



Book Review

Kalman J. Kaplan and Paul Cantz (2017). *Biblical Psychotherapy: Reclaiming Scriptural Narratives for Positive Psychology and Suicide Prevention*. Maryland, USA: Lexington Books. Pages: 260 (Hard Bound), Price: Rs. 6155/-, ISBN: 978-1-4985-6081-8.

Psychotherapy and theology as human disciplines share an unequivocal commitment towards well being of the person. Before the 'scientific' approaches to psychotherapy came up in the Western society in the 19th century, religion and religious scriptures provided the ubiquitous link for alleviating all human misery and strife. A wide variety of perspectives exist on the use of religious scriptures within psychotherapeutic practices, especially in the perspective of Christianity. At the same time, while Christianity has engaged the discipline of psychology as a part of the effort to understand human experience (Johnson, 2010), psychology has rarely imbibed the positivity inherent in many of the Biblical narratives. "Biblical psychotherapy: Reclaiming scriptural narratives for positive psychology and suicide prevention" the recent book by Kalman J. Kaplan and Paul Cantz fills this void by questioning the conventional conceptualizations of mental illness and health made by modern psychology with its roots in tragic Greek premises, and by simultaneously constructing an alternative conceptualization inspired by Biblical narratives and characters. The authors have dedicated the book to Dr. Erich Wellisch, who had made a call for Biblical psychology as early as 1953, and have acknowledged that their work is founded on his path-breaking and visionary work.

Kaplan's scholarship in the area of biblical psychology has been longstanding and remarkable. As Cantz has remarked in the foreword written for Kaplan's earlier book "Living Biblically: Ten Guides for Fulfillment and Happiness" (2012), other scholars who have studied the interrelationship of religion and psychology have either commented upon the "behavioural responses to religious phenomenon", or have attempted "retrofitting religious teachings to sync with the latest psychological theories". Kaplan on the other hand, tends to question the basic premise and logic of rooting all conceptualization of mental illness and health unequivocally in Greek mythology. The arguments that Kaplan has made in "Living Biblically" for utilizing Biblical characters and their narratives for leading a happy and fulfilled life, have been expanded and extended for specific context of suicide prevention, seamlessly weaving the Biblical wisdom into psychological theories and practice.

Apart from an introduction and a succinctly written conclusion, the volume has been divided into eleven chapters, sequentially leading the reader from an insightful discussion about the relevance of Biblical narratives in mental health and suicide prevention psychology in the initial chapter; demarcating the domain of Biblical psychology distinguishing it from the field of positive psychology; providing a contrasting description of perspectives on suicide using Biblical and Greek narratives in the forthcoming chapters; and drawing linkages of seven evidence based risk factors for suicide with Biblical and Greek characters using a case based approach. The focus of the book is on suicide prevention and the chapters 5 through 11 constitute the main body of the volume in this regard. In these chapters the authors have ingeniously discussed each suicide risk factor utilizing specific characters and their contrasting life choices to emphasize the positivity inherent in the Biblical narratives. The conclusion underlines the importance of hope in preventing suicidal behaviours and for leading a positively oriented fulfilling life.

The authors have skillfully begun their argument by highlighting the phenomenal rise in suicide in the USA surging to a 30 year high in 2016, and hence the heightened need for dealing with sense of

hopelessness and meaninglessness that appears to pervade the modern society. Another interesting fact that brings in is about the significant role the clergy often play in managing the emotional and relationship based distress that the members of their congregation face. Although, providing a major mental health service, their contributions go largely unacknowledged, majorly because of the dichotomy created by modern science of psychology, that emphasizes upon keeping the religious separate from the professional. The same dilemma is often faced by the psychotherapists who often remain oblivious to the religious and spiritual inclinations of their clients. Bringing these two facts together, they build a case for developing an alternate perspective to mental health that acknowledges and utilizes the positivity inherent in scriptural narratives.

Talking of scriptural narratives, Kaplan and Cantz exclusively focus on Hebrew Biblical narratives. They argue that despite the predominance of Hebrew scholars in early conceptualizations of medicine and health, it is the Greek perspective that has tended to dominate the modern professional conceptualizations. Psychotherapy is no exception in this regard. Discussing about Freud and his exclusive reliance on Greek mythological characters and narratives as anchors for understanding human predicament, dilemma and psychological distress, the authors highlight the fatalistic nature of Greek myths that fails to help the protagonist reach any positive resolution. In this context the book puts a question mark on the very premises on which the major modern psychotherapeutic conceptualizations are based, and the cyclic and fatalistic nature of which constrains the practitioners and patients from having "an ambitious vision of psychological well-being".

Biblical psychology with its acknowledgement of the wholeness of human experience, and possibility of salvation through personal efforts aided by a benevolent God emerges as a ray of hope in this regard. The call made by the founding father of Biblical psychology, Dr. Eric Wellisch over sixty years ago has been taken up quite well by Kaplan through his scholarly endeavors through the years, and has been structured quite well for the significant field of suicide prevention in the present text that explores the Biblical narratives for their intrinsic psychological significance, rather than trying to fit them within the pre-existing frameworks. Further, the book explains and demarcates the domain of Biblical psychology, not merely by describing the potent role Biblical perspectives can play in alleviation of distress and suicide prevention, but also the potential it has for infusing sense of meaning and purpose in individuals and community. Though the authors acknowledge the commonality of approach Biblical approach seems to have with positive psychology, they emphasize that it delves into deeper questions than those addressed by positive approaches propagated by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). A major difference in this regard is constituted by the system of attribution followed by the two approaches. Positive psychological approaches focus on cognitive style of the individual and its explanation of misery depends on individual's attribution process. Biblical approaches go beyond and explore the roots of such attributions, and acknowledge the cultural influences on individual attribution propensities and availability of meaning frameworks.

The book emphasizes the critical role played by sense of hope in the future in alleviating distress and constructing a meaningful life. The authors emphasize that the Biblical approach being proposed by the volume has much more potential as compared to many of the schools and approaches prevalent in psychotherapy, including psychodynamic approaches, cognitive behavioural therapy, humanistic psychology and multi-cultural psychology. Though, they claim that the Biblical approach transcends the culturally specific domains of behaviour by looking for "universal processes intrinsic to human life itself", the applicability of Biblical approach seems to be limited by the religious inclination and openness of the clients. Also, the specific dilemmas and their manifestations in different cultures might not easily fit into the Biblical framework. Yet, the volume provides a rich and comprehensive way of easing this task for the therapists who are keen to learn by providing detailed illustrative case examples and discussing these at length in the light of the prevalent psychological framework (rooted in Greek worldview) and providing a simultaneous contrast through a more positively oriented Biblical framework.

Though at certain junctures the text becomes a bit complex to interpret, especially for the reader unfamiliar with Biblical narratives, the book proves to be an interesting and compelling read. An engaged reading also tends to provoke the reader to utilize her ingenuity in exploring the religious- spiritual texts and narratives prevalent in specific cultures, and explore the feasibility of using these for constructing a meaning making framework for alleviation of distress and creating a fulfilled life. With a brilliantly enticing foreword by the prominent psychiatrist Thomas H. Jobe, the volume succeeds in building a firm ground for the novel approach that transcends inherent dualisms of modern psychological theory and practice, bringing together theology and professionalism, and promoting the wholeness of human experience through psychotherapeutic practice.

References

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Updesh Kumar (2017). *Handbook of Suicidal Behaviour*. Singapore: Springer Nature. Pages: 557 (Hard Bound), Price: Rs. 26497/-. ISBN: 978-981-10-4815-9.

In this troubled era of ever engulfing gap between the desired and the achieved, no matter what the level of achievement is, reports of violence toward self and others are also on the wax. Suicide and suicidal attempts have emerged as one of the major threats to health in the coming decade. In this backdrop, the *Handbook of Suicidal Behaviour* edited by Updesh Kumar is a very timely and welcome contribution for the psychologists and social scientists. The volume flaunts a rich and diversified configuration of authors representing national and international scholarship in the domain under study. No single volume can claim to be completely comprehensive with regard to a multifaceted topic like suicidal behaviour, but undoubtedly the book under discussion is a major step ahead to cover a considerable breadth and depth of this fatal and perpetually enigmatic behaviour among diverse groups under different conditions. The volume is divided in three parts. The first part is titled 'Deconstructing the phenomenon of suicide', and consists of nine articles. The first article by Swati Mukherjee and Updesh Kumar provides a glimpse of the perspectives on suicide, both sociological and psychological, and includes the very latest multidisciplinary multistage approaches to suicide. The somewhat varying understanding of suicidal behaviour from different disciplines is also discussed, along with a review of available intervention strategies. Among the remaining papers in this section, two rather unusual themes are the discourses on suicide in ancient Indian scriptures (Latha Nrugham) and Greek versus Biblical perspectives (Kaplan and Kantz). We learn that the ancient Indian scriptures do not take a universally consistent position. Contrarily, the Greek literature glorifies narcissistic and altruistic suicide as different from the Biblical support of life, the latter thus being a precursor of positive psychology. This section also includes the genetic and temperamental components of suicidal behaviour, issues of trauma and suicide terrorism, thus looking at suicidal behaviour from its multiple manifestations, trying to provide

an integrated view. Many of the articles in this section are extremely useful, some being comprehensive reviews, and others being novel and thought provoking. However, I was wondering about the title of the section itself. The word 'Deconstruction' makes me a bit uncomfortable. Deconstruction refers to a critical analysis of expression or language, and a relational study of the constructs involved for meaning making. Although communication and meaning making of texts have been addressed in some articles, I wonder if, on the whole, the spirit of the articles does justice to the term 'deconstruction'. If a second edition of the book is planned at any point of time (given its richness, there should be), I would request the editor to reconsider this title.

The second part is titled 'Risk appraisal and Vulnerable groups'. This section consists of fourteen articles identifying numerous risk and vulnerability issues, and some offer management and intervention strategies also (for example, Bames et al.). Some discourses are lesser known, for example, about management of lethal means, or the bereavement processes of suicide survivors, while a number of articles focus on different stages of life span. The clinically significant debate of role of antidepressant in managing suicidal behaviour has been taken up by Courtet et al. The personality components including perfectionism and personality disorders as contributory factors have been examined by other authors. The articles come from a wide range of authors representing different countries across the globe. The third part of the book is titled 'Prevention, Intervention and Beyond'. This section contains six papers, all by foreign authors. This section encompasses a vast range from role of spirituality to addressing suicide in army veterans. Some recent third wave therapies are also brought in context of suicide.

The second and the third sections are considerably rich in addressing a large number of dimensions of suicidal behavior. However, as a reader, I would perhaps have been happier if there were some more references to typical Indian issues, linked directly to politico-cultural and socioeconomic issues like the farmers' suicide. In the third section there is no Indian author, making us wonder whether the western strategies are applicable across all cultures. Nevertheless, I suppose one should not expect everything from one edited volume, and this one claims respect for its diversity of topics.

On the whole, this book is undoubtedly a significant addition to the list of must-reads for a scholar of suicidology as well as clinical psychology. Its applicative value is immense and the width of coverage is truly astonishing, without sacrificing the theoretical underpinning. I expect that as a major reference book, this volume is destined to enjoy large appreciation from its readers.

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Akbar Husain and Fauzia Nazam (2017). *Applied Positive Psychology*. New Delhi, India: Research India Press. Pages: 226. Price INR 1295. ISBN 9789351711209.

From a broader applied perspective of positive psychology every alphabet can be viewed as having a comprehensive positive conceptualization.

Applied Positive Psychology is a unique authorship presenting the idea of positive psychology in a much wider and comprehensive sense wherein Akbar Husain and Fauzia Nazam define and deliberate upon some major and broader level constructs with special emphasis on each and every letter of their spelling representing a positive conceptualization. Akbar Husain, a senior professor of

psychology at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh with around 40 years of experience has long been a dedicated researcher in the field of positive and spiritual psychology. He has already authored many widely appreciated books and research papers in the area. Fauzia Nazam is a budding researcher in the field with specialization of her doctorate and post-doctorate and some significant publications in the field of positive psychology. The specialized research experience of the authors come together in this book to ignite the scholars and readers to think in new directions in order to explore the field of positive psychology from an applied viewpoint.

The book comprises of eleven chapters beginning with first chapter introducing the field of positive psychology. The chapter briefly provides a sketch of progress of positive psychology with delineation on its conceptual understanding, historical background and its applications in work and well-being. The proceeding 10 chapters delineate on ten significant domains of positive psychology including Flourishing, Flow, Forgiveness, Gratitude, Hope, Optimism, Resilience, Social Support, Strength, and Wisdom, respectively. After a brief introduction to the broader domain, every domain has been sketched as an acronym of the encompassing letters of its spelling and the conceptualizations drawn from the uniquely assigned full-forms have been explained and associated with the primary domain to represent what the authors call as analytical model. The readers can rather consider those acronym based explanations as the sub-components of the broader construct domain as per the way they have been presented.

The authors analytically explain Flourishing as a combination of Freedom, Life satisfaction, Out growth, Unconditional love, Relationships, Inner strength, Social support, Hope, Inspiration, Nobleness, and Good action. Flow has been described as a product of Feedback, Life satisfaction, Optimal experience, and Well-being. Applications of 'flow' in family, intimate relationships, education, workplace, health, and culture have also been briefly talked about. After thorough deliberations on the conceptual understanding of Forgiveness with special reference to its religion specific ideologies, it has been explained as involving Faithfulness, Obedience, Rumination, Good company, Intention, Values, Extraversion, Nature, Emotions, Sincerity, and Sacrifice. With similar general and religion specific introductory deliberations, the acronym components of Gratitude involve Generosity, Reciprocity, Almsgiving, Thankfulness, intuition, Transcendence, Unity, Divinity, and Experience. Citing few existing models, the authors have correlated Hope with Happiness, Optimism, Perseverance and Emotions, and have explained the applications of hope in various fields. The authors' proposed acronymous model of Optimism encompasses Order, Performance, Thinking, Intrinsic motivation, Mental health, Intraception, Self-efficacy, and Meaning in life. With a brief theoretical background, Resilience has been associated with Recovery, Eustress, Self-efficacy, Inner strength, Life skills, Insight, Emotional intelligence, Needs, Causal attribution, and Emotional processing. Moving ahead, Social Support has been explained as involving Structural, Others', Community, Informational, Affective, Life, Spiritual, Unconditional, Parental, Perceived, Organizational, Received, and Tangible support. Strength has been described as a product of Silence, Tolerance, Relationships, Endurance, Non-violence, Goodness, Truth, and Happiness. Lastly, basing their discussion on few existing theoretical views, the authors elaborate on Wisdom as encompassing Will to meaning, Intellect, Spirituality, Divine quality, Optimal maturity, and Meaning in life.

On the critical side, the abstract acronymous descriptions of the included constructs overtly appear to be like shooting in dark with vivid correlated and hypothesized guess as different scholars are likely to differ on some sub-components as literature also supports some other correlates with same first letters. For example, for some scholars' empathy maybe a better significant correlate of forgiveness as compared to extraversion as considered by the authors here. Further, at many places in the book there exists a paucity of related empirical citations. Though the title of the book is quite comprehensive, the widely researched positive psychology concepts of virtues and character strengths remain out of the scope of book. Also, they way the constructs have been explained in acronym forms, in my opinion, present more of dissection type of modeling than analytical. Furthermore, many of the concepts which have been shown to be the acronymous part of broader constructs by the authors are given higher

independent impetus by various scholars in the field. For example, well-being, happiness, meaning in life, or emotional intelligence etc are widely considered as broad independent constructs. However, considering them as correlates of the primary constructs addressed in the book would still be undeniable; although the authors have not categorically suggested any specific research directions to study the hypothesized models.

On the appreciative direction, it is an undeniable fact that not too many authored books are published by Indian psychology fraternity and the majority relies on edited volumes to encompass wider works by different researchers; whereas, it is commendable that the authors here have put in tremendous efforts to put together their works and exhaustive insights in the recently emerging area of positive psychology. The book has been written in a very lucid and simple language which would immensely attract any sort of reader ranging from a layman to a researcher, scientist or academician. It presents a conspicuous description of how various concepts of positive psychology interact and integrate together to form the bigger gestalts of positive attributes. The ideas presented in the book would provide new directions to the research in positive psychology which can be directed on testing the proposed models and would certainly ignite the minds of scholars to think on the new lines and horizons of theoretical modeling. Hopes are high that many of future empirical researches will form this book as their basis and would take this line of modeling at bigger platforms.

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