Barnaby Barratt

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Barnaby B. Barratt, PhD, DHS, is a radical psychoanalyst, sexuality educator, sex therapist, somatic psychologist and facilitator of tantric meditation. Raised in England and earning his first doctorate from Harvard University, he has taught at universities all over the country and chaired graduate programs in somatic and clinical psychology. For a major portion of his career he was Professor Family Medicine, Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences at Wayne State University (Detroit). His books include Psychoanalysis and the Postmodern Impulse (1993), Sexual Health and Erotic Freedom (2005), What is Tantric Practice? (2006), Liberating Eros (2009), and The Emergence of Somatic Psychology and Bodymind Therapy (2010). He is currently Visiting Professor at the University of Cape Town and has a private practice of psychodynamic bodymind therapy and psychoanalysis in Johannesburg (South Africa).

Serge Prengel, LMHC is the editor the *Proactive Mindfulness* project.

For better or worse, this transcript retains the spontaneous, spoken-language quality of the podcast conversation.

Serge Prengel: So I'm with Barnaby Barratt. Hi Barnaby.

Barnaby Barratt: Hi, Serge. Thank you for having this conversation with me.

S P: Great, great. I'm looking forward to it. So, you just wrote a book…The Emergence of Somatic Psychology and Bodymind Therapy.

B B: Yes.

S P: And [Barnaby starts to speak]…go ahead.

B B: No, I'm delighted to say that it came out just earlier this year, published by Palgrave McMillan. And I'm hoping that a paperback edition will soon surface because like many books in our field the hardcover version is rather expensive.

S P: So, you know this book is very different from other books, in the sense that often other books talk about techniques, approaches and this is a very broad...I mean you have a lot of specifics…but there's a lot of context, a lot of putting therapy, bodymind therapy, in a context. Would you maybe talk a little bit about that?

B B: Yes I'd be happy to. I have been involved as a chair or as a director of various graduate training programs in Clinical Psychology, Counseling Psychology, and in Somatic Psychology, and coming at this as a teacher of graduate students and future healers, I felt that there was a lack in our field of a textbook that really gave an overview of the development of the field and an assessment of its current state. As you just indicated, most of the great texts in our

field, the current texts, and I won't mention specific ones, but you could think, I think, off the top of our heads, we could both consider about six books which you would say every practitioner who's going into our field should have read. I felt that there was a tendency in all these books to promote a….first of all to focus on technique, rather than theory, history, development, of how intellectually this enterprise called somatic psychology has developed, and secondly the tendency to promote a particular way of looking at bodymind therapy, a particular technique, a particular school of thought. So I set out to write a book, which I appreciate your saying it's unusual because I think it is. I set out to write a book that would give any graduate student, both one going into the field of bodymind therapy, and a student of our social sciences or the healing arts outside of the field, that would give any graduate student a really good overview of what somatic psychology and bodymind therapy is about. I wanted it to be an introductory text that really every graduate student in clinical psychology or in the associated fields should read, and I felt that there was a lack of that, and that the discipline of somatic psychology was at a point at which this was needed. We needed to have a textbook like this.

S P: Yea, yea.

B B: The second thing I wanted to achieve in it is to see if I could in an even-handed sort of way trace out the intellectual history of somatic psychology and the sources that I think it has drawn upon. And I identify in the book seven different sources that the discipline of somatic psychology has developed out of, which I think is important for anyone entering this field to get a grasp of how the field has developed, how I believe it's the wave of the future. I think that somatic psychology, or somatic psychodynamics maybe is a better, more specific way to frame what I'm thinking about, is the wave of the future in terms of healing because of the way it has drawn together all sorts of different traditions of healing, from contemporary neuroscience to ancient shamanic practice and so forth. And the last reason that I wanted to write this book was that I wanted to pose a series of challenges to those who are bodymind therapists in the field, because I think there are some crucial issues right now which need to be confronted if this discipline is to realize what I believe to be its considerable potential.

S P: So I think we have to make sure we address these challenges or at least talk about them a bit, but before going there, maybe it would be great to hear a little bit about your journey, your professional career, which also has been a bit unusual, hasn't it?

B B: Yea, I guess it has. My professional career really started with my having a crisis of depression when I was an undergraduate, and this was in the early 70s, late 60s, early 70s in England, and at that time given the state of the National Health Service and the fact that I was a poor working class kid, probably the treatment that I would have been given would have been electric shock therapy. But I was very blessed to be put in an experimental program run by the National Health Service, that was ran on psychoanalytic lines, and I had a first experience of psychoanalytically oriented therapy that was an absolute epiphany for me and a godsend. And I became very deeply committed to psychoanalysis as a way of

finding out the meaning of things, as a client-centered or patient-centered approach that is about meaning; not about mechanics, not about the sorts of things that sometimes one reads about in rather badly written textbooks, not about egos and superegos and ids clunking around like things that bump in the night, but psychoanalysis of a discipline that listens to the patients, and tries to understand meanings, and tries to understand meanings that are occult, meanings that are hidden. And I determined to become a psychoanalyst when I came to the states to do my Ph. D. work in psychology at Harvard, and as quickly as I could after that I got into psychoanalytic training. What I did not realize, on the basis of my own experience to that point, was how far psychoanalysis has in its history moved away from listening to the body. And I hesitate to make this as a generalization because it's a little whopping generalization and there are so many very talented psychoanalysts who do listen to the signals and the messages and the meanings of the body. But by and large, the way I see it, psychoanalysis after about 1914 really started to distance itself from the body. But if you look at Freud's writings prior to 1914, they are very much about libido, and libido is about the body; it's about the life's energies of the body, it's about how energy moves in the body and how energy creates meanings through the body. And Freud after about 1914 became much more sort of "in the head" in his theorizations, and I think I can trace this as an argument and document why it is and you can think about why it might be that Freud did that. Some of this was of course after Wilhelm Reich, Otto Gross, Sandor Ferenczi, George Groddeck, really continued to hold on to listening to the body as a part of psychology practice. In any event, as I perceived it in my career as a psychoanalyst and became increasingly involved in training, other clinicians and training future psychoanalysts, I was very struck by a couple of things. One was the way in which psychoanalytic theory moved away from sexuality since the early years of the discipline, to the point where if you look, for instance, at the writings of Heinz Kohut, the sort of the premier theorist of self-psychology, you can't find any references to the body or to sexuality, hardly at all in his entire corpus of writings.

S P: Yea.

B B: But if something very serious that went on in psychoanalysis, at least in the North American continent, where psychoanalytic theorizing backed away from sexuality as being a primary source and preoccupation of our lives, and backed away from listening to the body. And so, I started to get training on the side, first of all in sexuality, and I have something of a reputation as a sex therapist and sexuality educator, I've been very involved in that, and I brought into that field something very distinctive because by and large, sex therapy and sexuality education, since Kinsey and since Masters & Johnson, has tended to be cognitive behavioral.

S P: Yea.

B B: And I think…would like to think that in a minor way I contributed to bringing psychodynamic thinking into the field of sex therapy in this country, and I ended up president of the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, & Therapists. So

one piece of it's that. Another piece was my own personal practice as a Buddhist, in the Kagyu tradition, which is a mode of tantric meditation, and a meditation that listens to the body, and it meditates and uses the body as part of a meditative and spiritual method. I also, along the way, I trained and was certified as an instructor in Ashtanga yoga and I was trained and certified in Thai massage. Thai massage, as I'm sure you know Serge, is very interesting because it sort of conjoins the South Asian yoga system, I'm talking about Prana, in the body and the Chi system, that is the traditional Chinese system. The Thai Sen Sib system of energy and tracking in the body sort of has elements of both combined in a certain way.

S P: Yea.

B B: So that's….I'm sorry to be long-winded, but that's the sort of…where my training has taken me, and as you can tell, my qualifications as a somatic psychologist are perhaps somewhat eccentric.

S P: Well you know the…

B B: {…}a different path than most other practitioners.

S P: What I really appreciate in your taking the time to give this review, is how in a way, we cannot talk about having a perspective integrating something without having that integration of your own experience, and what's very beautiful in the way you described your journey is how it starts from that personal discovery of psychoanalysis as a way to reach…to satisfy the quest for meaning; how there is the involvement with, you know, the traditions, the Eastern traditions, at different levels, and all of this is what contributes to the point-of-view as opposed to this being simply something intellectual that comes out of lecturing.

B B: Yes, I think that's correct. I think that…I really do not want to, in any way, be derogatory about contemporary psychoanalysis, because I think there are so many wonderful practitioners coming out of that discipline. But I also have become alarmed occasionally with how often psychoanalysts and their patients get caught in stories, and in the repetitive, elaborative, working with stories, and lose track of listening to the body. So for me, and when people ask me how do I identify myself nowadays, I still am a psychoanalyst, but I think of myself as a spiritual existential somatic psychoanalyst. It's rather a mouthful.

S P: Yea.

B B: I think we need somatic psychodynamics, we need to bring the wisdom of listening to meanings, which is inherent in what psychoanalysis is about, and the wisdom of listening to the body and the ancient traditions of talking about bodily energies, as well as the contemporary advances of neuroscience. That is what somatic psychology is essentially

about. We need to bring them together, and that's very powerful, both theoretically and in terms of the healing methods that it generates.

S P: Yea, yea. So maybe…you know that's where we might talk a little bit about how that is not simply a change of techniques or a change of vocabulary, but a deeper kind of shifting.

B B: Yes, I think it's a deeper kind of shifting in a number of ways. I think one way it's a deeper kind of shifting is that we are gradually coming to terms with and beginning to integrate energy talk and the idea that there are subtle energies in the body, and that subtle energies in the body eventuate in meanings that actually guide our lives, consciously or unconsciously. I think we're at the point of history where….formally that sort of wisdom is being split off from the sort of more theoretical, cognitive wisdom we know about: how people function and how behavior is guided by certain sorts of scripts and so on. Maybe that wasn't so clear, what I just said, but I think you and I are pointing to something that's very powerful. It's happening right now in the field of human sciences.

S P: Yea, yea, so…

B B: Although I think somatic psychology is absolutely…somatic psychology and bodymind therapy have the potential to be the wave of the future, if we can meet certain challenges that we're facing.

S P: So maybe want to stay a little bit on that notion of deep shifting. That, you know…I think you say very nicely in the book that as we are in the middle of that period of shifting in a way we can't fully appreciate what it will shift to and can't you know fully see it from where we are. But there is a deep sense of something shifting in the way simply we see things and conceptualize things. And maybe one way to capture that would be to talk about your own experience seeing patients, way back when as somebody who had only the tools of psychoanalysis, and how your perspective has changed now that you have the benefit of these other approaches and that conceptual framework.

B B: Yea, thank you. I think as psychoanalyst I've always been a maverick, so…but I wrote a book in 1993 called Psychoanalysis and the Postmodern Impulse. Knowing and Being Since Freud's Psychology was the subtitle of it. And there I think what I tried to bring into focus was do you conceive of healing as a way of arriving at a definitive story about oneself. Because there is that sort of way of thinking within contemporary psychoanalysis, the idea that healing or cure or adaptation is arriving at a really well-functioning, good story about oneself that incorporates different elements that had perhaps been previously forgotten or repressed.

S P: Ummm hmm.

B B: The idea, for instance, that you can arrive at certainties, that you can arrive at an anchoring point for the self that is secure and firm and stable, which is very much an idea

that comes out of what professionals call modernism, as the episteme, the epistemological framework, that has dominated at least Western thinking for about three to five hundred years. There is that way of thinking on the one hand and there is another way of thinking, and the other way of thinking says that we perhaps never arrive at certainties. Perhaps certainties are a sort of delusion, and that what psychoanalysis actually does is mobilize things. It opens up narratives rather than arriving at definitive narratives or revisions of them, but it opens up the person in a deconstructive way. In other words, that the power of psychoanalysis is more hauling in its question the stories one has told oneself about oneself. That's what powerful. Rather than arriving at new stories and new certainties that are perhaps delusional. Now the same thing I think is…that where the body comes in here is that the body incessantly speaks to us if only we listen to it and don't run around in our heads, and I think all body mind therapists know this: that if you stop running around being in your head and telling yourself stories and you listen to your body, you have a more grounded, integrated way of being in the world, that opens you up to new possibilities, but doesn't necessarily amount to arriving at some point of absolute truth or a fixed point of certainty. In this way, I hesitate to use the term post-modern because it has already become such an overworked term and so misunderstood, but there is a post-modern aspect to this.

S P: Ummm hmm.

B B: And this of course goes along with what all of us know is happening in science, where Newtonian, Copernican science is essentially crumbling, in many respects, and in many ways. And quantum physics is teaching us how to think about things in ways that are almost hitherto unthinkable. There's something about all this that is, I think, of a magnitude of a deep shift in our culture, in our ways of knowing and our ways of being in the world, that we're in the middle of it. We don't even really know what these transitions are about, because they're much more complicated than certain sorts of new age thinking will tend to tell us.

S P: Yea.

B B: Much more complicated and much more profound, and we're in the middle of huge epistemic shifts that are of a crucial nature. And the ecological movement is part of this and all sorts of other things that I think bodymind therapy is really central to and has a lot to say about the human condition in a way that hasn't been said hitherto.

S P: So I want to maybe take what you said and slightly change something, and check with you whether you would agree with it, that in a way as we're talking and you're emphasizing the magnitude of the shift, there is the possibility for somebody who hears this conversation and hasn't read your book to think that we're talking about some things that, you know, they have no idea about. And actually, in a lot of ways, a lot of people who are listening to this conversation as bodymind-oriented psychotherapists are already doing a lot of what you described because the paradigms, the approaches, the understandings they have are

different from something that would be governed by this modern, rationalistic, certainty-oriented tradition and are more process oriented. Would you agree with that statement?

B B: Yea I'd totally agree with that statement. I think that…I think one of the reasons I wrote them the book that I wrote is that I think bodymind therapists are doing things that they don't even perhaps appreciate the radicalism of what they're doing.

S P: Yea.

B B: Because most of us are practitioners and we practice and we listen to our patients and we work with them, and we go to workshops and various trainings and we learn new ways of thinking about the bodymind. And I think many of us don't realize how far we've come in a break from Newtonian science and in a break from a Cartesian world view, and in our practice and in our way of being in the world. So in a certain sense, I think what I hope will be the contribution of this book is to help people understand their own practice and to sort of locate it in a bigger picture of things that are happening in the world and in the human sciences. So I think I'm agreeing very strongly with what you're saying, and I think it's important for us to know self-consciously where we are because the old ways of working have a rather insidious manner of creeping back into public discourse and into private discourse. You know, we can slide back into a Cartesian world view very, very easily, in our way of talking, in our way of thinking, in our way of acting. So I think it's sort of important to realize how…I think it's important for somatic psychologists and bodymind therapists to realize where they are in what is an amazing shift that's going on in the culture globally and locally, and an amazing shift that's going on in science and in our understanding what the condition of what being human is about.

S P: Yea, yea. So that's…it's a different understanding sense of what our condition of being human is and how it is related to the old modern version, is in many ways about that sense of losing the emphasis on logic, on reason, on cognitive processes, but of being aware of more of bottom-up processes and conscious in the sense of bottom-up as opposed to very thought out processes.

B B: Yea. You know when I talk to students one very, I think simple, but useful way of thinking about this is that Western culture for three to five hundred years has really had what Timothy Reiss, who was influenced by Michel Foucault, talked about a master discourse of domination. The idea is that if you can control something, dominate it, you somehow know it. And it is sort of like the master-slave paradigm, and that's the inheritance of Descartes…you know, that in some way the body is meant to control the mind, the mind is the mechanism, the body is the agent, and like the master and the slave, the mind is supposed to be in charge of and control the body. Well, subtly but profoundly, we're breaking with that way of thinking about a relationship between a mind and a body. So when we start listening to our body, when we start listening to the bodymind's messages in a different sort of way, we'll in fact learn something that is quite radical in terms of the whole shift away from the paradigms of domination that have really ruled Western thought.

These are all, of course, huge generalizations, but I think they have a very important validity that we need to be aware of.

S P: Yea, yea. So it's a kind of post-colonial paradigm that…

B B: Exactly.
S P: It's no longer the mind is the boss, the body is the slave, or the third world…you know, well-meaning but kind of stupid.

B B: Right. No, that's a very good way to put it. Actually, one of my favorite authors, Enrique Dussel, wrote a book called The Philosophy of Liberation. It's a difficult book to read actually in some ways unless I think maybe it lost in translation because it was written in Spanish, as a lot of philosophy of liberation is written in Spanish. But I think that's actually the sort of philosophy, the sort of approach that somatic psychology and bodymind therapy is all about, and I don't think many of us who are practitioners, I think very often don't even realize how fundamentally and radically important it is what we're doing and how different it is from the sort of science that was done, you know, up to the latter…you know, and wasn't even questioned up to the mid part of the 20th century.

S P: Yea, yea. So that added to that is more respectful, more in a way contemplative of what's happening, as opposed to imposing a meaning, imposing a narrative, trying to neatly tie things from that outside perspective, is in itself a revolutionary perspective.

B B: Yes, exactly. Thank you. That puts it very nicely.

S P: Thanks. So maybe we could talk a little bit about, in a way having said how many of us…you know, bodymind-oriented psychotherapists are already doing something that's very different and are into this new outlook, maybe talk a little bit about what you caution us about, the dangers you point out, the pitfalls.

B B: Yea. Of course, you know when you do this sort of thing there's a fair amount of chutzpah and arrogance involved, and I hope that I have done it with humility and respect. I think depending on how you define somatic psychology, depending on how you see the purview of bodymind therapy, and there are different ways of defining it and thinking about it, and there are some techniques that you might want not to think of as bodymind therapy techniques depending on how you created the definition. But let's just assume we know what we're talking about as the field for the moment, which may be risky but let's assume it anyway. I think the development of the field and the realization of its potential, the first thing that holds it up right now is the sort of structures we have. And mostly these methods and these ways of looking at things are mostly taught outside of universities, with a few exceptions, and as a result they've developed somewhat entrepreneurially. And we have a situation here where particularly in North America, we have sort of like different curricula of training, all of which are sort of somewhat parochially focused. I don't know how to say that more tactfully. But we have a small…we have a group of people who are doing this

method, we have a group of people doing that method, and so it's sort of like a silo effect. And this ultimately is not good for the field, and it's not good for our realizing the potential of what we have to say to the social sciences in general and to the healing arts in general, and I think we've got a lot to say. But it's set up as if we're right now rather fragmented into little sort of fiefdoms, where particular charismatic and brilliant individuals have created particular systems, particular training programs, and there is too little dialogue between them. I think, Serge, this is one of the reasons why these conversations that you create for us have such enormous value, that you know, you're creating a platform whereby there can be dialogue across the different sort of techniques and methods and ways in which people have branded them, because there's a rather serious tendency we have in our field to brand a particular technique and then it becomes this or that technique and it's distinct from all others and better than and so forth. I've said enough so…but this is I think the major challenge, that we have to develop a more coherent discourse, and frankly that's why I wrote the book. And I know this sounds arrogant and I apologize for it, but I felt there was the need for a book that would present an overview and an analysis of the historical development and an analysis of the future potential of somatic psychology and bodymind therapy and that's why I did it. Ok, now the second challenge to our field, I think is not just organizational but is also sort of intellectual. And you put your finger on it a little while ago as we were…five minutes ago we were talking about how people are doing things but perhaps they don't even fully realize the import of what they're doing. And so there's a sort of a lag here and I think that it's important that as practitioners we become aware of sort of where we stand in the greater scheme of cultural, you know, cultural, ecological, political and so forth developments. After that, I think there are, and I focus on this in the book, I think there are some specific questions that we need to have courage looking at. One is the question of boundaries, bodies and boundaries, and it's a very tricky, tricky question, but it's one that has to be confronted and it's extraordinarily difficult to confront it in the current cultural climate. But we have to be very clear about what a body is, and what are boundaries, and where do boundaries come from, and what creates boundaries, and what makes boundaries. We tend to assume as though that's self-evident, but we need to have, I think, a much, much more sophisticated understanding of the nature of boundaries in relation to the bodymind than I think we currently do, and I think that task is urgent, that that be confronted very courageously. The second thing that I think that we need to confront quite courageously as a discipline is the question of sexuality because there is a tendency in some areas of this discipline to act as though bodymind therapy is all about the body except the genitals. And obviously that's sort of politically astute, the other hand it's not true, so the actual condition of being human, it's not really true to the science and it's not true to what we know about the bodymind. And this is a tough one as well in terms of the cultural climate that we operate in. There are somatic psychology practitioners that want to talk about the body as if it is everything but its sexuality, and I don't think that ultimately that's viable in terms of our really understanding the body and the contribution we have to make as somatic psychologists. Another question and challenge I think, which actually you just touched upon very interestingly because you took me by surprise starting to talk about post-colonialism. But I think to understand the nature of individual change in relation to political, global change is actually rather important. And naturally as

practitioners, we tend to sort of slide into a rather consulting room or workshop focused orientation, in which we're just looking at the particular individual who's presented himself or herself as our patient, or we're just looking at the particular group of trainees or whatever. But I think to understand the relationship between individual change, and change on a sociopolitical level is ultimately necessary. A fourth, and I'll leave it at this for the moment, but a fourth challenge I think here is…doing bodymind therapy in my mind is inherently a spiritual practice and I'm not sure that we can wriggle around that. That's not to say that we have to have declarations of faith, we don't, but I think that when you start to talk about the body's energies, you're really beginning to talk about something that is holy, and that connects the practice that we do as bodymind therapists…connects us with the great Dharmic traditions of Pranayama, it connects us with what Sufis have talked about, it connects us with what tantric meditators have talked about, have practiced, and so forth. So we're at another interesting challenge here. I think that there's a general awareness that the boundary between science and spirituality is perhaps breaking down, and I mean spirituality, I don't mean organized religion, and I think this is a question that we have to confront courageously and honestly is how do we think about that?

S P: Yea. Yea. And maybe again to bring it to, you know, the people…you and I and the people who listen to this conversation, it's not a sense of that you're asking these questions and you say for us to confront them meaning we appoint a commission that confronts them, but actually day in and day out in our clinical practice to realize that we are in the middle of confronting them. And we are moment by moment taking certain attitudes or making some shifts, and actually it's not an outside activity but it's very much actually what we are living moment by moment and day by day.

B B: Yea. I think that's a very nice way of putting it. I think that's very true. I also think that if we're going to represent ourselves as the discipline that we are, you know, if we're going to advance somatic psychology as a discipline and as the discipline of the future, and if we're going to advance bodymind therapy as something that is not the manipulative techniques of cognitive behaviorism, and is not incessant play with narratives in the name of some other sort of therapy, if we're going to advance these disciplines, then the questions that we wrestle with daily, the ones I just articulated, the question of boundaries, the question of sexuality, the question of the political implication of what we do on an individual level, and the question of spirituality in relation to the body, I think we have to be somewhat public about the fact that there are things here that are really important to talk about. So we cannot really just limit it to the practice we have as clinicians. In some sense if we're going to advance this discipline we need to talk about these questions and the dilemmas they create for us in a public and forthright and self-reflective manner.

S P: Yea. Yea…So Barnaby, as we're coming to the end of this conversation, just wanted to check if there is something you want to add as a conclusion, or whether you feel that these big questions are actually a very good place to leave people with.

B B: I think this is an excellent place to leave people with. I regret it if I've sounded like I'm on a soapbox, but I think there is something in our discipline that is so precious and has such potential for the future that we need to be able to advance it in these sorts of ways by talking about these questions, not by thinking we have the answers because I don't think any of us do, most of all myself.

This conversation was transcribed by Tanice Prince.

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