy if we feel *with* that client, and despite the pressures to mechanize the process continue to show deep empathy which is the key to therapeutic movement. Empathy must not become a casualty of technological advances, and though computerized therapy is being heralded it is a poor substitute for two connected human beings encountering each other person to person.

DOWNSIZE

In a recent article in *Science News*, it was noted that astronomers theorized a billion trillion stars in the cosmos; but hold on—more

studies have found that eight elliptical massive galaxies have three times as many red dwarf stars as previously thought. The revised estimate is three billion trillion stars in all.

So here we are on Planet Earth, its size pretty well established, and the activities we explore as psychologists pretty consistent. Yet pressure is put on us to expand everything we do. Technology tells us that we can have more clients, grow our practice and offer more services, because we can shortcut the process of the therapeutic encounter. Find out what’s wrong, give it a name, prescribe the remedy, and turn to the next client. Something is profoundly sad about such a scenario.

In baseball, which I engaged in extensively as a young person, there is something called “little ball.” It means instead of constantly hoping your players will hit home runs, you work hard to get them on first base, perhaps be sacrificed to second base, steal third, and score on a fly ball to the outfield. Thereby, several people are involved in scoring one run.

Little does not mean less. In conservation, we are regularly asked to use fewer natural resources; that makes sense when something is limited. In human relations, we are not limited in our care, our attention, or our focus. We are not asking that *less* be applied, but that what is applied is personal, intimately related to the client next to us, and *pertinent only to that client*. It is the over-sized generalization that impairs therapeutic movement. Rarely is it helpful to say to a client: “Oh, well a lot of people do that.”

I have a problem with the over-

all technology message that each of us needs to be available at any moment to anyone, anyplace, any time. The entire world can invade us; there is no privacy; our little environmental space, once sacred, is now a public marketplace.

Pierro Ferrucci, in his book *The Power of Kindness*, postulates that we are going through an Ice Age of the heart, brought on by the Industrial Revolution, new technologies, and an accelerated life pace: all part of doing things faster and bigger, with less intimate contact.

Downsizing is like having the desire to live in a village rather than a metropolis, to enjoy the fruits of cherished conversation rather than the bellicose fuming of state-of-the-art, amplified rhetoric. My hope is that no matter how fast and furious our technology grows, we will not abandon the sweet comfort of one-on-one connection.

Maslow noted that the healthiest folks he studied had few friendships, but those they had were deep. These self-actualizing people, he wrote, would rather spend time in acute conversation with one or two others, than attend a gaudy party or even a grand celebration. This sort of challenges the noble, social motives behind Facebook.

CHOICE

Though Humanistic theorists do not include William Glasser, the founder of Reality Therapy, in their family of therapists, many of his ideas and approaches blend nicely with existential thought.

Glasser’s more recent works include a heavy focus on Choice Theory as a way of looking at human behavior. I have heard him say that virtually all behavior is a

matter of choice, that folks do not automatically have a response to stimuli, but choose whether or not to react—even when a phone rings or a traffic light turns red.

I cite this because I worry that the hum of high-speed technological growth, rather than freeing us, might severely limit our life choices. Innovations are meant to make life easier, bring people closer to goals in less time and with less hassle. In reality, they often serve to confuse. For example, if you want to order tickets for a stage presentation, the website tells you all of your choices; then instructs you to push this if you want that, but when you push this, an instant alert pops up and you don't have the required software. When there isn't a shared context, or there are simply too many options, technology seems not to be an advantage. Yes, freeing us to make easier choices is what the newest inventions are *supposed* to do, but they can thwart our freedom to choose.

To make proper life choices is what we want all our clients to do, to free themselves of the compulsions or fears that freeze healthy functioning. When a traumatic event is occurring, we have three possibilities: fight, flight, or freeze. The first two choices will likely give us some sense of control over our movements, confront the issue, or get the hell away from it; the third stops us in our tracks. It is the stuff of PTSD. When we freeze, we close down. To freeze is often beyond choice. I freeze when I find contradictory instructions, either on pill bottles, websites, or phone commands. *I want to speak with a person!*

It was reported on the news recently that an IBM robot named Watson had defeated humans in a trial game of *Jeopardy*. Competitors made choices, and the one with the most accurate choice has always been the winner; now technology can crush all contestants' choices. The fun goes out of the game.

In football, coaches stare at charts in their hands throughout a game, earphones attached to their heads. Decisions about the game—what plays to call, who needs to be sent in—are made by computerized averages. Since I played college and professional football eons ago, I am well aware of the most brilliant coaches—especially my college coach Rod Dedeaux, at USC, who was voted College Baseball Coach of the Century—following hunches, and making choices they can *see* will pay off.

When a client or student philosophizes that something was “meant to be,” I am aware of a dreadful sense of destiny commanding their lives. “Meant to be” has powerlessness written all over it. Often I will respond, “I see you as having choices; destiny is a matter of choice not chance.” After the fact, it is facile to say, “Oh, it was destiny.”

Blind adherence to new technological information deprives us of our gut feelings, and our power-enhancing choices.

THE GOOD WITH THE BAD

So do we trash all technological gains? Of course not. What is needed is like the title of the old Jane Austin novel *Sense and Sensibility*. If burgeoning technology is to be helpful rather than hurtful to

the human condition, we must use it with sense, apply it in shrewd ways to informational areas that enhance people and their lives, while not robbing them of their empathy toward each other, or their choice-making abilities.

Cell phones are marvelous, yet their use is limited by their failures, which often result in human *miscommunication*. A friend told me that he bought an iPad for his wife and that she can watch movies or listen to her favorite music on it. It is a marvelous invention, an ingenious new form of personal entertainment, if used without sacrificing the connection between the wife and her husband, or anyone else. Brilliant technological advances are not a substitute for intimate human contact.

We'll walk on the moon again, we may walk on Mars, a cure for cancer may result from new findings, magnificent discoveries may extend life routinely up to 100 years for many of us. My plea is not to inhibit or detour the ongoing technological explosion; rather it is to hold on to that which makes us human: the people-to-people, human-to-human, adult-to-child, child-to-child, and human-to-planet discourse. Without it, all the splendid inventions in the universe will not prevent humans from sinking into a worldwide and tragic pit of loneliness. As Mark Twain said: “If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging.”

*STAN CHARNOFSKY, Ph.D., is a Professor at California State University, Northridge, a former President of AHP and a current Board member. He is the author of **The Deceived Society** (Traford, 2005).*

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AWAKENING TO AWE: PERSONAL STORIES OF PROFOUND TRANSFORMATION

By KIRK J. SCHNEIDER

BJason Aronson, 2009, \$25.60,
180 pp., ISBN 9780765706652.

Reviewed by Bob Edelstein

Kirk J. Schneider, Ph.D., is a leading spokesperson for contemporary humanistic psychology and is the Editor of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. He is a pioneer in developing existential-integrative psychotherapy and in the application of awe-based consciousness to existential-humanistic psychotherapy. *Awakening to Awe* explores the nature and power of awe from Dr. Schneider's theoretical and therapeutic stance as well as through interviews of people transformed by their experience of awe.

His theoretical and therapeutic stance emphasizes the importance of living life with reverence, respect, humility, wonder, inclusiveness, and uncertainty, yet also with faith and trust. This is a very bold way to live, as his stance advocates living one's life by being open to its mystery and magnificence while simultaneously taking responsibility to live the life that is authentically your own. The people Dr. Schneider interviewed represent a range of stories demonstrating qualities and experiences of awe. Three examples are:

—A woman who grew up with a schizophrenic father in the 1950s and coped with her maelstrom

of feelings by opening to the grandeur and danger of nature and by cultivating a strong sense of compassion. She used the realizations gleaned from her experience to become an avid sailor and to develop a thriving career as a professor of psychology who values the importance of the full range of human nature.

—An ex-gang member who listened to a stirring from his soul after witnessing the assassination of his younger brother. This stirring encompassed a surrender to a Higher Power and a realization that life is an amazing, unpredictable adventure. He used that experience to become a youth educator providing violence prevention work for elementary school students in an awe-based cultural curriculum.

—A professor, who is a Stage 3 cancer survivor and has had heart disease, discovered that by engaging with his chronic illness with an attitude of awe, he also experiences chronic vitality. Awe for this man is a communion and an intimacy into dialogue and participation with the wonders and tempests of existence. He

embodies how to embrace the joy and wonder of living within the context of physical suffering and decay.

I feel this book, in conjunction with Dr. Schneider's *Rediscovery of Awe*, is groundbreaking. Dr. Schneider's emphasis on awe-based consciousness derives from his personal philosophy of

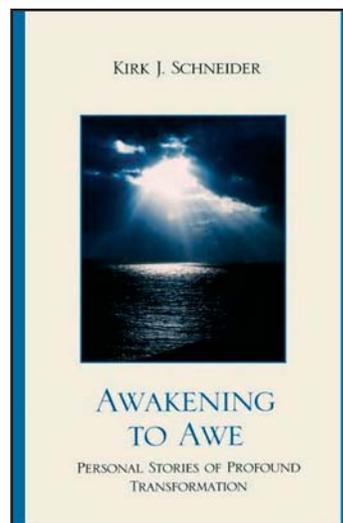
enchanted agnosticism. I believe the exploration of awe-based consciousness can catalyze a reemergence of a contemporary existential-spiritual movement in much the same way that Abraham Maslow's exploration of self-actualization catalyzed the human potential movement.

Existential philosophers and psychotherapists have long been at odds about spirituality. On one side of the debate, Soren Kierkegaard emphasized being authentic to your religious values and Paul Tillich emphasized that the holy is a "God-Beyond-God." On the other side, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Irvin Yalom all emphasize that we are thrown into being and there is no God to save us, thus we need to make meaning for ourselves. While

Camus, Sartre, and Yalom come from an atheistic perspective, they all acknowledge that life is an unknown in which both beauty and horror can happen.

Since a core component of existentialist theory is questioning

the meaning of life and not coming up with ultimate answers, both sides of the argument bear examination. The common thread between the two is that in order to live the most fulfilled life as a human being, it is essential to be open to the unknown, the wonder, and the mystery of life in order to take optimal responsibility for ourselves in how we live.



One perception of existential philosophy is that there is nothing more to life than what you experience in the immediate moment. This outlook can be perceived as pessimistic and gloomy. Dr. Schneider emphasizes the spiritual dimension of existence by highlighting it under the symbol of awe. The spiritual dimension celebrates that there is always something more, whether you call this mystery, awe, wonder, God, Higher-Power, or daimon. Bringing awe into the equation emphasizes that our experience also transcends the immediate moment. Our human experience is always evolving. We are always both being and becoming. This can allow for a more positive and hopeful perspective.

In Dr. Schneider's exploration of awe he emphasizes how awe connotes an openness to life as it is, with its mystery, with its depth, with its pain and joy. It can be 'awe-some' or 'awe-ful'. It is an invitation to value life as it is. Awe is a meta level which invites us to fully engage in life without knowing how it is going to unfold, even as we intend to impact life as we move toward a specific goal. This implies that spiritual presence is an important part of existence. Although the book is directed toward a more general audience, it also supports the existential-humanistic psychotherapist to embrace an awe-based dimension of life in working with clients. This allows the therapist to not be conflicted if they are spiritually oriented. It reminds me of the question I asked Rollo May at a conference I attended at the beginning of my career as an existential-humanistic psychotherapist. I asked if one

could be both existential and spiritual. He responded that it was essential to be both, and that even atheistic existentialists like Camus and Sartre were spiritual. Having an openness to life with its mystery, from ecstasy to tragedy, is spiritual whether you call it that or not.

I very much value Schneider taking a chapter to explore the qualities which need to be cultivated for awe to awaken in our everyday life. These qualities are transiency, unknowing, surprise, vastness, intricacy, sentiment, and solitude. The embracing of these qualities supports a grounded understanding and experiencing of awe as it applies to daily life. Similarly, Schneider takes a chapter to explore the general conditions favorable for the cultivation of an awe-based society. The conditions for this are presence, freedom, courage, and appreciation. Schneider describes a specific application he's initiating to bring awe into politics in California. He calls it the Experiential Democracy Project. Thus, I appreciated this book not only for its thorough examination of awe but also for its clear call to take action with an awe-based attitude informing us individually and collectively.

Some of the interviews are rambling and thus were at times hard to follow. I presume this was due to the use of the actual transcripts of the interviews with limited editing. Also, some interviews didn't strike a strong chord in me. However, I also know, given how the experience of awe is unique to each of us, these same interviews may strike a strong chord in others.

I very much value this book and encourage both professionals

and the general public to read it with an awe-based attitude. If you are not sure what an awe-based attitude means before your read it, you will by the time you are finished.

BOB EDELSTEIN, LMFT, MFT, is an existential-humanistic psychotherapist based in Portland, Oregon. In addition to maintaining a private practice for more than 35 years, he also provides consultation, supervision, and training for professionals, including a one-day workshop entitled Deepen Your Therapeutic Work Using an Existential Humanistic Perspective. Bob is a founding member of the Association for Humanistic Psychology-Oregon Community and of the Existential-Humanistic Northwest Professional Organization. He is a board member of the San Francisco based Existential-Humanistic Institute.

THE SORCERER'S DREAM: DREAMING AND SPIRITUAL ADVENTURE IN A NEW MILLENIUM

BY ALYSA BRACEAU (DREAMSHIELD)
Booklocker.com, 2010, 298
pp., \$19.95 (paperback), ISBN
1609101565.

Reviewed by Stanley Krippner

This provocative book begins in 2004 near a canal in Amsterdam, in other words what many indigenous people call "Middle Earth." But before it is finished, the author, Alysa Braceau, has taken her readers into other worlds and other realities.

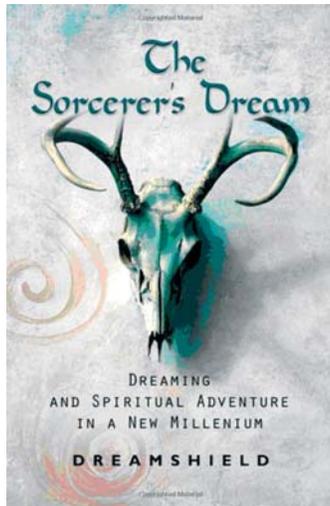
At a workshop devoted to the writings of Carlos Castaneda, Braceau meets a Native American shaman, Running Deer, who sees "great power" in her. Eventually, he starts to teach her a number of shamanic techniques and provides a curriculum of esoteric wisdom. Before long, she is working as his apprentice, in a manner that resembles Castaneda's studies

with the alleged Yaqui sorcerer, don Juan Matus. He tells Braceau that mastery of these lessons will last for some two and one half years and that she will reach “the totality” through dreaming. Again, this is reminiscent of Castaneda’s remarkable book *The Art of Dreaming*. Both systems emphasize “lucid dreaming,” a phenomenon in which a dreamer becomes aware that he or she is dreaming.

Braceau meets with Running Deer on a fairly regular basis to receive instruction, usually through exercises and experiences. Some of don Juan Matus’ language emerges in these lessons, examples being “assemblage point,” “dream body,” and “impeccable action.” There is some overlap between Running Deer’s worldview and that of don Juan Matus, even though they hail from very different cultural systems, the former from a more northern part of the continent and the latter from Mesoamerica, mainly the Toltecs, Aztecs, and (by extension) the Mayas. Running Deer tells Braceau that the two systems should not be compared, and I would urge the reader who is familiar with the Castaneda books to avoid making these comparisons while immersing oneself in this particular tradition and what it has to offer.

However, I do want to make one important comparison between the teachers themselves. For me, don Juan Matus was primarily

a sorcerer. He told Castaneda that he healed people at one time, which would have made him a shaman. But his role in the Castaneda books is that of a practitioner who knows how to accumulate and utilize power. Running Deer, on the other hand, provides many useful techniques for self-healing. This is attained through awareness of those aspects



of the world that Westerners typically ignore and allowing this knowledge to enlarge one’s grasp of reality. And with this newfound knowledge, one can obtain freedom from emotional blocks to growth. This would put Running Deer into the category of shamanic healers. But

his behavior in other parts of the book is more like that of a sorcerer. For anthropologists, the critical difference is that a shaman works within the context of a community while the sorcerer is more independent, even more isolated. Running Deer seems to fit this profile. But, again, anthropologists constantly create distinctions that real-life encounters dispel and disregard.

Running Deer helps Braceau find her inner child, improve her relationships, encounter non-ordinary entities, and feel more comfortable with the natural world. To me, this is the supreme irony of the book: The more one is at ease with Nature, the easier it is to contact spiritual beings who have no place in the accepted Western worldview.

Castaneda was a more gripping

writer than Braceau, but Braceau’s book is easier to read and to apply. She has an engaging narrative style and tells stories that are engrossing, so much so that some critical readers will suspend judgment on their veridicality. Nonetheless, there is a lack of literature on female sorcerers and this book makes an admirable effort to fill this lacuna. When, at the end, she attains “totality,” the reader will share her exaltation and will wonder to what use she will put this new awareness. Maybe a sequel will provide the answers.

STANLEY KRIPPNER, Ph.D., is Alan Watts Professor of Psychology at Saybrook University, and co-author of *Personal Mythology*.

WORDS AGAINST THE VOID: POEMS BY AN EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGIST

BY TOM GREENING

University of the Rockies Press, 2008, \$17.95, 124 pp., ISBN 978-0976463856.

Reviewed by Michael Moats

Tom Greening’s book, *Words Against the Void*, is a book that will probably not be received by all with warm regards and words of praise. He calls the readers to lay down their judgments and to use the wisdom that he calls *drivel* to challenge one’s self, one’s profession, one’s politics, and one’s world. His openness and vulnerable expressions are wrapped in sarcasm, absurdity, and provocative rhymes, and he is quick to share that “my stinging barbs are waspish” (p. 73).

After hearing the buzz about his book, the first flippant perusing caused question as to what all

the fuss was about, but it was when Tom's voice and heart were searched out in the poems that I could move beyond the characters and could hear the *character*. His emotions began to illuminate depth and rawness that was stimulating. Tom offers an exploration of the many caverns, vast and small, in one's life that are often left unmapped due to fear and trepidation, as well as apathy. What can appear simply as a soapbox is just the edge of the void that he dares you to explore.

The *void* seems to be the unknown or mystery, which can also include the absence of independent thought, individuality, creativity, and also meaninglessness in one's life. As Tom would say, "We need more freedom from the known and must not count on thought alone" (p. 2).

He speaks of living instead just existing in our efforts to compartmentalize and control to keep our homeostasis of being numb to life. Tom states, "I do not hope to really live but merely to survive, but will I mourn when I'm near death not having been alive" (p. 5)? For he implies it is not possible to truly understand life simply by studying theory or doing quantitative research in a lab, rather one must *be* living to understand life and to realize our profession will never fully reach an understanding.

Tom's incessant disdain for the pharmacological power house was evident in his poetry. He shares his frustration and outright anger at the reductionistic approaches of neuroscience and pharmacology. "I hoped I'd find some people there who cared about the human soul, but learned instead it was our

job to do 'prediction and control' (p. 7). There was definitely a separation of him against them. This division seemed to beg for an opportunity for a bridge, but the rigid structure of engineering quickly caused that image to transform into a rope swing that allowed everyone to play in the waters at the base of the chasm. Still yet, his passion continued to call out not to make everything positive and calm but to allow for passionate stances regardless of opinion, to save the Kumbayas for someone else's book. Tom's angst begs the question if those creating and prescribing, in an effort to numb the humanness of existence, are in fact numbed themselves to

the gifts that being human has to offer. He shares, "Let's visualize much higher goals: Let's act as if we might have souls" (p. 79).

Tom does not simply leave it at the footsteps of neuroscience. He points at his colleagues and himself. He calls for us to drop our narcissistic tendencies, to get off our pedestals, and to become *beings*. Tom begs us to drop the façade and to be authentic with one another, not through the definition of authenticity but through an encounter of vulnerability, as he describes, "We wandered in and out the prison gate and passed each other in the dark unheard, then met at last before it was too late and found we did not need to say a word" (p. 4).

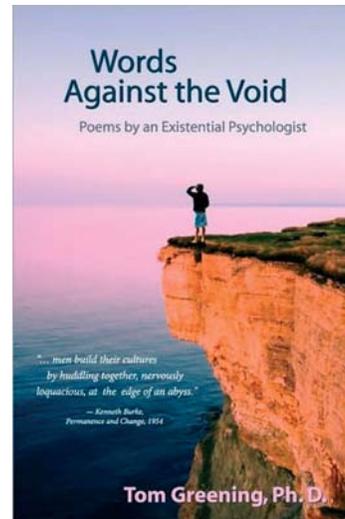
Tom pokes fun and instigates conflict through his words,

such as, "The world will be a better place when blessed by my inherent grace. And as for you who disagree—I will forgive your blasphemy" (p. 80). One cannot help but wonder if he says this just to be antagonizing because it causes one to fight the void, to feel something, and to be authentically engaged.

Feeling a similar angst, a great Chinese writer, Lu Xun, expressed his emotional pain through the written word. He wrote about the need to engage life fully. Using a symbolic iron house full of sleeping men who were quietly suffocating, Lu Xun stated the need to bang on the house, which could cause a painful death for those who awoke, but they at least

would have hope of destroying the structure and regaining life. In Tom's poetry, he can be heard yelling, "Wake up! Engage life; engage yourself!"

Tom continues to express his thoughts and feelings about not trying to stamp out the darkness in one's life but to allow it to come forth and to cherish it. "Tomorrow I will try to be more cheery but now I cherish being dreary" (p. 66). Being able to choose to allow darkness and to accept one's self is clearly stated in Tom's poem, *Saner than Thou*. He writes, "Some people find it odd and strange that I lack any wish to change . . . [void]. . . Perhaps you'd like to ask me how I got to be more sane than Thou" (p. 47). He definitely exemplifies not fighting one's nature but to embrace it through



engagement and inquisitiveness.

After Tom's "musings [which] are morose and murky, querulous, quixotic, [and] quirky" (p. 52), he stays true to his heart and also honors his friends and colleagues Ronnie Laing, Jim Bugental, and Rollo May. These seem to point to his heart that underlies the sarcastic tone in the poems.

Although it would be easy to see these as the angry rants of one disenchanted with the field of psychology, if one sees the sensitivity in his heart it becomes possible to see a different muse that inspires much of this poetry.

The poems are sharp, sarcastic, funny, boring, and more. If the readers blindly accepted his art without critique Tom would probably write a poem about the mindless dolts or how his *drivel was successfully useless*.

Much like other forms of art, Tom's poems are artful expressions of himself through the exploration of his void, and begging the readers to do the same. Through appreciation or disdain for his work it is for the readers to choose whether or not they are willing to accept the challenge to explore their individual voids, never having an identical journey.

The challenge is to face the void, keep from labeling it, and, instead, engage it. Some may say he wastes his time writing words that are rubbish, and Tom may agree at times; who is the "wiser fool" (p. 71)? To criticize his work, as with any art, is easy, but to hear the message Tom tries to portray by suggesting that we might try "blow[ing] clouds around the sky to the delight of small children" (p. 31) says that we are willing to explore the voids of our existence. Perhaps this review is less about

the contents of the book and more about the light it has shown within my void. Thank you, Tom!

MICHAEL MOATS, PsyD, at therapeutic.encounter@gmail.com, is a post-doctoral resident at the Switzer Counseling Center, part of the Switzer Institute, and is additionally involved in working with hospice patients and families. He has been involved with international, cross-cultural trainings, and research involving learning through loss.

SPIRITUAL ENVY: AN AGNOSTIC'S QUEST

BY MICHAEL KRASNÝ
New World Library, 264 pp.,
\$22.95, ISBN 9781577319122.

Reviewed by Stan Charnofsky

Michael Krasny's book *Spiritual Envy* is a vital piece, sensible in myriad ways, cleanly written, lucid, philosophically persuasive; though I'm not quite in tune with the title. Not sure why he is envious. More on this later.

He grew up in a traditional Jewish family that presumed he would believe what they believed. As a teen he began to question, and as a young adult he flirted with atheism, then landed on agnosticism.

I relate to his experiences, yet my history was different: My [Jewish] parents had no religion, which kept me from having to revolt. I recall as a child in a Mexican-American neighborhood in Los Angeles, asking my father what our religion was. His reply: "Yours can be whatever you choose. Mine is to be fair and honest, do good, be helpful, believe in love." Seemed like a fine belief system to me.

In the early part of Krasny's book, he discusses the Ten

Commandments, their authenticity as the word of the then-believed-in God, and their usefulness in today's world. Hemingway, Sartre, Buber, and Camus all influenced Krasny's developing code of ethics, which as a college student he labeled "my own commandments."

His journey took him to ponder a personal God versus an effable, mysterious one, enlisting heart and head in the quest. Though he challenges many of the tenets of Moses' Ten Commandments as impractical, he honors the intent, which was to create an ethical foundation for Western civilization. Ah, but even the boldest of the Commandments, "Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery," was interpreted by Moses, as one sage put it, as: requiring women to be faithful to their husbands for life but permitting men to have concubines and mistresses as long as those women were not married. Even today adultery is defined variously in different world cultures.

Krasny notes his desire for union with something greater than himself, and how he was influenced in his search by many of the great poets: Shakespeare, Keats, Dickenson, Eliot, Neruda, and others. With all of that, his existential bent shines through: Existence precedes essence.

Devoting a few chapters to the "face" of God, Krasny asks if Moses truly saw The Face on Sinai, or if Jesus truly raised the dead—and himself. He summarizes with: "Unanswerable questions are what make agnosticism understandable, perhaps even laudable." Not knowing about God, the universe, and even ourselves, he writes, is one of the "fundamental reasons I call myself an agnostic."

Agnosticism is “an understanding of the limits of the human mind.”

He quotes John Lennon who asks: Is God “a concept by which we measure pain?” He also asks why the present-day God, almost everywhere, is masculine, while nature and earth are mothers.

Gnosis is Greek for knowledge, and *Agnosticism* is tied to the idea of not having knowledge—of God, an afterlife, and other aspects of faith. Gnosticism became a virtual religion, and Gnostics were happy to include Carl Jung among their members; their relation with a God was and is personal and not interpreted through a church.

Bertrand Russell, a Nobel Laureate in literature, is the 20th century’s most famous agnostic, and he was fired by City College of New York as “morally unfit” to teach. He was an advocate for reason and conclusions based on science and probability rather than on faith and certainty.

There is a section on the paranormal, telepathy, and ESP, and Krasny concludes that what such happenings prove or disprove is moot, and often lead only to more questions. A fascinating comment he makes is: “Hunger for food and sex I understand is biological, but I don’t understand the source of spiritual hunger.” He posits that it could come “from our awareness that we are infinitesimally small in the vastness of the universe.”

Still, he has envy. Those who say “I’m spiritual but not religious” may be resisting what Huston Smith noted was an “institution.” Yet Krasny writes that both religion and spirituality “can and do provide comfort, solace, meaning, and morality, even inner peace.” Much of the “spiritual” impetus in recent years has come

from Eastern philosophy, and he repeats that he remains envious of those who “graze” out there, yet (to co-opt Gertrude Stein’s phrase) *there is no there there*—at least for Krasny!

At one point he labels himself a “wishy-washy agnostic” because when his children were about to

be born he hedged his bets by praying to God that they be healthy: a throwback, he notes, to his childhood and his fear of the unknown.

What is admirable in Krasny’s writing is his openness to the achievements and grand influences of the many of the world’s religions: abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement, the Polish Solidarity Movement, Renaissance art, etc., though he cites these alongside the fact that the Puritans came to America to escape religious persecution, but then took up the practice themselves, killing nonbelievers, Native Americans, and so-called witches.

His section on evil is well-analyzed, and he ends it citing his code, which is not to dehumanize others by demonizing them and making them the enemy. I am here reminded of Carl Rogers, who once said that he had not

experienced any built-in evil in people, but rather protective armor, put in place by having been hurt. Another way to put it is that we come packaged right.

Krasny cites many citizens who have chosen to “do good” in the world. His point? That whether one is spiritual, religious, or a not-knowing agnostic, to do good is within everyone’s grasp.

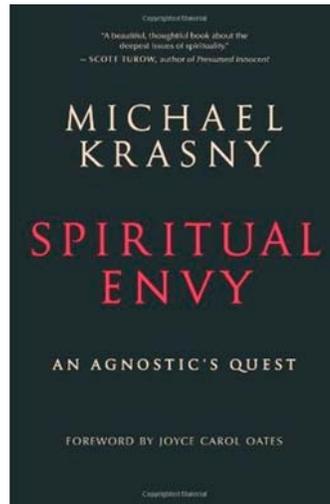
As his writing concludes, Krasny tells us that though he is agnostic he believes this one life is all that there is. Death, that grand mystery, is what terrifies many, and he says the key is to live life so that one may die without regret.

This elegant book is important, and in fact might be considered critical for understanding today’s fractured world. Earlier I questioned the title of *Spiritual Envy*, which Krasny notes is built on the recognition that those who embrace a religious or spiritual certainty have something palpable to hang on to.

I am again reminded of Maslow, who wrote that the healthiest (self-actualizing) folks he studied were quite comfortable with uncertainty, and in their later years often said simply and without trepidation that they had lived their lives, which would soon be over. Ambiguity was a not an issue for them.

Krasny, a professor at San Francisco State University, a talk-show host, a journalist, a deep writer with profound intelligence and a broad education—partnered with his lack of a dogmatic stance—would be, I bet, a candidate for Maslow’s self-actualization list.

STAN CHARNOFSKY, Ph.D., is a Professor at California State University, Northridge, a former President of AHP and a current Board member. He is the author of *The Deceived Society* (Trafford, 2005).



THE ORIGIN OF A PERSON

BY ALVIN R. MAHRER
Howard Gontovnick Publications, 2010, 182 pp., \$20.95. ISBN 978-0-9681865-6-5.

Reviewed by John Rowan

This is rather a strange book. It spends the first 72 pages looking at all the various wrong ways of asking the question “What is the origin of a person?” And Mahrer makes it clear that he is not asking the question “What is the origin of personality?”

He says that he was wrong in his earlier books to ignore the primal. He has now read the works of Grof, Lake, Chamberlain, and so forth, and been most impressed by them.

Far more than most fashionable theories say, the period from about conception to shortly after birth is powerful in the origin of a person. This period contains the roots of lifelong feelings, worries, and troubles, ways of being and behaving. (p. 74)

He goes rather far in the direction of attributing all the origins of the person to the primal period.

The fetus and the newborn can be thought of as having a personality that is rather well-defined, sophisticated, advanced, adult-like. (p. 77)

It is refreshing to me to hear this, because it fits so well with my own experience, in the training I had with Bill Swartley, one of the founders of the International Primal Association, which is still going now.

So now Mahrer can say that

By knowing the origin of the basic person you are, you can discover how to let go of the basic person you are. (p. 100)

This is quite a claim, and in Chapter 5 we go into this issue rather deeply. But now we are not tangling with primal theory, but going back to the theory laid down in Mahrer’s earlier books, which acknowledges great authority from the parents in the early days of the child. And at this point we are back with the experiential theory for which Mahrer is already well-known. But there is no extended explanation of the basic terms *operating potentials* and *deeper potentials* which are so important for Mahrer’s own approach. So the

unready reader may be left a bit puzzled by all this.

This book is deeply out of sympathy with today’s world of empirical research, and this writer

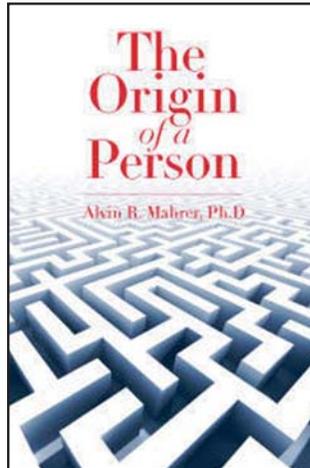
has explained in other books why this should be so. Hence he has to admit at the end that:

I believe that this book’s answers can be thought of as provocative, challenging, innovative, visionary, revolutionary, a

genuine paradigm shift. I can also see this answer as kind of wacky, without solid support, an unjustified departure from what is taken for granted as true, mostly aerie-faerie nonsense, much ado about nothing. (p. 174)

This book is well worth reading, if only to take a bath in a refreshing spring of unfamiliar ideas. It is very clearly written, with no flimflam, no unnecessary displays of erudition, no self-importance. Good luck with it!

JOHN ROWAN, Ph.D., is author of *Personification: Using the Dialogical Self in Psychotherapy and Counselling* (Routledge, 2010).



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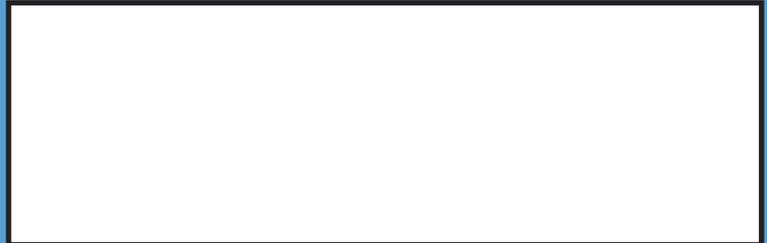
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