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Book Review of:

Gavrielides, T. (2015). *The Psychology of Restorative Justice*. Furnham: Ashgate Publishing

Ben Lyon

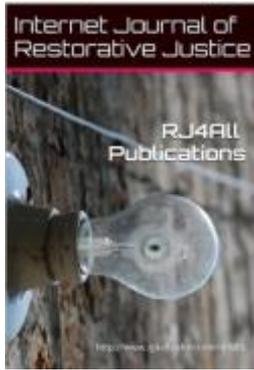
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Ben Lyon, *Restorative practitioner*

I was asked to consider this volume from the perspective of a restorative practitioner (turned researcher), in order to lend some balance to the heavyweight academic muscle on display. It was such a pleasure to read this input, especially on a theme that has not been drawn together before in the field of restorative justice research. The editor, Theo Gavrielides deserves our thanks for highlighting this range of studies and for leading us through the competing claims of various scientific and ethical thought.

This collection draws together a wide range of scientific study into a coherent whole, insofar as that this is possible. Part 1 presents developing theories, from psychology through to neuroscience. Part 2 takes us through some of the critical issues that arise and Part 3 introduces us to examples of new research. If it is a fundamental concept of the scientific approach that we produce fresh, new experiments or theses, and prove them by exposure to debate; then this edition succeeds.

There is an occasional defence of historic positions on display - and possibly the odd touch of Semmelweis syndrome. It is a pity to dismiss new research because it does not fit our own current and received wisdom. Then again, serious consideration is given to the possibility that psychology and science has something to offer towards our understanding of restorative processes. In some chapters, I also see much reliance on restorative conferences as the basis for research. I do wonder

why are we so very narrow in our studies when there are so many other restorative riches outside these very narrow parameters. I am also sometimes alarmed to read firm conclusions and recommendations about what we practitioners should be doing, based upon page after page of academic references; but with scarce mention of the sample sizes of any fresh research.

I found common cause with Gerard Drennan that the denial of restorative practices as being therapeutic has, *“inhibited the development of restorative justice interventions in forensic mental health settings.”* (page105) He also comes to the conclusion that it is, *“crucial to avoid the trap of prioritizing the recovery needs of the wrongdoer, while neglecting the moral and ethical requirement to prioritize the restoration of the victim.”* (page118) This is exactly the position of so many of the victims of crime that I have worked with and I suspect that I will be returning for support from his work and this line of enquiry for many years to come.

I work, or have worked, on a case-by-case basis. Each victim is an individual and none were willing participants in the breach of their peace, caused by the harm done to them. They owe nothing to society in resolving the delinquent behaviour of their offender. They usually only seek the healing of their individual situation. I can think of few if any who considered themselves bound by theories of justice or morality and most have turned to restorative practice to avoid such strictures.

Daniel Reisel gets pragmatically close to the formal structure and workings of the human mind, which is necessary for my position. He successfully links morality, empathy and altruism to psychology and cognitive neuroscience. This is a clear scientific shift toward the hard-wired diagram that I seek for my reference.

Judah Oudshorn drew me to the position of whole communities as subjects for a broader scope of restorative justice. He takes us into the old communities that we have marginalized through top-down formal law enforcement and he makes a strong case for restorative methods as a political and social tool for independent justice.

Isabel Ramirez’s Chilean team, with Maria Soledad Martinez and Samuel Malamud Herrera delight, as ever, with their direct, analytical observation of real-time criminal mediation - the gold

standard for such research. It helps, of course, that I agree with their conclusion, that we should *“concentrate on the actors’ strengths....and seek to bring about a genuine restoration of the victim’s broken rights.”*(page 241)ⁱ.

The only absence for me from this rich volume was that of evolutionary psychology. There is a tacit position that any consideration of scientific reasoning underpinning restorative justice is in some way upstart, or “trendy.” In the first place, this work makes clear that the scientific mapping of the brain and its functioning is moving forward apace. In the second I cannot see how such a recently described matter as restorative justice can be held to be the historical property of philosophy. I am reminded of the 1971 quote from Trivers, the evolutionary biologist, that the offender *“should be selected to make a reparative gesture to compensate for his misdeed and to behave reciprocally in the future, and thus to prevent the rupture of reciprocal relationships.”*

Here, I would like to take the opportunity and make a special plea to future researchers in this field. Much is said in the literature about the rehabilitation of offenders and of the reason of their minds. A word count comparison between relative attention to victim, or to the offender would show a wide discrepancy. A comparison of the works quoted, especially of the funding provided for these studies, would show a greater chasm. I deal with an equal number of victims, most of whom have some form of harm that they wish to rectify. Is there the chance that we can give equal attention and study to their needs, maybe to the therapeutic needs of family and wider community groups too?

If I was looking for work on the psychological causes and effects to restorative justice, then this is not the one. It is better than that! The volume ignites a vigorous debate and encourages new research to take place. It draws a wide range of disparate research together and informs a wider community of restorative practice. As a practitioner it makes me think and maybe stimulates me towards giving a better service for our clients.

Hearty thanks goes to Theo Gavriuelides and all the contributors. Let's keep this debate wide open, just like this, and not talk each other down. As I remind myself before any restorative process, this is not about me, it belongs to the clients and the community, and so this book needs to be read. There will be something to suit each practitioner's approach and to challenge every practitioner's preconceptions. I recommend that you dip into this rich mixture and pull out a psychological plum or two - it certainly worked for me.

ⁱ *The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism* Author(s): Robert L. Trivers
Source: *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Mar., 1971), pp. 35-57
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