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Alicja Czerkawska, *Poradnictwo egzystencjalne. Założenia – inspiracje – rozwiązania praktyczne (Existential counselling. Assumptions – inspirations – practical solutions)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Naukowe Szkoły Wyższej, Wrocław 2013, 203 pp.

Alicja Czerkawska's monograph study *Poradnictwo egzystencjalne. Założenia – inspiracje – rozwiązania praktyczne (Existential counselling: Assumptions – inspirations – practical solutions)* (Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej [University of Lower Silesia Press] 2013) adroitly blends theory and practice of modern humanist thought. Drawing on existentialist reflection in philosophy, psychology, psychiatry and pedagogy as well as on her own counselling experience, the author presents an original take on counsellogy. The recourse to existentialism in the counselling process indicates that queries about the meaning and end of human life and activity are endemic in both individual lives and collective human history. These queries are pervasive irrespective of one's material status, social position and endorsed worldview as they are intrinsic to the common pursuit of happiness. Czerkawska's analyses imply that humans inquire into the meaning and end of life also in postmodernity. We could even say that the realities of life often enforce such questions, leaving people vulnerable and confused. The sense of isolation tends to be aggravated by the awareness of ubiquitous material problems and a lack of clear criteria for assessing actions one engages in. These circumstances open up new possibilities for and create needs related to counselling.

Czekawska very subtly combines her own counselling experience with existentialist tenets, whereby she abides by typical phenomenographic principles and, at the same time, creates her own, original research framework, which she calls individual retrospective phenomenography. Choosing and studying a phenomenon in fully conscious engagement, she discovers its other- and self-invested meanings by subjectively describing and interpreting a selected fragment of reality.

The book outlines the concept of help which seems to have a lot in common with the phenomenon of synergy. Czerkawska suggests that the effectiveness of counselling is predicated on the co-existence of the potentials, as well as deficiencies and weaknesses, of all the participants in the counselling process. In her concept of helping, like in synergy, situational contexts and event-related emotions and experiences are viewed as essential factors. In this case, the study of the counselee-counsellor relationship draws on a variety of sources: philosophy, psychology, psychiatry and everyday human interactions, both institutional and informal ones.

Seeking to establish what existential counselling is, Czerkawska outlines selected areas of existentialist philosophy, which she deems fundamental to her project of constructing existential counselling. She insightfully analyses the concepts developed by selected philosophers and possibilities of applying them in counselling. She concludes: "Existentialist philosophers have always referred to universal human matters and life processes. First and foremost, they attend to the difficult task of having to shape one's lot, realising at the same time one's inevitable mortality. (47-48)"

Analogically to philosophy, Czerkawska discusses the connections between counselling on the one hand and psychology and psychiatry (psychotherapy in particular) on the other. When she examines options of using their findings in counselling, she relies on Gerald Corey's conviction that "increasing self-awareness, which includes awareness of alternatives, motivations, factors influencing the person, and personal goals, is an aim of all counseling. (68)" She realises that counselling is fraught with ambiguities and, consequently, difficulties, and its alliance with pedagogy is an uneasy one. It seems even that she finds the links of counselling with psychology, or psychiatry, more relevant than its connections with pedagogy.

Drawing on the already classic division of counselling put forward by Alicja Kargulowa, Czerkawska distinguishes major types of helping (directive, dialogic and liberal ones) and counsellor models defined by Bożena Wojtasik (expert, guide, consultant, reliable guardian and *laissez-faire* type). Subsequently, she elaborates on their implications for existential counselling with flair and meticulousness at the same time. She relates the existentialist tenets both to counselling and to human problems in life. She frames counselling help as a space of solving existential problems, thereby gesturing at existentialism as a source of support in building a new quality of life. The argument is illustrated with interesting diagrams.

In her book, Alicja Czerkawska analyses the possibilities and difficulties inherent in the acquisition of counsellor competencies which go beyond the mandatory professional qualifications. She describes the NEST project (New Experience for Survivors of Trauma – Group Counselling Programme), focusing on its "existential" value in improving counselling skills: "The special edition of the programme helps not only acquire the 'psychological agility' but also achieve inner integration and maturity necessary for self-understanding as a counsellor. (131-132)" Czerkawska reflects on the practices of existential counselling relying on her own counselling experience with the NEST programme. She discusses selected case

studies and analyses the path from a decision to use professional help, to identification of a “proper” problem, to starting the counselling relationship anew, so to say. She believes that existential counselling aims not so much to achieve counselling objectives as rather to encourage the counselee to decide to revise his/her life goals. This does not mean, of course, that the effects of counselling interventions are unimportant: “Celebrating together is an important stage which ends the cycle of sessions. It crowns the effort invested in the thirty sessions,” – (179) Czerkawska insists.

The structure and development of the book’s argument are lucid and logical. Czerkawska compiles and systematises the knowledge about the impact of philosophy, psychology and many related disciplines on the processes of education and self-education in a broad sense of the term. Particularly valuable are, in my opinion, reflections on the relevance of the counsellor’s views on man and the world. Czerkawska emphasises that the declared view is far less important than the atmosphere in which counselling intervention unfolds: “Behind each way of helping, there is a certain image of man and the world and of a relationship between the two. In professional helping, the professional’s authenticity is very important and the choice of the psychological framework authenticates one in the helping situation. The counsellor senses that his/her counselling style suits him/her, that helping others s/he is congruent and true to him/herself. Even though counselees usually know little, or nothing at all, about these frameworks, emotionally they are well capable of assessing the congruence of the professional’s personality and his/her work. (127-128)”

In her concept of counselling developed in *Poradnictwo egzystencjalne. Założenia – inspiracje – rozwiązania praktyczne*, Alicja Czerkawska very successfully combines the abundance of existentialism-informed thinking and its implications for counselling practice. What is more, the issues she discusses (and they have without doubt been carefully selected) reveal not only how rich existentialism is but also how up-to-date and urgently needed it proves in the age of postmodernity.

Translated from Polish by Patrycja Poniatońska