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The Paradoxical Self. Kirk J. Schneider. New York and London: Plenum Press, 1990, 235 pages, \$20.95.

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Before commenting on the potential usefulness of this book, some speculation as to its prospective audience may be in order. One testimonial on the back dust cover asserts that "this book will be equally relevant for the lay person, as for therapists of different theoretical persuasions." However, the fact that the final chapter is entitled "Toward a Paradox-Based Therapy and a Therapeutic Rapprochement" further suggests that this work is primarily directed toward therapists. Notwithstanding a longstanding and deep respect for the positions of many existential writers, I am nevertheless a therapist of a different theoretical persuasion, and my comments should be taken with that fact in mind.

Generally speaking, I have found Schneider's formulation of the "paradox principle" and its attendant assumptions to be limited in their usefulness as a conceptual frame for the problems presented by clients. Briefly stated, the paradox principle "holds that the psyche is a constructive/expansive continuum, only degrees of which are conscious." Thus, at any given moment my phenomenological world may be qualified as occupying a locus on a hypothetical continuum, the poles of which trail off into the absolutes of constriction (finiteness, limitedness, inwardness) and expansion (infinitude, boundlessness, outwardness). Consciousness presumably coheres in the central vicinity of this continuum, whereas unconsciousness pervades the poles. The central tendency of the consciousness of the functional person follows from the presumption that he or she is not particularly repelled by dread of either extreme, and is thus prone to lead a balanced life. The relative location of consciousness on the continuum is characterized by freedom of movement, and may be found at any locus within a broad range, depending on the demands of the circumstance and intentions of the individual. Schneider postulates the functioning of a "centric mode," which is the core of consciousness and which weighs and chooses among constrictive and expansive possibilities. (By the way, this mode of awareness is referred to as "reflective," suggesting the attainment of some distance and perspective on life's possibilities. As such, one might question the original assertion that "the psyche is a constrictive/expansive continuum." If the "core of consciousness" has a function that transcends the continuum, then the continuum might best be viewed as one aspect of the psyche.) In any case, "dysfunctional" people tend to fixate at one extreme of the continuum or the other — or

to fluctuate broadly from one extreme to the other – depending on the interaction of their native disposition (temperament), and their idiopathic history of developmental experiences. (A rough developmental schema relevant to the etiology of dysfunction is presented.) In essence, trauma occurs when the child's "expectations" (consistent with its disposition) differ radically from the events the child actually encounters. Trauma serve to overly sensitize the individual to the negative valence of the pole of the continuum associated with the radically dissonant event or series of moderately dissonant events, and thus to engender a sense of "dread" of that polar extreme (i.e., constrictiveness or expansiveness). We may further assume that dread interferes with reflection such that the dysfunctional person chronically chooses extreme positions on the continuum as a means of avoiding the negative associations with the opposite extreme. Schneider goes on to explain where each of the main psychotic, anxiety, depressive, and personality disorders lie on the continuum of constriction/expansion.

As a general heuristic in arriving at a conceptualization of problems that people present for treatment, there is really nothing wrong with Schneider's formulation. The problem is that it has little in the way of advantages that would recommend it to therapists. Let me speak more personally here. My experience with people coming for treatment is that they are looking for ways of thinking about themselves and their problems that allow them to get a handle on their problems, including some specification of the tools necessary for restructuring problem areas. As with many existential tenets, the paradox principle is fairly abstract and offers little in the way of implementing change. It is interesting to note that when Schneider presents case material and actual interventions used, he defers to techniques developed in other schools of psychotherapy as the primary intervention. He attempts to normalize this seemingly incongruous state of affairs by suggesting that the paradox principle provided the conceptual frame on the basis of which to decide interventions. The reader should be reminded, however, that some of the newer and more technique-oriented therapies have come a long way in the past decade in developing sophisticated conceptual principles with which to frame problematic lives. Hence, my first criticism of this book is that it has little to offer in the way of innovative and pragmatic treatment ideas.

My second problem with Schneider's approach is that it tends to deemphasize the aspects of existential therapies that are most useful to practicing therapists. He does talk some about the importance of the client-therapist relationship, but the discussion has the appearance of being a dyssynchronous foray into the author's dissertation, with a relation to the paradox principle that is tangential at best. Schneider refers freely to unconscious motives and other psychoanalytic constructs that existential psychology in its original form did its best to banish. Talk of therapist qualities of authenticity and genuineness seems no more present here than it might be in a book on behavior therapy.

The primary way in which Schneider compromises the existential approach is in his willingness to overstep the bounds of phenomenology – without owning up to the possibility that he is doing so. In its purest form, phenomenology works exclusively at the level of description and low-level inference regarding the client's world. I would suppose that any therapist who sees more than a few clients a week has a very difficult time reinventing the wheel (or some variation thereof), with each new client, without the assistance of preconceptions. That is one reason why most therapists gravitate to one theoretical orientation or another: in order to have a repertoire of conceptual principles available for analyzing various problems (while hopefully avoiding the potential problem of hauling clients on the Procrustean bed). So far so good. Schneider is providing us with just such a conceptual principle. However, the con-

ceptual principles generated by some other schools of thought are related to theory, and hence open to some form of empirical validation. Schneider seems to have one foot on either side of the line that separates phenomenological from hypothetico-deductive methods. He employs a number of fairly high-level inferences regarding the influence of a particular kind of childhood trauma on later behavior: natural dispositions of the child; as well as where particular diagnostic categories fall on the hypothetical constriction/expansion continuum. Moreover, he draws freely – if somewhat selectively – from empirical and experimental research in support of his position. He does call for “further empirical and theoretical work,” in connection with the paradox principle, but he gives little indication of what the nature and direction of that work might be. In sum, Schneider appears to be forwarding a theory, complete with hypothetical constructs and causal inferences, with no indication of how the theory might be validated – apart from presenting a few case studies.

In his testimonial to the book, Bugenthal said that Schneider “will bore no one who gives his perspective a respectful attention.” Notwithstanding the criticisms cited above, I was not bored with this book. Further, Schneider should be congratulated for taking on the daunting task of making the difficult ideas of existentialism more accessible. However, limited expectations will probably make for the best reading of this book.