

FOREWORD

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This book breaks new ground not only in terms of its content, but also in its method. Donna Savery writes about a new phenomenon: 'Echoism' which of course existed previously but, until now, has gone unnoticed.

She explores Echoism through working with echoistic patients in a new way, combining insights about the human condition from existential philosophy with psychoanalytic theory and practice, mainly of the Kleinian school.

Let me dwell a little on these two points which make this book so special. When Donna Savery writes in this book about *Echoism* she writes about a phenomenon which had no name before and therefore could not be identified as a psychological condition worthy of attention in psychoanalysis. This is regrettable, but by no means uncommon because, for the most part, we give attention only to phenomena which are already named and conceptualized and therefore easy to recognize. This may sound pessimistic, and it certainly runs counter to an idealization of the phenomenological method in the form valued by many existential therapists. Following the work of Gadamer (1960), in his *Truth and Method*, we know that we cannot easily rid ourselves unconditionally from assumptions, expectations and preconceptions, so as to become completely and directly open to phenomena, to be able to perceive the 'things themselves' (Husserl). Every 'thing' needs 'words' to become something of which we can speak and discuss. Furthermore, we usually take up common words and phrases to name a certain phenomenon, in order to feel sure we are on safe ground when we speak about it.

Donna Savery had the courage to stay with a phenomenon that she encountered in therapy even though it made no sense for her as long as she only referred to the *current* psychopathological concepts. But instead of giving up, as we usually do in such circumstances, she puzzled over it with all of her thoughts and feelings, and she finally looked for help in *The Myth of Echo and Narcissus*. This allowed her to trace an arc between the enigmatic kind of being of certain patients and the mythical figure of *Echo*, and to discover how much these patients had in

common with the latter. This astounding affinity made it possible to give this 'new' phenomenon its appropriate name: *Echoism*.

Sceptics may question whether it is simply a new label for a long-established and already widely-discussed phenomenon. By studying this book I came to the conclusion that the opposite is true, that it is a phenomenon constantly overlooked until now, which comes to light for the first time thanks to its being named. Therefore it seems fitting to me, to speak of a discovery, made by Donna Savery, in the field of psychopathology. The reader will soon gain a sympathetic understanding that this author is not claiming to have the final word on this newly discovered phenomenon, but her intention is to open up a field for further investigation and discussion. What we find in this book, however, is already enough to enhance not only our theoretical understanding but also our therapeutic competence.

Let me say a word about what I have learned from this book about the important distinction between echoism and ordinary forms of what we call *depression*. Although in the echoist there are some features or – psychoanalytically speaking – forms of defences shared with depressed individuals - there is an important difference which the term echoism itself indicates, namely its intrinsic relationship to narcissism. It is essential for the echoist to be attracted by narcissistic people, to look for shelter in submitting to them, to play the silent – or, better – the *silenced* role in an imbalanced relationship with them.

This leads to the second point, which concerns the unique way Donna Savery has chosen to approach her topic. Her decision to combine existential philosophy with psychoanalysis is very courageous. In continental Europe this endeavor is represented in the *Daseinsanalytic* movement – *psychoanalysis under an existential perspective*, as Binswanger described it. Because, in the UK, many practitioners of existential therapy believe that this integration is neither necessary nor desirable, it may appear to some that in using this approach the author risks falling between two separate stools. Fortunately, Donna Savery takes this risk, and the reader will realize that it is highly suited to her subject, because it is only by using these two seemingly different perspectives, and by so skillfully combining them, that the complexity and richness of the phenomenon that is *echoism* can come into view.

But what is true for the phenomenon of echoism, is true for other psychopathological phenomena as well. The reader of this book therefore

becomes acquainted with a new approach which is fruitful in the whole field of psychopathology and, indeed, psychotherapy. This means that this book has a pioneering role quite independent of its specialist topic. The psychoanalyst will hopefully realize that integrating philosophical ideas about the human condition does not go against psychoanalysis but deepens its insights. I hope too that existential therapy will realize that it is time to overcome its deep-rooted prejudice against the psychoanalytic discovery of the Unconscious as being irreconcilable with a phenomenological stance. I am sure that the enormous value of existential therapy lies in its willingness to encounter clients not as people being afflicted by 'mental disorders' but as individuals wrestling with existential problems. Yet, I consider it a weakness to dismiss the psychoanalytic perspective by holding on to the phantasy that existential philosophy can replace psychoanalysis. The psychoanalytic perspective is not only indispensable for understanding the childhood history of our clients or patients, but is even more important for reflecting on our dynamic interaction in the here and now of the therapeutic session. In this respect the many vignettes in the book are very impressive!

Some of the psychoanalytic terminology is sometimes not easy to digest for a phenomenologist. But for me it is a rewarding task to become a translator of psychoanalytic terms by searching for their hidden existential meaning. We might look to Sartre who, in *Being and Nothingness*, rather than dismissing the unconscious, provides an existential concept of it, and in his phenomenological analysis of *Bad Faith*, succeeds in demonstrating how the *unconscious* works in all of us.

So, in summary, this book by Donna Savery not only paves the way for a better mutual understanding by existential and psychoanalytic therapists, but also provides a broadening (widening) of the horizon of each of them. It requires readers therefore, with an open mind, who are ready to *look over their own tea cup*, so to speak; I am confident that it will find them.