Review

Clinical Psychology: A critical examination
by Craig Newnes

Reviewed by Tony Wainwright

Craig NEWNES, for those who need an introduction, is a past editor of the Clinical Psychology Forum, and for many years, until 2007, led a very successful department of psychological therapies in the NHS in Shropshire. He has published numerous articles and books and has been a critical voice in clinical psychology during his lengthy career. He is now (semi-) retired and his latest volume provides a critical perspective on the profession of which he has, for so long, been a part.

The book’s main contention, which is explored in different ways, is that the profession of clinical psychology has a core problem, which he sums up as follows:

‘For a supposedly reflective profession, clinical psychologists have shown little interest in examining their wider role in maintaining the status quo and, until very recently, have failed to adequately criticise the inherent contradictions and lack of validity in psychiatric disorders.’

I was reminded while reading the book of a recent ethics column by Bender (2014) discussing the profession’s position in the field of dementia care which makes some similar points. Craig argues that complicity in an unhelpful and damaging dominant narrative has been one of the hallmarks of our professional identity.

The book is divided into eight chapters, and the all but three have titles starting with ‘Problems with…’. These include problems with ‘theory and research’, ‘assessment: pathologising difference’, ‘practice: effectiveness and informed consent’, ‘practice: pathologising childhood’, and ‘practice: pathologising adults’. Each chapter describes the author’s views on the position clinical psychology has taken in each of these areas finds it wanting.

Craig’s style is consciously unacademic. His account of his early career working in a rope factory, then at Birds Eye Foods, and finally, as a ceiling tiler before entering the profession is a backdrop, and informs the underlying message that clinical psychology and the wider psychology profession is a privileged group who have a conflict of interest as they make money out of other peoples distress and poor living conditions. He also provides honest accounts of his own life, and the experience he has had as a practitioner.

Throughout the book, Craig makes many assertions that are not well referenced, and while giving much food for thought readers should enjoy further researching these controversial points.

He says in the introduction that this is not a balanced account: it is one-sided and biased. However, he is not apologetic for this because, he says, there are many books and journals that provide support for the status quo – this is certainly not one of them.

References