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The SEA is a Registered Charity No. 1039274

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Change of Address
Please note, it is members’ responsibility to let us know of a change of address. If you have not notified us we will not be able to send out a second copy. You will of course be able to buy a second copy.

Disclaimer
Views expressed in this Circular are those of individual contributors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or of the Society. Equally, publication of advertisements is not an endorsement of the advertiser nor of the products and services advertised.
I am delighted to welcome readers old and new to this bumper edition of the Circular. We have been blessed with an extraordinary range of contributions, from all corners of the existential world. I can only express my deep gratitude to the many individuals who have been willing to commit their ideas, reflections and creative musings to paper and to present them to us for our consideration. There is much for us to ponder here: papers from Paul Wong and Reed Lindberg tell us more about Meaning Therapy and Applied Existential Psychotherapy respectively; a case study from Harvard Research Fellow Dr Christian Schultz explores the therapeutic relationship in the most difficult of circumstances; and two papers by Joël Vos and Daniel Sousa respond to feedback following Mick Cooper’s talk at the SEA AGM. A challenging piece on inauthenticity from Manu Bazzano and a more restful collaboration on mindfulness, together with a poem, a Philosophy Festival review, and a peek into the inner world of an SEA member, complete what must surely be one of the most interesting Circulars we have ever produced. There is truly something for everyone. I do hope you will be intrigued, enlightened or even infuriated by what you read. Perhaps you will be inspired to respond to one or more of the authors or to contribute thoughts of your own in our next issue, which is due out in February 2014. Happy reading!

Susan Iacovou
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VACANCY FOR CPD EVENTS CO-ORDINATOR
An exciting opportunity has arisen to join the SEA committee as CPD Events Coordinator. The CPD events will allow for a deeper exploration of existential themes and issues in the context of psychotherapy and counseling psychology.

As CPD events coordinator you will handle venue bookings, invite the speakers and promote and manage the event. The CPD workshops are likely to be on a Saturday although there is some flexibility. It is thought there should be approximately six CPD events a year. You will also be invited to SEA committee meetings although if you are not able to attend it is possible to provide a quarterly report instead.

There is a substantial amount of scope in this role for you to contribute your creative ideas.

Please note the SEA is a charity organisation and the position is on an honorary basis.

If you are interested in the above vacancy or would like more information, please email: clairecamarshall@yahoo.com
COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Pavlos Filippopoulos
Chair: I am still new to the role of Chair and it is still a learning process. So far it has proved to be a combination of leading a strong committee and carrying the badge of the Society in a number of Psychotherapy, Psychology and other fields.

Digby Tantam
Committee Member: I reflect the interests of the staff and students of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling (NSPC), and the Society of Psychotherapy (SoP), with a special interest in researchers in existential psychotherapy.

Claire Marshall
Publicity Officer: I am responsible for managing and organising information produced by the SEA, creating and disseminating relevant information, developing the branding, promoting interdisciplinary connections, maintaining the SEA’s profile amongst students as well as other public relation matters.

Mike Harding
Committee Member: As the former Registration Officer of the SEA, I am now the Committee Member responsible for registering ADEP graduates and other suitably qualified practitioners for first-time registration with the UKCP.

Natasha Synesiou
Secretary: I coordinate monthly committee meetings and the AGM. This entails compiling an agenda, as well as taking and circulating minutes of the meetings. I liaise between committee and other SEA members, respond to various enquiries and, as a trustee of the SEA I uphold the legal requirements of the Charity Commission, as it applies to the Society.

Murray Blackett
Conference Co-organisers: How do you capture a theme that engages, inspires and engenders real debate for people from many walks of existential life? How do you make this as meaningful as possible, in just one day? And how can that day come alive and make the SEA 2013 conference a memorable one? These are just a few of the questions we hope to answer as Conference Co-organisers.

Derek Bean
Practice Matters: More on this role as Derek sees it in the next issue.

Sarah Young
Administrator; Hans W. Cohn Scholarship: I am responsible for sending out the Scholarship application form and liaising with readers of completed applications (usually past recipients). The subcommittee of readers includes the Chair of the Society, so I keep him/ her informed of any applications. Awarding the Scholarship is dependent on funds available, so I maintain contact with the Treasurer and Committee. I also ensure that payments are made by the Treasurer when fees are due, and that Scholarship information is up to date on the website and occasionally included in the Circular, as well as keeping students informed about it directly. I am also responsible for asking recipients to write a paper for the Journal and/or give a presentation on their research.

Paola Pomponi
Honorary Treasurer: I look after the financial issues of the Society. I balance the yearly accounts, deal with the bank, keep all financial documents on file, and help with any queries related to moneys, receipts and payments.

Haran Rasalingam
SEA Webmaster: I am focused on maintaining and improving the website, developing our digital presence further, handling any technical issues and co-ordinating content management on the site.

Ursula Berghaus
Committee Member: More on this role in the next issue.

Paul Silver-Myer
Membership Secretary: I send annual membership renewal invitations and provide a receipt and membership card. I liaise with Distribution and Marketing, and the Circular Editors, provide membership details to the Registration Officer and Therapist List Co-ordinator, and update the Treasurer on fees received. Keeping an overview of changes in member numbers and attending to membership related queries and feedback is also part of my role.

Susan Iacovou
Editor, The Hermeneutic Circular: The Hermeneutic Circular has gone from strength to strength under the stewardship of previous editors and I hope to continue their good work. My role is to encourage students, qualified practitioners and everyone interested in existential philosophy and psychotherapy to contribute articles,
poems, case studies, workshop reports and adverts to the Circular. Help, suggestions for future features and feedback all welcome.

Simon du Plock & Greg Madison

Journal Co-editors: Simon du Plock has co-edited Existential Analysis (EA) since 1993. He has worked closely over this period with Professor Ernesto Spinelli, and Alessandra Lemma, then with Dr Hans W. Cohn, Dr John Heaton, and, most recently with Greg Madison. Simon is Head of Post-Qualification Doctorates in Psychotherapy at Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University. Greg joined Simon in co-editing EA almost six years ago, after returning to the UK from a brief stint on faculty at a Canadian university. Greg is a psychologist and psychotherapist with interests in developing an experiential-existential model of therapy and concerns about the impact of globalisation and technology on human existence. His EA role includes working closely with the whole journal team in our attempts to produce two coherent high-quality publications a year.

Martin Adams

Journal marketing and distribution, and Book Reviews’ Editor. I have two roles in the SEA. I am the person who sends out all the copies of Existential Analysis to members and to people who buy back copies. I also manage the subscriptions of EA to academic institutions across the world. As the book reviews editor I look out for and receive books that would be appropriate for review. On many occasions I commission reviews.

Paul McGinley

Representative to the Constructivist and Existential College: My role as representative of the SEA on the Executive Committee of the “Constructivist and Existential College” is to support the SEA Chair in representing the interests of the Registered Members of the SEA at UKCP level, as well as promoting existential psychotherapy generally.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW FOR EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS

The following publications have been received for possible review. People who wish to be included in the list of book reviewers for Existential Analysis for these or other publications are requested to e-mail the Book Reviews Editor, Martin Adams at adamsmc@regents.ac.uk

Itten, T. and Young C. (2012) R.D.Laing: 50 years since The Divided Self, Ross on Wye: PCCS
Ross-on-Wye: PCCS
Hello all. This is my second ‘Report from the Chair’ to you through the Hermeneutic Circular.

A couple of weeks ago I went on my first away-day with the Executive Committee of the College of Constructivist Psychotherapies (CCP). I had the pleasure of meeting the Chairs of the other Organisational Members face-to-face on what was a very productive day. Firstly, I gained an insight into the structure of the UKCP and the SEA’s part within it. The UKCP is organised into ‘Colleges’, each of which consists of ‘Organisational Members’ (OMs). Our Society is an Organisational Member of the CCP. Although I acknowledge that many of our members are not UKCP registered, the SEA still holds the highest number of members within the CCP, which substantiates the Existential approach not just within our College but, significantly, within the UKCP; I feel this is important for all our members and not just for UKCP-registered members.

Secondly, I want to report on some significant developments that took place that day. We managed to sign off and agree several documents that have been developed over the last few years; the Competencies Document (which describes the competency threshold of any member of the college who is a practicing psychotherapist) the Supervision Document, the College Flag Statement (a statement that features the overview of the College on the UKCP website), CPD as well as Ethics Documents (Continuous Professional Development and Ethical Conduct respectively).

The most significant of these for UKCP-registered members is the Supervision Document. Signing this off means that access to the UKCP Supervision Directory has been officially opened from the 1st of October 2013 and therefore the Grandparenting Route will run for three years from this date. Paul McGinley has suggested that we run a day-long seminar briefly outlining the politics behind this Directory, followed by a workshop as to how to fill the application in, so that by the end of the day attendees will know if there are any criteria that they fall short of and what they will need to do to fulfil them. We will be advertising this soon on the Practice Matters page on the SEA website to see if this is something members might be interested in attending.

Another important development, certainly in terms of public and professional profile, is the change of name that I managed to negotiate so that the CCP has been changed from The College of Constructivist Psychotherapies to now being called The Constructivist and Existential College (CEC). I would like to acknowledge Paul McGinley’s contribution to this change of name, which is an important step in continuing to establish the existential approach and means that this College is the only one in the UKCP that is clearly identified as existential. This will fortify the SEA’s position as a strong, non-partisan, existential community, with registering power for existential practitioners through the CEC.

It was also decided at the College meeting that the price for five-yearly re-accreditation of members who have decided to become Direct Members of the UKCP has been set at £500. This is to reflect the cost of the administrative tasks involved in such reaccreditation and to guarantee that these members are not being subsidised by members who continue to remain within the SEA (or other Organisational Members of the CEC). At Executive Committee level we felt that this was a reasonable step and is something that Registered Members need to be aware of, particularly those who may decide to become Direct Members of the UKCP for economic rather than ideological reasons.

All the above developments will enable the SEA committee to decide on a strategic plan for the immediate future of the Society. As I see it we can choose to explore our ‘extrovert’ capacities in order to attract more members and increase our voice in the public and scientific realm, or we can concentrate on the intra and infrastructure of the SEA in order to increase our efficiency. These possible directions will be discussed at the next SEA committee meeting and I will be reporting back to you in the next newsletter.

In the spirit of extraversion let me leak out a little more information about this year’s SEA conference, the Society’s 25th, to be held at the NYCO on the 23rd November. As you know, some of the founding members of the Society will be giving presentations on the day. You will also be able to see them all as they appeared in the first ever SEA conference twenty-five years ago in a recording of that event that will be screening in the main conference room over the lunch hour. Most of the former Chairs of the SEA will also be present on the day, either presenting or chairing sessions.

I hear that there will be a Pandora’s Box for attendees to put their questions and observations into throughout the day; a lucky handful will be explored in Discussion Fora – a shortened, simplified version of last year’s Open Space Technology – during the last hour of the conference, where people will be free to get together in groups to debate some of the conference themes, or simply to have a chat and a coffee with their peers.

There will be a book-signing event and experiential workshops that will invite attendees to be and do as well as listen – to put your money where your mouth is, as it were. There might even be some music, but more on this on the day itself.

In closing, and in view of the 25th anniversary of the SEA, I would like to thank the current committee and all previous ones for their hard work and dedication to the Society. Without their honorary contribution of their time and energy the SEA would not be where it is today.

I hope to see most of you at the Conference and if not speak to you in the next issue of the Hermeneutic Circular.

Bye for now.
MEASURING A SHORT-TERM EXISTENTIAL THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION IN THE NHS

BY MARK RAYNER & DIEGO VITALI

I have been asked to write this in response to issues that were raised in the last issue of the Hermeneutic Circular and I hope that this describes and clarifies some of the questions raised.

As an integratively trained therapist who has worked in an existential-phenomenological manner in both the private and public sector for 17 years, I have seen many changes in practice and developments in how services are delivered and evaluated.

My basic stance is that existential-phenomenological therapies have sat on the margins of public sector service delivery and that this is a shame for those of us that believe passionately in addressing human concerns in a broad and inquisitive manner.

There has been much wrangling between types of therapies and types of therapists and we have seen the dawn of evidence-based practice and adherence to medical models of working.

In my opinion there is probably no single type of therapy that can make real claims to be better, more effective, efficacious than another (Luborsky, 1975). But I do believe that utilising existential thinking and a phenomenological method (Husserl, 1913) offers the possibility of engaging with distress in a way that explores clients’ meanings (Frankl, 1959) and encourages understanding and the hope for change and recovery (Sheppard et al., 2008) – which I believe to be central to the endeavour of any effective therapeutic model.

I know this is contentious but I think we live in a world of testimonials, measurements, evaluations, audits, key performance indicators and competencies, and, as Mick Cooper says in his book entitled The Facts are Friendly (2008), we should not be afraid of this. Therefore, I decided to join in and have developed a way of working in the NHS in primary care settings and have piloted a short-term existentially informed intervention that is based on several simple premises:

1. Early intervention in the life-cycle of human distress leads to better recovery and outcomes
2. Understanding human difficulties as distress rather than disability promotes the possibility of challenging the medicalisation of misery
3. Intervening at GP point of contact reduces stigma associated with mental illness and promotes better engagement
4. Change is the endeavor of all therapy, although change may be understood in many ways. In other words, from the perspective of this therapy, change may be understood in terms of change in understanding or viewpoint or experience of sense of self i.e. not just limited to behavioural but possibly behavioural change as well
5. This type of therapy challenges the notion of collaboration as used by manualised cognitive based therapies. This therapy believes collaboration to be the attempt to understand and work with the clients’ identified concerns rather than suggesting what is, or may be termed as, maladaptive or faulty thinking and directing change, which this type of therapy would consider to be compliance rather than collaboration.

The following short précis attempts to describe an existential-phenomenological way of working that has been applied in primary care settings using an assessment and six sessions of therapy. This is not a standardised model but one that is operationalised (to be published) so that we can demonstrate what it is that we are doing on a session by session basis, and also so that we can evaluate whether this process has been effective for the clients and what about this process has been effective. Therefore, in the spirit of joining in we have used routine outcome measures so that we can compare and contrast our work with models like CBT and those used in national initiatives like Improving Access to Psychological Therapy (Layard, 2004). Whilst I fully recognise that CORE 5-OM (Evan et al., 2000), GAD-7 (Spitzer, 2006) and PHQ-9 (Lowe et al., 2004) measurements bear little or no relation to an existential attitude, nor do they elicit information that is necessarily a real measurement of recovery, unless we utilise these measures, we as existential therapists will continue to be side-lined and marginalised. The importance of using these measures lies first in the clients’ willingness to complete them – see the Hawthorne Effect of Expectation (Landsberg, 1958) – and, second, it gives us data that ALL therapies in the public sector must gather to have any chance of commissioning. In addition, we have used another (somewhat under-utilised – in my opinion) tool known as the Core GOAL-attainment measure, which asks a client what they see as the concerns they would like to work on in therapy and then asks them to rate the degree to which they reached those goals at the end of therapy.

The most important assumption this therapy makes is that about the words that the clients use to express their presenting concerns. In order to help any person as a therapist, one must find where the person is already (Kierkegaard, 1844). Almost all clients have learnt the language of illness in today’s world of psychological therapy delivery. This approach takes this language of depression, anxiety, etc. to be statements of the persons’ sense of relationship to themselves, others and the world and, as such, is devoted to explicating what this means in the living experience of the person through a process of phenomenological inquiry as follows:

1. The assessment
This initial meeting centres around the stated concerns of the client and provides a form of psycho-education about the process of therapy and the measurement tools we will use. We also initiate the engagement with the client’s goals for therapy. In statutory services we have to assess and manage risk and attempt to formulate the person’s concerns. From a phenomenological stance we attempt to do the latter through a process of description, clarification and horizontalisation (Spinelli, 1989). It is in this session that the attitudes, assumptions, values and beliefs of the client are elicited, together with an assessment of how these may impact upon the way the person sees the world and their
difficulties. The therapist is also engaged in the process of bracketing his or her own views in an attempt to see the world through the eyes of the other (Jaspers, 1913). It is worth noting that apart from the above statutory requirements that are mandatory in any type of therapy, there is nothing of this endeavour that sets it apart from other therapies other than the way in which the world views of the client are elicited in an existential manner that focuses upon the acts and contents of consciousness (Husserl, 1913).

2. First therapy session
In this session, the phenomenological process of therapy is also partly psycho-educative, inasmuch as we explain the limitations of our work together in terms of time (Minkowski, 1933) and outline how, in a collaborative fashion, we may aim towards the achievement of the goals indicated by the client. From the assessment session, we further explain that we are interested in the human breadth of experience not just the medical view of the person’s concerns, thus challenging either implicitly or explicitly the notion of illness.

3. Second therapy session
In this session, we move the phenomenological enquiry onwards by eliciting the nature of the person’s relationship to their concerns, and the relationship that they have with themself as a person who has these concerns, and attempt to place the person at the centre of their world so that they are able to begin to take ownership of their difficulties and start to disentangle themselves from ideas of illness and the typical stances that the harsh world has caused them to adopt. This is not to say that they have not possibly had awful, difficult and disabling experiences but rather this proposes that, if they are to recover, they must not necessarily, but may profit from, giving up the stance that they continue to be a hostage to. In other words, we introduce the idea that their sense of self is not immutable or the fixed result of past experiences but rather of illness.

4. Third therapy session
In this session, through phenomenological reductions we continue to look further at the relationship that they have with the concerns they’ve expressed, and how they have become this person and identified with a sense of self that is limited by these views. Here we are at the middle stage of therapy and, whilst we have considered the brevity of our interaction from the outset, it is here that we plan how they would like to re-understand or re-discover a lost sense of self through the interaction with the therapist. Again, it is worth noting that, although this therapeutic intervention considers the existential given of the person being in relation to the world (Heidegger, 1927) and that at this stage we are discussing choice and responsibility for who they are and how they would like to proceed, there are many therapies that would be doing something similar but approaching this from positions of different theoretical modalities.

5. Fourth therapy session
In the fourth and fifth session, the recognition that the person will soon be living in the world after therapy has ended is considered, and the clients are encouraged to live with their newly forming understanding of themselves. This is done both in the therapeutic encounter but also in the world as the clients are encouraged to try this temporary sense of self in whatever ways they choose to in their world and to bring this back to the therapist for reconsideration of whether or not this has been, or is becoming, a beneficial process.

6. Fifth therapy session
Further consideration is given to the notion of the client ‘being-in-the-world’ (Heidegger, 1927) insofar as the therapeutic space is recognised as a special space, but that all clients are inevitably living in the world of others, and their existence is both within and emergent from their own worlds.

7. Sixth therapy session
In the final session, this therapy envisages the journey ending as also a beginning (Sartre, 1943) and one that has hopefully allowed the client to reconsider their place in the world through a detailed investigation of their values, attitudes and beliefs. The CORE Goal Attainment Form is completed, along with the other measures.

The final important note relating to the use of these standardised measures of anxiety and depression is that when a person experiences therapy as understanding, compassionate, challenging and supportive and they feel better about themselves and/or understand themselves better, we have found, as indicated in the results below, that they tend to report that their anxiety or depression has been alleviated – thus we can demonstrate statistically significant and reliable change using this process.

The strong and inherent research-oriented backbone of this clinical experimentation should be underlined, insofar as this pilot project was carried out along strict lines of methodological data collection and analysis of outcomes. A specific paper about this research work is being prepared for publication and a preview of our results is presented below.

According to our data, this short-term existential intervention demonstrates success as follows:
- producing reliable and significant clinical improvements to a clinical population in primary care;
- reporting very low drop-out rates (to be published);
- producing recovery or at least high effect sizes for the patients presenting mild to moderate depression and/or anxiety.

The research study aimed to assess the clinical reliability and the average size of change produced in the clinical population. Therefore we aimed to produce quantitative results that could be further compared with the literature and benchmarked against the National Standards required by the National Health Service. The sample consisted of clinical cases (i.e. patients assessed above the clinical threshold with respect to the adopted scales) referred...
to our practice by a primary care multidisciplinary team. The population was assessed prior to intervention and during therapy on a session-by-session basis and then re-assessed at the end of the 6th and last session using PHQ-9 (Lowe et al, 2004), GAD-7 (Spitzer et al, 2001) and CORE-OM (Evans et al, 2000). The proportion of clinical cases that registered a statistically reliable improvement (Jacobson & Truax 1991) was 55% for PHQ-9 (α=0.9), 52.2% for GAD-7 (α=0.9) and 57.1% for CORE-OM global score (α=0.95).

We also considered a theoretical target-population for a primary care service and therefore we measured only the clinical cases that were assessed below the highest severity bands of the used scales i.e. those deemed eligible for a primary care mild-moderate short-term intervention; for these clients, we observed a statistically reliable improvement in 72.7% of the cases for PHQ-9, 76.9% for GAD-7, 64.3% for CORE-OM.

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EEYORE & TINKERBELL: AN AEP PERSPECTIVE ON COUPLES THERAPY

BY REED LINDBERG

Successful long-lasting relationships are a combination of freedom and commitment, a balance that is sometimes hard to achieve. Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of bad faith helps us understand why. For Sartre bad faith, or lying to oneself about the nature of reality, comes in two forms: overemphasis on facticity or overemphasis on freedom. We can neither be free in a world without facts nor a fact in a world without freedom. Freedom has meaning only in situation, and every situation is a combination of what the world brings and what we make of what the world brings. What the world brings includes our personal past (which constrains us once we have created it), our socio-material circumstances, our physical limitations, our past relationship choices, and the various givens of our lives. Freedom is our way of living those circumstances. Freedom without commitment to someone or something has little
meaning, while commitment without freedom can be deadening and life-denying.

Applied Existential Psychotherapy (AEP), the mode of therapy that I use in working with both individuals and couples, is deeply grounded in the existential philosophy of Sartre. AEP is a synthesis of existential philosophy, psychoanalytic insights, and experiential techniques drawn from Gestalt and other active therapies. In AEP couples work, we also include interventions from other couples modalities that are compatible with an existential perspective. In practicing couples therapy from an AEP perspective, I have found that Sartre’s ideas on ‘bad faith’ provide a framework for understanding many of the difficulties that couples bring to therapy. Among these is the freedom-commitment dilemma that sometimes threatens to tear couples apart.

The reason the freedom-commitment dilemma is so hard for couples to negotiate is that we are often afraid of committed freedom. Living in a free and committed authentic relationship should be enjoyable and enriching, but it can also be challenging and uncomfortable. If we accept and support our partner’s freedom, our partner would be free to view us in ways that might challenge our preferred or desired sense of self – or they might leave us. On the other hand, if we opt for the security of trying to restrict our own and our partner’s freedom, we could wake to find ourselves in a boring relationship. An unspoken anxiety might be that if we commit ourselves fully to our relationship, we are excluding other relationships or other possibilities that might have been more exciting, or more interesting than this one. Yet, if we insist on keeping our options open, without full commitment, our relationship may come to lack depth and meaning.

Consciously working toward authentic relating keeps the relationship lively and supportive at the same time. Yet since bad faith is a universal human temptation, we often fail at authentic relating. When we do so it is important to remember that bad faith is not a moral failing but an ontological propensity born of the human condition. It is deeply human to try to flee engaged freedom—by either ignoring the conditions of our lives and believing we are absolutely free, or by believing we are bogged down in our relational, social, and material circumstances. I try to emphasise that we must hold our failures lightly, not make them a source of unhelpful self-castigation. At the same time, as Sartre makes clear, it is authentic engagement, not bad faith, that leads to fulfilling relationships. Facilitating authenticity is the healing work of therapy.

Often the freedom-commitment dilemma underlies the issues that couples bring to therapy, because this dilemma has its roots in bad faith efforts to flee either freedom or facticity. I recall the dilemma of a middle-aged couple on the verge of divorce who came to see me some years ago. The husband was certain he wanted to save the marriage, yet he was also the more cautious of the two about counselling. The wife had decided to move on to embrace an ascetic lifestyle of meditation and celibacy. Her fascination with this new-found spiritual path turned out to be a manoeuvre to help her find a way out of the relationship without guilt. She was feeling stifled by the relationship and wanted more novelty.

The wife was admittedly angry with her husband, but was willing to try therapy as a last ditch effort to save the marriage. He tried to avoid her anger and to minimise her complaints. Both were anxious to tell stories about how they had been wronged, not gotten their needs met, or been bored with the relationship. The husband dealt with the problems by being critical, making demands, and creating small dramas. The wife withdrew, made plans to get away from home, and expressed little affection or sexual interest. Both were extremely intelligent and sophisticated. Both had doctorates and were socially and financially successful.

I was tempted to encourage the couple’s expressions of anger and disappointment and to discuss possible solutions to the practical ‘issues’ that made them so dissatisfied. Instead I challenged the patterns of bad faith that emerged as we explored their ways of relating to each other. Each seemed to gravitate toward one of the poles of bad faith. The husband would overemphasise facticity. He preferred a comfortable box into which to put his wife, himself, and their relationship. He had grown up in an unpredictable family, wanted rules and regularity, and was cautious about change. The wife had felt stifled by overly rigid parents. She viewed her husband and their relationship as boring and disappointing. She longed to spread her wings.

There were face-to-face dialogues and heated but honest exchanges about why each was so dissatisfied with the relationship. He resented being criticised for his hard work and serious attitude to life. She chafed at being held back from social interaction and new intellectual and emotional experiences. She was concerned that the life had gone out of their relationship. He complained that she no longer loved him and agonised over her lack of commitment, interest, and support.

It was the element of humour that proved to be key to opening new perspectives for both. He seemed mired in what Sartre called the ‘spirit of seriousness’, a dogged adherence to roles and a belief that things are as they are, that is characteristic of the form of bad faith that overemphasises facticity. Yet he was also sometimes capable of laughing at his seriousness. And she appreciated that. They came up with humorous names for their strategies: the ‘Eeyore Syndrome’ after the overly serious donkey in Winnie the Pooh, and the ‘Tinkerbell Approach’ after the fairy in Peter Pan. She, the couple said, encouraged lost boys to remain boys. Like Tinkerbell, she was always on the verge of ‘flying away’, while her husband was mired in everyday life, complained, and felt sorry for himself like Eeyore.

Their capacity for laughing at their obvious differences opened a door. I introduced the idea of the ‘spirit of play’, a concept that AEP offers as an antidote to the spirit of seriousness. The spirit of play is a life stance that recognises and supports our own and each other’s freedom in situation. I suggested that developing the playfulness inherent in their ability to laugh with each other might be useful. He was sceptical about play as a solution. She was charmed by the idea.

We explored the threat that play posed for him – his fear that she would leave if he were to let go and stop trying to control her,
and, if instead, he encouraged her need for novelty, growth, and change. Once he acknowledged the futility of trying to demand that she love him, stay with him, and do things his way, he began to warm to the possibility that he too could enjoy being playful. Then we explored her need to keep her options open by having one foot out the door. She acknowledged her fear of commitment and her idea of freedom as flight from the realities of everyday life. Then she was able to plant herself more firmly in the relationship. Of course, all this took time and willingness to see things from the other’s point of view as well as to challenge one’s own perspective.

Interestingly, once she was willing to feel more committed, he was able to support her freedom; and once he was able to support her freedom, she felt more committed. Rather than being polarised in positions of bad faith, they were able to enter into authentic relationship. They remembered that it was these very differences, her free spirit and his ability to be solidly involved, that had drawn them together in the first place. These initial invitations to growth, however, had become a source of conflict. Once each began to integrate both poles of their relationship and of human reality, freedom and commitment, they were able to develop a new and more authentic way of being themselves with each other. A particularly delightful outcome that surprised both was a renewal of sexual passion. Not surprising, perhaps, since erotic energy is often fuelled by playfulness and lack of predictability in a situation where basic commitment exists. Embracing the other person as a free subject, rather than a predictable object, may be fundamentally alluring and exciting.

Reed Lindberg, M.A., L.P.C., is managing director of the Boulder Psychotherapy Institute. He is co-author of a chapter on couples therapy from a Sartrean perspective in Existential Perspectives on Relationship Therapy (ed. Emmy van Deurzen and Susan Iacovou, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
Applied Existential Psychotherapy

September 2014

A two-day course with Betty Cannon, Ph.D.

Applied Existential Psychotherapy (AEP) is an approach developed by Dr Betty Cannon over the past 30 years at the Boulder Psychotherapy Institute (BPI) in Colorado. Grounded in the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, AEP interlaces existential insights with techniques drawn from Gestalt therapy and other experiential approaches. It works deeply with the body and process as well as verbal material and content. It is a dynamic here-and-now therapy that also takes into account how the past impacts the present. Dr Cannon is currently working on a new book on AEP: In the Spirit of Play: Applied Existential Psychotherapy.

Dr Cannon will provide an overview of the theoretical premises of AEP, and teach a specific set of techniques that can be used to work with clients on a variety of issues. AEP interventions can also be integrated with other approaches to allow for more immediacy in the therapeutic encounter. Demonstration videos and experiential exercises provide a clear sense of how the therapy operates in practice.

In this workshop, you will learn to attend to Here and Now issues in a way that produces experiential immediacy and authentic relationship. You will discover ways to deepen to emotional states and family of origin issues that move clients to profound change. And you will learn to help clients get out of their heads and into their bodies and hence to move from the 'spirit of seriousness' (Sartre) to the spirit of play (Cannon).

Find Reed Lindberg's article, 'Eeyore and Tinkerbell: An AEP Perspective on Couples Therapy' in this issue. ~ Videos of AEP, including demo sessions, are available for viewing online via the 'Videos' link in the top menu bar at www.boulderpsych.com.

‘Every once in a rare while a text comes along whose intellectual impact is such that it makes one want to shout: "Please, whatever you do, READ THIS BOOK!" Betty Cannon's Sartre and Psychoanalysis is such a book. . . . I cannot praise this book too highly. For anyone interested in existential analysis, and most especially anyone practising such, Cannon's text is required reading. Thankfully, it is also pleasurable and eloquent reading, admirable for its clarity, authority and lack of academic pretension. In other words: a text destined to become a classic in the field.’
- Ernesto Spinelli, Existential Analysis, July-Sept. 1992, no.3.

Contact Us - Email: BPI@indra.com - Web: www.BoulderPshych.com - Facebook: boulderpsychotherapyyinstutute

Dr Cannon is a member of the editorial boards of Existential Analysis, Sartre Studies International, and Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry. She is the author of numerous articles, chapters, and an internationally acclaimed book on existential therapy: Sartre and Psychoanalysis. She is a member of the planning committee for the World Congress for Existential Therapy to be held in London in May of 2015. She is emerita professor at the Colorado School of Mines, adjunct professor at Naropa University, and president of the Boulder Psychotherapy Institute. She was the executive editor and contributor to the entries on Existential Psychoanalysis for the Edinburgh International Encyclopaedia of Psychoanalysis. She contributed a chapter on AEP to Existential Therapy: Legacy, Vibrancy and Dialogue (ed. Laura Barnett and Greg Madison, Routledge, 2012). She is co-author with Reed Lindberg of a chapter on AEP Couples Therapy for Existential Perspectives on Relationship Therapy (ed. Emmy van Deurzen and Susan Iacovou, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Contact Our London Organizers: Susan Iacovou and Karen Weixel-Dixon to reserve a space:
AEP2014@gmail.com (10% discount for bookings received and paid for before 28 February 2014).
BY MARTIN MILTON

Καλημέρα Kalimera!
What a rare pleasure! In September I had a chance to combine some serious thinking, wonderful hospitality and stunning beauty by attending the combined conference of the Hellenic and Swedish Societies of Existential Psychology, held on the remote Island of Karpathos.

The conference was a chance to hear about work being done by a range of colleagues in Greece, Sweden, Australia, the UK and Turkey. Topics included lifespan development, authenticity, ‘Things’ and our relationship with them, The Poetic, Focusing, existentialism and Buddhism, psychoanalysis and existentialism (yes, Pandora’s box was opened again!!) and so many more.

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**Just the Basics: Existential Relationship Therapy**

Relationship counselling from an existential perspective makes perfect sense: we are fundamentally in relationship with others from the minute we are born. How we conduct ourselves within any of the given relationships, including both intimate and more public engagements, is a direct reflection of our world-view and our self-concept.

How does a practitioner proceed then? What is the format for the sessions, what are the ethical and contractual implications? What are the aims of this work, and what might be the expectations of the parties involved?

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**TWO REPORTS FROM THE GREEK – SWEDISH JOINT CONFERENCE ON ‘EXISTENCE AND PSYCHOTHERAPY’ SEPTEMBER 2013**
Qualified practitioners and training existential therapists alike all presented in a thought provoking manner and the two full days have left me with weeks of contemplation.

As well as a comprehensive range of topics, I was also very impressed by the fluency – both of conceptualization and expression – when colleagues were presenting in a second language. My own limits in my second (and intended) third languages helped me understand the deep reflection and communicative talent on show at this conference.

A conference obviously means meeting new colleagues, but as well as this it was also a chance for me to spend some quality time with, and listen to, colleagues from the British Society, i.e. Alison Strasser and Martin Adams – Alison being a colleague I trained with (a ‘little’ while ago) and Martin being a colleague I frequently see in the hallways of Regent’s University but seldom have the privilege of talking with for any period of time. Lunch times and dinner times became as interesting as the conference itself and I am now wishing that I could attend the module that Martin runs on our Doctorate rather than simply manage the programme!

During the conference I had the chance to present a workshop with Alison on ‘everydayness’ in practice, the joys and stresses of hearing of the everyday aspects of clients’ lives (the washing up, the weather, or the most recent storyline on EastEnders – the meaning of which can sometimes be obvious and sometimes far less so). We explored the ways in which people understand and engage with it so that we may find a way beyond such difficult emotions as boredom and explore the meaning that seems inevitably to be there.

My second presentation was an outline of the work I have recently undertaken with colleagues in the Society on existential perspectives to sexuality and the debates and controversies we are engaged in. Talking about this in a short time slot was a challenge (try covering Russia, Uganda and Zimbabwe, Equal Marriage, affirmative and non-affirmative possibilities of existential therapy, ontic and ontological dimensions, the relationship between the personal and the political, masculinity, femininity, Trans and more in 30 minutes!).

Talking about these issues in a foreign country to people from a variety of countries soon brought home the fact that, separate to language, contexts are both so very important and also so changeable. The conversations afterwards have almost left me wishing that I could recall the manuscript from the publishers to add in work from wider European perspectives. But I won’t.

A combination of preparation for the new term at Regents and still being so close to the event means that I cannot yet write an extensive report, this can only be a snapshot of the experience. I am still luxuriating in the experience and still making sense of the offerings given. It won’t be long though before I start following up the work of these two Societies and I look forward to discussions and future events that may occur.

Evαριστό
efaristo Colleagues
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TWO REPORTS FROM THE GREEK – SWEDISH JOINT CONFERENCE ON ‘EXISTENCE AND PSYCHOThERAPY’
CONTINUED

BY ALEX HARISIADES

On the 10th and 11th of September this year, the first joint Greek-Swedish Conference on Existential Psychotherapy took place on the Greek island of Karpathos. The conference was organized by the Hellenic Association for Existential Psychology ‘Gignesthai’ in association with the Swedish Association for Existential Psychology and its main theme was: ‘Existence and Psychotherapy – existential perspectives for an efficient therapeutic practice’. The idea for the conference came from a proposal by the chair of the Swedish Association, Dan Stwine. We saw it as a good opportunity for the two teams to get to know each other, to exchange ideas and engage in a productive dialogue on the topic of existential approaches to psychotherapy, overcoming the language barrier through the use of English.

Karpathos is the second largest of the Greek Dodecanese islands, in the southeastern Aegean Sea. It is not one of the best-known tourist destinations, but it has wonderful beaches and is rich in culture and traditions. It also maintains the atmosphere of a bygone era. Due to these characteristics we thought Karpathos was a very suitable destination for a small conference because it would provide the opportunity to combine an interesting trip with participation in an existential conference. In the process, we were pleasantly surprised that this combination attracted important colleagues not only from Greece and Sweden but also from other places in the world. We had the pleasure of having with us Martin Adams and Martin Milton from Great Britain, Alison Strasser from Australia and Ferhat Jak Işız from Turkey. As a result the conference acquired a more international character.

The Conference took place in a hotel hall with a great view of the sea. So, the sea and the surrounding landscape of the port of Karpathos became part of the Conference. This played an important role in the climate that prevailed among participants. There was a sense of informality and freedom. This in turn helped in the fruitful exchange of views and in the maintenance of a meaningful dialogue.

There was great variety in the topics that were presented and discussed during this conference. Some of the topics and concepts are listed here: The Issue of Authenticity; The Importance of Silence; Thrownness and the Will to Authenticity; The Poetic Element in Therapy; Human Sexuality, Human Development; What Works in Psychotherapy; The Dialogue Between Existential Therapy and Psychoanalysis; Existentialism in Buddhism and many others. In addition to the presentations there were also two very interesting workshops – one on everydayness in existential practice and the other on focusing and existential therapy.

For us, the ‘Hellenic Association for Existential Psychology’, this Conference was particularly important for many reasons. First and foremost it was the first conference co-organized in Greece. It was also a good opportunity to present some of the work related to existential psychotherapy that Gignesthai is engaged in. Our greatest joy was the opportunity given to some
of our students to present their work at the conference. Gignesthai has an active research team and the paper on authenticity that was presented at the conference was the result of this team’s effort.

We also had the opportunity to see in practice what was presented in the paper – Reminding People of What They Already Know - that practitioners from different countries can share views and ideas in a non-threatening and non-judgmental manner and thus serve as role models for the larger communities and countries to which they belong. Now more than ever the need for cooperation and mutual respect of differences is vital for European countries and the world as a whole.

The feedback that we received about the conference from all participants was very positive. There was also a strong desire to have a similar event in Karpathos or perhaps on a different Greek island in the near future. Although the challenge of organizing a conference is considerable, we are looking forward to the next time we will be able to meet with other colleagues from abroad, to share ideas and discussions on existential psychotherapy.

Contact: www.gignesthai.gr

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EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOTHERAPY
WITH A PERSON WHO LIVES WITH
A LEFT VENTRICULAR ASSIST
DEVICE AND AWAITS HEART
TRANSPLANTATION –

A CASE STUDY EXCERPT

BY DR CHRISTIAN SCHULTZ

One ought to hold on to one’s heart;
for if one lets it go, one soon loses control
of the head too.
Friedrich Nietzsche

Since the age of fifteen, I always had an
organ donor declaration in my wallet. But
I filled in that they can take whatever they
want except for my heart. I didn’t want to
be buried without my heart. And now this
won’t happen. My own heart, will one day
go, I don’t know where, to a special waste?
This was a problem for me in the beginning,
I have to say. (pause)

I need to think about my heart as a muscle.
With me as a human being, as a person, this
has nothing to do with.
Randi, session 115

Prolog

In the desert
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.
I said, ‘Is it good, friend?’
‘It is bitter — bitter,’ he answered,

‘But I like it
Because it is bitter,
And because it is my heart.’
(Stephen Crane, Complete Poems of
Stephen Crane)

‘Your heart beats calmly, I can hear it.’ Philipp
rests his head on my chest and looks me in the
eyes. Sunday morning has just begun and we
are still in bed. I had one of those nights. ‘Bad
dreams’ they say, I call it my ‘typical anxiety’.
I reach for the iPhone and check the time.
There is no reason why but it has become a
habit in my daily routines. We stay silent for
a while, I hug him and he listens to the beat
of my heart. The brightness of the awakening
day challenges my eyes and I dose off into
those midlands between wake and sleep. The naked creature looks
at me from a distance holding its half eaten heart in its hand. It
looks ugly and interesting at the same time. I want to pity it but
what I feel is that I’m drawn to it. I want to taste his heart.

I awake to the smell of coffee and croissant, Philipp stands at
the kitchenette, holding a cup of coffee in his hands, reading in
a random magazine, naked and fully immersed in his own world.
I’m still a little anxious and happy not to be alone. I look at him
with wonder and feel alive.

Initial engagement

It was the Medical Chief of the surgical critical care unit who
gave us a call and said: ‘We need you guys, we don’t know how
EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOTHERAPY WITH A PERSON WHO LIVES WITH A LEFT VENTRICULAR ASSIST DEVICE AND AWAITS HEART TRANSPLANTATION – A CASE STUDY EXCERPT

CONTINUED

to deal with this’. A young woman of 35 years, her name was Randi, I learned later, had been admitted to the emergency department the night before. She had suffered a near fatal heart attack with the need for emergency surgery as her heart muscle had been damaged to such an extent that survival was only possible through the use of extra-corporeal machine oxygenation (an apparatus that is used in heart surgery and takes over the role of oxygenation of the blood for a limit period of time). A heart-transplant was needed but given the scarcity of available hearts it was highly unlikely that a donor would be found within any meaningful time. Consequently, the thoracic surgeons implanted a new device into the left chamber of Randi’s heart which served as a mechanical circulatory support (Bruce et al., 2013). Such devices are called ventricular assist devices (VADs) and it has become a reality that an increasing number of patients are now supported with VADs either as an acute ‘bridge to recovery’, or for several years as ‘destination therapy’ for patients not eligible for heart transplantation, and as ‘bridge to transplant’ in patients like Randi (Potapov et al., 2011).

The woman I was about to meet had been transferred from the operation theatre to the critical care unit and the critical care team intended to wake her up and deliver the ‘difficult news’ (Alexander et al., 2006). However, a dramatic parallel incident complicated the picture: whilst her parents had hastily driven down from Hamburg to Dusseldorf (a five hour ride in good traffic) after being informed as her emergency contacts, her father had experienced a fatal heart attack while entering his daughter’s apartment. This overlap of similar incidents left his wife – Randi’s mother – in a desperate situation; whilst in deep concern about her younger child, her ex-husband who she was on good terms with, died and left her in an almost absurd and incomprehensible situation. The critical care team felt that they didn’t know how to proceed, how to support and counsel the mother and widow, let alone what to tell the awakening patient.

When entering the critical care unit, my heart was beating faster than normal. I felt nervous and immediately picked up a particular sense of alertness and tension when seeing the staff nurses who I was familiar with. Anxiety was what I saw in their faces and even the Medical Chief, who I sat down with for a briefing, was unusually uneasy. An aura of trauma surrounded me. I felt a pressure on me, clearly not-knowing at this point what to do; there was no recipe for such circumstances. Staying-with and watching my own boundaries, not getting swept away like everyone else was my goal. This intellectualisation was easier said than done but it helped me to remind myself of my role and my competence, my perceived ability to give words and names to these phenomena which caused so much uproar in my fellow colleagues. It was a situation of not-knowing, of mystery and anxiety. What was I, a young, potential brother, husband or son, symbolically speaking, going to do and say in this situation?

The term ‘situation’ has been used in philosophy of existence and has influenced 20th-century philosophy to a large degree. It has been used by Karl Jaspers to expand on his concept of ‘limit-situation’, which he distinguishes from temporary situations, by saying that ‘human beings never can leave the limit-situations, in contrast to temporary situations. Limit-situation is therefore constitutive for the human being. Even if one can leave every temporary situation, one can never leave one’s ‘situatedness’, thus situatedness as such can be understood as a constitutive limit-situation. Bornemark (2006) traces this thinking back to Kierkegaard and continues to compare Jasper with Heidegger, emphasizing how Heidegger developed the concept of the facticity of the situation further into the concept of determined openness, of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1986). For all three philosophers, death is the ultimate limit-situation, the utmost possibility of Dasein. In my situation this meant: I could have decided to leave the critical care unit, to escape from this situation-of-the-other, namely existence at the verge to non-existence, mortality and death. However, even with such a temporary flight would I not have been able to avoid the situation-of-the-other at all times and forever, nor run away from my own death awareness for good.

Another limit-situation of human existence described by Jaspers has particular relevance to the situation in focus here, and this is unavoidable suffering. ‘Suffering is often understood as something that can be avoided through, for example, the development of medicine and science’ (Bornemark, 2006). The context I found myself in was a lived demonstration of how little medicine and science had to offer to alleviate suffering in this situation. However, in dealing with suffering it is important that ‘I do not try to blame it or project it on someone else; instead I realize that there is no such thing as a solution that is perfect in every respect’ (Bornemark, 2006). Again, I had the choice to escape from that temporary situation or to get in contact with that suffering, to approach it with the openness and determination that in the philosophical writing had been used to describe the existential meaning of suffering, embracing the imperfection of my actions and the not-knowing. I had to make a choice. This facticity of the situation reminded me of the fundamental freedom of being, as the future was, indeed, uncertain and would be so in every given situation. In reflecting my situatedness in the critical care unit, I now much better understand what Jaspers meant when he spoke of human beings as being understood historically through their choices and actions, while my individual future, as Jaspers had helped me to understand, remained existentially uncertain in that moment and presence.

When I entered the box-like compartment, I first met Randi and her mother. I felt as if I was entering a sacred place. The silence of human voice produced by the beeping machines surrounding Randi was stunning. Her mother sat next to her bed and looked surprisingly stable on first glance. She looked at me and I awaited her eye contact before approaching the bed. I became acutely aware that there was a thin line between becoming a supportive pilar in this situation and being perceived as an unwanted intruder. I asked the patient’s mother for permission to come closer, asked for her permission to touch her daughter and asked her for her daughter’s name. It was in this moment that I...
first made contact with this other person who had gone through traumatic experience and for whom even more crisis was looming in the hours to come.

In a chat conversation via Facebook that took place three years after this first encounter, Randi records the following memory about this time (chat protocol)¹:

The last thing I remember about that day is how I am lying in the ambulance, the doors open and one of the paramedics says: ‘Alright then, now we are at the university hospital’. The next thing I know are horrible nightmares, dreams, which I always had the intention to write down, but every time I try to do so, the memories become so intense and bad that I stop it right away. Then I wake up, at my bedside sits my mother, and a doctor, and you are there too. And then they (in German: “man”) tell me – please apologize my wording, those were my thoughts – ‘Mrs. B. you had a severe heart attack, your heart is damaged to the point where you need a new one. My first thought was: ‘Who are they talking about? Do they want to fuck around with me?’ Then follows the worst moment in my life – my mum tells me ‘Daddy is dead.’ A moment that I will NEVER forget. And the gratitude I felt for not having to be alone in this moment. And you were there too. In this moment, however, I wasn’t entirely sure what your function and role was in the hospital and what you will mean to me, later. After that, there was an overwhelming wish to sleep and wake up and realise that all of this was nothing but a bad dream – unfortunately, that was not the case. In between, I also felt this anger; this enormous frustration about all those who had told me about my father’s death, the very person who I would have needed the most next to my mum. And, of course, this whole anger with my dad, who was gone and had left me ‘behind’.

A number of very important existential themes are explicitly or implicitly addressed in this authentic client voice. These are further explored in a more detailed analysis not published, here. However, I would like to make short reference to the central aspect of trauma in this context. The first part of this chat protocol can be largely understood as a vivid description of what is clinically termed trauma and in its chronic residue categorically described as post-traumatic stress disorder (Davydow et al., 2008, Bienvenu et al., 2013, Bienvenu and Neufeld, 2011). In particular, the disturbing, stressful memories that Randi cannot work through, even three years after the primary incident, have been described by many authors before and have been recorded in the accounts of a considerable number of critical care survivors (Kiekkas et al., 2010, Barnett, 2009). The term trauma is not an existential one, though, but according to Stolorow, emotional trauma ‘can produce an affective state whose features bare close resemblance to the central elements of Heidegger’s description of anxiety’ (Stolorow, 2011). Robert Frie in his essay ‘On the nature and meaning of human finitude’ (Frie, 2013) expands on Stolorow’s argument and quotes from *Being and Time* to make the comparison more explicit:

> ‘[T]he state-of-mind which can hold open the utter and constant threat to it-self arising from Dasein’s ownmost individualized Being, is anxiety. In this state-of-mind, Dasein finds itself fact to fact with the ‘nothing’ of the possible impossibility of its existence...Being-towards-death is essentially anxiety. The ‘nothing’ with which anxiety brings us face to face, unveils the nullity by which Dasein, in its very basis, is defined.’ (Heidegger, 1986, Frie, 2013)

The ‘bringing face to face’ Heidegger speaks of needs to be understood in the most radical sense in this context: because it is the very nature of the brutal force and the loss of control experienced by the traumatized individual that ‘exposes what had been heretofore concealed’ and thereby leads to overwhelming existential anxiety (Stolorow, 2011). In the consequence of this existential perspective, Stolorow parts from Heidegger who views the state of authentic Being-towards-death as a non-relational possibility (something that is in each case uniquely one’s own). According to Stolorow emotional trauma needs to be borne in the relational contexts of attunement and understanding: ‘Although the possibility of emotional trauma is always present, so too is the possibility of forming bonds of deep emotional attunement within which devastating emotional pain can be held, rendered more tolerable and hopefully, eventually integrated’ (Stolorow, 2011). This is how I understand the second part of Randi’s comment when she speaks about the ‘gratitude for [...] not having to be alone’. Frie argues that Stolorow’s position is an extension rather than an alternative view to Heidegger’s philosophy. My own take on this is that I am hesitant to fully accept Stolorow’s perspective, because in my view great caution needs to be exerted not to mistake existential philosophical thinking for a form of clinical psychology. Speaking from the perspective of a palliative care physician, it is the aporia of death (Derrida, 1993), the impossibility of communicating death, which makes it the ‘utmost possibility of Dasein’ (Heidegger, 1989/1999). Being capable of ‘forming bonds of deep emotional attunement’ implies that there still is a possibility of interpersonal relationship, but my perspective is that this is not so in death. From my understanding it follows that integrating trauma has very much to do with death, maybe to the extent of being the closest human experience to what death is, however, it is an approximation of it exactly because the relational context is not ultimately annihilated. From my point of view, Heidegger has been very much aware of the need for this distinction and has cautioned interpreters of his *Philosophy of Existence* to not mistake it as a psychology or ‘-ism’ in terms of a systematic teaching (Bornemark, 2006). Says Heidegger:

> ‘When thinking here is not done ‘fundamental-ontologically’ with the intention of grounding the truth of being, the worst and most absurd misinterpretations creep in and spread – and, naturally a ‘philosophy of death’ is made up.’ (Heidegger, 1989/1999)

In an attempt to refer what I have expressed above back to the encounter between my client and me, the relational and inter-subjective aspect of dealing with existential anxiety formed the basis for our mutual journey over the following thirty months. Randi was not dead, she was still alive, although she depended on a mechanical device connected to her heart and existed in a state of profound anxiety. And I was anxious too. As Cooper and Adams state ‘by acknowledging our anxiety in the face of radical non-being, we are alerted to the fact that existence really matters to us: that our basic relationship to the world is one of care. Again, then, we are motivated to grasp hold of our lives, and to make the most of the time that we do have’ (Cooper and Adams, 2005).
Against this background, the still existing future possibilities were the fundamental on which we began to build our therapeutic relationship in search of meaning, understanding and integration of these dramatic events.

Therapeutic process

Randi recovered well and she was soon discharged from the critical care unit to a regular inpatient unit. I continued my daily visits and soon we agreed on meeting every other day. These bedside meetings were mostly narrative-oriented (Schütz, 1972) and helped me to better understand Randi’s current life situation and develop an understanding of her biographical history. At this time, the traumatic events and ‘the machine’ were bracketed from most of our conversations.

The main therapeutic process between Randi and me took just over two years after Randi had returned from her successful rehabilitation. Randi lived with her VAD as a ‘bridge to transplant’, meaning that she was listed for a heart transplant (Bruce et al., 2013). She kept a beeper with her so that the transplant team could reach her 24/7, and she needed to stay within a one hour radius of the university hospital at all times. We met once a week on a regular schedule. As we both did not know for how long our mutual journey would last, we agreed on a more supportive set of goals in the beginning (getting used to living with a life support device, dealing with everyday demands and regulations with the constraints of the VAD protocol, etc.) and slowly shifted into a more existential exploration of her situation over the course of time.

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The detailed existential analysis of this therapeutic encounter will be published elsewhere and is available upon request by contacting the author.

Epilogue

I climb the stairs and the closer I get, the more I can feel a change. I have goose bumps. My numerous unfinished tasks for the day step into the background and it feels as if an opening like a clearance inside of me, deep inside, opens up. ‘Hey there, Dr Schulz from the psychosomatic team. What room did you say is she in?’ ‘Room 309’, the nurse looks at me and smiles, then she turns away and continues her day.

The door. No time to wait. While my body enters the room my emotions try to squeeze through the doorframe.

The first things I see are her eyes. Big, round eyes and a sudden smile of surprise. I find a chair next to Randi’s bed, sit down and can’t speak. Randi keeps looking at me, gentle, welcoming, with the mark of major surgery. There is no battery pack, no cables, no signs of foreign material.

The clearing has now become a coat, wrapped around me and with a sudden sigh of relief and relaxation I touch her arm and begin to cry. I am small now. And while Randi echoes my tears she keeps looking at me in silence.

I had given up on that hope, prepared myself for loss and what I found was human connection.

Three weeks later, I began my new job in a locked unit of an acute psychiatric hospital as part of my training rotations. Randi, too, began a new life and our therapy was over.

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Notes

1 The text used for Prolog and Epilog is an excerpt from my reflective diary, which I kept during the time of this therapeutic encounter albeit independent of the therapeutic work with this particular client.
2 It would be an intellectual insult and untruthfulness to the reader to imply that I stood on the critical care unit floor and contemplated about Jasper’s philosophical writing, as much as I wished it had been the case. However, referring to and reading existential writing as argued above largely facilitated my processing of this event and situation.
3 All quotations have been translated from German. Where possible, grammar and choice of wording was kept as close to the original as possible, including ‘mistakes’.

References


In the past 10 years, many of my friends in the existential circle have asked me: ‘What is meaning therapy? How is it different from existential therapy?’ I believe that part of the reason for this persistent questioning is that, in their minds, existential therapy is about the meaning of human existence. Therefore, why the need for meaning therapy? After all, Deurzen and Adams (2011) have clearly stated that the motivation for meaning and purpose is central to existential therapy.

This article will serve as a brief introduction to meaning therapy (MT) and give readers some ideas about the scope and complexity of this new approach to existential therapy. On the one hand, MT still maintains all the traditional existential themes of empowering clients to live more authentic and vital lives in spite of the bleak human condition; on the other hand, MT is evidence-based, positive, integrative, cross-cultural, spiritual, and relational. These characteristics will hopefully make existential therapy more attractive and relevant to the younger generations of therapists and clients, who favour a more scientific and less philosophical approach to psychotherapy.

**It is evidence-based**

At a time when society demands evidence-based therapy, one of the advantages of MT is that it can incorporate the many measurements and interventions based on the burgeoning research on the positive psychology of meaning (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2012; Wong, 2012a, in press). In MT, our understanding of the phenomenological-hermeneutic data is enhanced by quantitative data based on valid and reliable psychological measurements. For example, we can use Wong’s Personal Meaning Profile (PMP; Wong, 1998a) to help identify what really matters to the client.

Similarly, the repertoire of our intervention tools can be increased by including evidence-based activities. Mindfulness-based stress reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 2005) and writing about one’s life (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006) are examples of evidence-based positive interventions. The main intervention strategies for meaning therapy are PURE (which stands for purpose, understanding, responsibility, and enjoyment) and ABCDE (which stands for acceptance, belief, commitment, discovery, and evaluation). Together, these two strategies can be used seamlessly to promote healing and flourishing (Wong, 2012b,c).

While we value evidence-based measurements and interventions to enhance meaningfulness and well-being, we are fully aware that science has its limitations. Those who try to explain the meaning of life and death purely in scientific parlance simply succeed in reducing the richness and mystery of human existence to barren physical terms. In meaning therapy, we make good use of both the philosophical literature and scientific studies of meaning and well-being.

**It is positive**

Traditional approaches to existential therapy focus on how to relate to existential anxiety with freedom and responsibility; its starting point is meaninglessness and groundlessness. In contrast, MT emphasizes meaning-seeking as the primary human motivation and the most effective way to confront and transcend existential anxieties. In other words, my starting point is affirmation of meaning and value in life (Frankl, 1985; Wong, 2005).

I follow Viktor Frankl in making this important strategic switch in order to serve the dual purpose of therapy and counselling: the amelioration of suffering and symptoms and the enhancement of well-being and human functioning. My emphasis on the human quest for meaning has another advantage. It provides a distinct vision about what constitutes the good life. Different from all those who emphasize hedonic happiness and strengths-based personal success, I have stressed meaning-based eudaimonic happiness and a much broader vision of harmony, peace, and justice, in the global village.
A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MEANING-CENTERED EXISTENTIAL THERAPY
CONTINUED

It is integrative
Integrative is probably the single defining attribute of MT, which provides not only a bridge between therapy and meaning research, but also a conceptual framework to organically incorporate the various therapeutic modalities that service the different aspects of the person, such as the unconscious self, the narrative self, etc. The genius of Viktor Frankl (1985) was that he practiced mindfulness before mindfulness became fashionable. He taught us to observe the present moment reflectively in order to create some space between the situation and our habitual way of reacting.

The different selves in this figure represent different dimensions of the complex, evolving meaning system, which represents our self-concept. For example, the executive self is essentially the rational and intelligent self that makes most of the major decisions in life. It is the rational self that appraises a situation based on the raw data from the experiencing self and decides whether it is harmful or beneficial. The experiencing self refers to our moment to moment lived experience. The narrative self refers to the story we live by. The unconscious self provides all kinds of material for MT, such as dreams and transference, the meaning of which cannot be understood without contribution from psychoanalysis. The habitual self reflects all the habitual patterns and reflex-like responses that we have acquired through past conditioning and present reinforcement contingencies. Without the observing self, our perception of actual experiences can be distorted by our over-identification with the narrative, habitual, or unconscious selves.

In the practice of mindful awareness, the observing self not only directly and non-judgementally observes our moment to moment lived experience, but also observes ourselves reflectively – our life as a whole and our Being in the world. Given our vast mental capacity, we can both pay attention to the immediate present and at the same time reflect on the big picture from the vantage point of our spiritual self. We are able to minimise the interference from our totalitarian ego and biases, only when we see things as they are unfolding, and when we decide on our responses based on reflecting on our spiritual values. In this double-vision strategy, we integrate both the minute details of the present moment and the much larger spiritual considerations of our decisions.

The observing self challenges Cartesian dualism; you can observe your own thoughts, feelings, and life experiences as a non-judging observer, without over-identifying with your own biases. Mindful awareness includes observing what is happening both inside and outside you. It is through mindful awareness of your inner world of meaning and feelings that you are able to bypass the obstacles to true self-knowledge and self-understanding; this provides the foundation for MT. The capacity for self-reflection or self-awareness is the most precious endowment; it gives us the ultimate freedom to transcend all deterministic forces, including a poor self-concept from an invalidating past, and to choose to become our best self.

The genius of Viktor Frankl (1985) was that he practiced mindfulness before mindfulness became fashionable. He taught us to observe the present moment reflectively in order to create some space between the situation and our habitual way of reacting.

When we do this, we are able to listen to our inner voice of conscience and spiritual values rather than follow our instincts, unconscious impulses and old habits automatically.

One is able to make good choices only when one’s decisions are guided by the observing self and the spiritual self, rather than by the habitual, unconscious, and narrative selves. The multiple selves all function within the physical self because all human experiences, such as feelings, thoughts, and self-reflections, are embodied experiences.

It is spiritual
I have already alluded to the central role of the spiritual self. Frankl referred to logotherapy as spiritual therapy, because the will to meaning (the motivation to pursue self-transcendence) is situated in the spiritual dimension, which is the very core of the human personality. He further characterises human existence in terms of spirituality, freedom, and responsibility. Likewise, MT emphasizes that the essence of being fully human is to devote one’s life to pursuing self-transcendence, which is to serve a higher purpose for the common good (Wong, in press). Similarly, Deurzen and Adams (2011) state, ‘In the sense that life is about meaning creating, the spiritual dimension is the central axis of existential therapy’ (p. 20).

It is cross-cultural
To the extent that meaning is both individually and socially constructed, one’s meaning systems are inevitably shaped by one’s historical and sociocultural background. Culture has a profound and pervasive influence on people’s behaviours and attitudes. We cannot understand clients’ behaviours and attitudes apart from their meaning systems and cultural backgrounds (Arthur & Pedersersen, 2008). We cannot fully understand the meaning of behaviour unless it is viewed at all levels of the ecological context. An ecological approach enables us to understand the existential-
In a multicultural society, personal meaning systems necessarily evolve through the long struggle of navigating the cross-currents of different cultures. Therefore, sensitivity, understanding, and knowledge of such struggles are essential to MT. MT employs macrocounseling skills because behaviour is always situated in an ecological context, which includes macrosystems such as culture, race, gender, history, and the human condition.

**It is relational**

Another crucial element of MT is the centrality of relationships to healing, meaning, and well-being (Wong & Wong, 2013). This basic tenet is based on the need to belong, which is a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and is the key to effective therapy (Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubble, 2009; Norcross, 2002).

In MT, the relationship goes beyond mere therapeutic alliance; it is an authentic encounter that reaches the deepest level of common humanity between two individuals. Therapeutic change necessarily involves some form of exchange of life, resulting in reciprocal change in both parties in the counseling setting. The therapist is the most important instrument in the entire therapeutic process. In addition to addressing interpersonal issues experienced by clients (Weissman, Markowitz, & Klerman, 2000) and capitalizing on the here-and-now interactions as the basis for diagnosis and therapy (Yalom, 1980), MT seeks to enhance clients’ positive meanings through fostering positive client-therapist relationships.

**Conclusion**

In this brief introduction, I have demonstrated that MT is a very flexible, dynamic, and practical way of doing existential therapy that makes effective use of multiple selves. This integrative approach makes sense in today’s global village, because no psychotherapy can be applied as one-size-fits-all. As an integrative approach, meaning therapy can be effectively applied to almost every single case, by virtue of its flexibility and multimodality.

Over the past thirty years, I have written extensively on how I integrate logotherapy with various modalities of psychotherapy, such as CBT, narrative therapy, mindfulness, and positive psychotherapy (e.g., Wong, 1997; 2006; 2008a; 2012b,c). I have devoted more than three decades to doing meaning research (Wong & Weiner, 1981; Wong & Fry, 1998; Wong, 2012a) and meaning-centered counselling and therapy (Wong, 1997, 1998b, 1999, 2012b; Wong & Wong, 2013). Those who are interested in learning more can look up my earlier publications.

In conclusion, MT can be summarized by its motto: ‘Meaning is all we have, relationship is all we need’. Although MT advocates the person-centered and holistic approach of working with all aspects of the person, it emphasises the meaning dimension. The advantage of this approach is that it makes full use of the vast literature on meaning research and helps move existential therapy to the mainstream of evidence-based psychotherapy.

**References**


In its previous edition, the *Hermeneutic Circular* published an article by Susan Iacovou. She described a presentation by Mick Cooper at the recent SEA AGM, in which he reviewed scientific research on existential therapies. Susan Iacovou mentioned that Mick could not provide her with copies of his presentation for publication, because this review is still work in progress by Meghan Craig, Mick and myself. It is unfortunate that, even before we had been able to complete and formally publish our study, this summary was already printed, and several contributors to the *Hermeneutic Circular* had already written critical reactions.

The editor has asked me to respond to these commentaries. In this article, I will not discuss the content of our work, because I believe that debating work in progress is not useful. However, I will reflect on the eagerness of these authors to respond so quickly to our review of quantitative research in our field. Of course, I understand their sceptical attitude towards quantitative research methods; I also feel tensions between hard science and existential therapies. However, it fascinates me why some existential therapists respond in such a strongly critical or even rejecting way, without knowing the details. It also reminds me of similar negative reactions at previous SEA events.

I will discuss four arguments, why I think that a too quick, closed and critical response to quantitative research is antagonistic to the fundamental assumptions of existential therapy. My intention is to contribute towards an open debate in which we can listen and collaborate with each other, while critically reflecting on our own assumptions.

1. In my opinion, the basic attitudes of existential therapy include being open, listening and genuinely relating to the other. We should bracket our own assumptions and antipathies, listen, relate and reflect before we respond. When we feel intuitively that someone’s theory is inaccurate, we need first to fundamentally understand their theory and become their ‘best student’, and only in a second stage would we criticise the other person with strong arguments from within their own theory. Of course, when we feel that a large injustice is done, such as in Nazi Germany, we may not have the time to relate and listen first, and we need to act immediately. However, without relating and understanding first, the other can simply disregard our criticism as ‘a lack of knowledge’ or ‘simple conservatism’. The only effect will be polarisation. I am afraid that when we do not take the time for an in-depth discussion, but write in invalidating ways like ‘we were listening to a presentation about nothingness’ (Paola Pomponi), a rift will occur in the existential therapeutic community, between those embracing modern research methods and practitioners adamant in their rejection. Unfortunately, I believe that many academics already perform research on existential themes without any connection to practitioners. This is a big loss for our community, as I believe that both our clinical practices and scientific research could grow tremendously when they inspire each other.

2. One of the authors suggested that quantitative research methods do not do justice to the client. I agree: that a number cannot summarize the totality of the client’s lived experience. For instance,
what does a score of 20 on the ‘Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale’ tell us? It only describes which answers the client gave to a selection of questions, and hopefully these answers relate to some extent to his perception of his current psychological hardships. It does not show all his felt relationships with his surrounding world. Thus, quantitative research is by definition reductionist. But is the alternative, an holistic account of therapy and research, feasible in reality?

I think that all scientific research methods are limited, be it quantitative or qualitative. Absolute truth cannot be reached. Our therapeutic practices are like a diamond with many facets, and shining a light from only one research direction will only reflect one facet of it. One light alone cannot do full justice to the diamond. We need to combine the different lights of different research methods if we want to see more facets of the diamond.

Why do we want to do research at all? Research is a way of validating our practices, and validation is an ethical necessity: if we accept our accountability towards the patient, the NHS, health insurance companies, and society in general. We need to reflect on our work and to improve it where possible, so that we can provide the best help possible to our clients.

How do we usually validate our work? And how do we validate the way that we validate our practices? Four examples.

A. I have heard existential therapists say that we can only understand our client’s lived experience at the depth of our therapeutic relationship, that is, via our felt-therapeutic connection with the client. I totally agree, but this relational truth is also limited. I am an ontologically distinct person from the client, and therefore I will never really understand them completely. I do not believe in holistic omnipotence.

B. Other therapists say that the client’s positive evaluation of the therapy is sufficient validation. I doubt that we should always trust our client’s words. There is the risk of wishful thinking, pleasing the therapist, false or unhealthy optimism.

C. One therapist told me that he is totally convinced that he provides high quality therapy, because he has received a good therapy training, and his work is strongly grounded in philosophy. I believe that good education and a well-defined philosophy are crucial to any valid therapy, but it does not guarantee good outcomes.

D. Other existential therapists praise qualitative methods, such as ‘Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis’, or depth interviews. From experience, I know that qualitative studies can yield very rich results. However, qualitative research can also be very vulnerable to the subjective biases of the interviewer and the interpreter of the study results. It is also difficult to draw conclusions from the experience of a limited number of clients, and to use these case studies to validate and improve all our practices with many thousands of clients.

Quantitative research is another way to validate our practices. It fosters a relatively objective validation, and its results are easily generalized. It owes these attributes to the standardisation of its methods, and the use of experimental settings. Standardisation and experimenting help to control subjective and random factors, such as the unique characteristics of an individual therapist. Controlling such factors help to identify in general what works with whom and why. This does not mean that subjective and random factors do not matter: on the contrary. I suspect that existential therapy is – like any other therapy – effective thanks to such relational and personal variables. But by standardising such variables one after another, we can draw specific conclusions and say which precise factors are contributing the most to the efficacy of therapies, and which factors are ineffective or even harmful to the client. Of course, the disadvantage of the quantitative approach is its relative lack of depth and subjectivity, as the contributors have argued in the previous edition of this journal.

Thus, all research approaches are limited. I believe that the only way to validate and ethically justify our practices is by casting different lights from different angles of scientific research at the same time. We need to combine philosophical, qualitative and quantitative methods. My work as an existential therapist would not feel ethically just to me if I only used one type of scientific research. Mixed-method research provides the best validation of what we do; without such research, giving therapy is unethical.

3. Is doing quantitative research ‘another fashion which will come and go’, like Tamara Sears suggested? Of course, in our society we love numbers and statistics, and without it any doctor or therapist is regarded as an imposter, offering invalid services. However, it is more than a short-lasting impulse, as the experimental paradigm began in the 17th century, and the first quantitative measurements in psychology were performed by Wundt in his laboratory in the 19th century. More generally, this technical approach seems characteristic of modern time. The existential philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote, for instance, that truth is revealed in a different dominant light in each era, and in our time this seems to be a mechanical-technical light (‘Die Frage nach der Technik’, 1917). This implies that all products of our society, including our therapeutic practices, are scrutinised in this light.

We cannot totally avoid taking part in the dominant quantitative discourse of our society. We are no Superhumans (‘Ubermensch’) who can transcend their context. Being is by definition being-in-the-world (Heidegger, Being and Time, 1927). This includes being part of a society that is demanding hard science. We are even evolutionarily driven to follow this discourse, because I assume that like any other beings in the animal realm, existential therapists have an evolutionary drive to survive. What do we need for our survival in the world anno 2013? Research evidence. Speaking ‘NICE’. Convincing health insurance companies to pay for our sessions. No survival without money – no money without scientific evidence – no recognition of our evidence if we do not use quantitative methods? To survive, we need quantitative research, at least as ‘a necessary evil’. Unfortunately, life always includes a bit of evil. Trying to be totally truthful to ourselves is an admirable vice, such as someone defending his deeply rooted antipathy towards quantitative research, but his survival may not benefit from this. Because it is unlikely that we will be able to create an existential-therapeutic heaven on earth, where either our philosophical and qualitative research is eulogized, or where research is not needed at all to validate our practices. We need to embrace the fact that we are-in-the-world, even if this is a quantitative world. Hiding ourselves in our impregnable existential-therapeutic fortresses may only lead to more suffering and dissociation from the world around us.

4. The authors described Mick’s presentation in the previous Hermeneutic Circular as: ‘fashion victim’, ‘presentation about nothingness’, ‘there is no point in generalising’, ‘research inhibits...
me’, ‘little time for the art of therapy’ and ‘therapy as a machine’. To me, the hard tone of their words sounded as if they were defending something that is very valuable to them. It is wonderful to see their passion and openness, but it also felt to me as if this defence mechanism closed them to an open exploration of new research methods. Probably I am incorrect about this: I don’t know what it precisely is that they want to protect. Is it a mere lack of understanding? Or do they want to safeguard their habitual ways of practicing and doing research? Or do they simply want to practice their therapy and not be bothered by any research and any validation at all? Are they afraid of an in-depth discussion of their usual ways of practicing and validating, because they fear that this discussion may urge them to change? Do they fear change? I don’t know.

I only know that I experienced their tone as creating a relational distance to researchers like me who like to integrate multiple research methods. Because I want to validate my therapeutic practices as well as possible, and I believe that this is the best way to validate them. In reaction to their tone, I also probably responded in a defensive way in this article. That is a pity, because I believe that we can learn much from each other, especially when we differ in opinion. I learn the most from my opponents, not from my friends. Let us embrace our differences, anxieties and uncertainties, and meet each other genuinely in an open debate about how to validate our work as existential therapists. I am convinced that this is the only way we can provide the best therapy to our clients.

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HI RESEARCH!
N.I.C.E TO SEE YOU AGAIN!
WANT TO GO FOR A DRINK?

BY DANIEL C. SOUSA

R (Research): *I thought we didn’t have anything more to say to each other...*

D (Daniel): *Why are you saying that? We can always try to talk, to dialogue, share some ideas.*

R: *Have you forgotten about the things you said? There are so many things about me that didn’t make sense to you.*

D: *And back then, do you remember that we spoke about your other dimensions, your beliefs? How you were so closed.*

I was not present at the SEA AGM in July this year.

I write this little article after a friendly invitation to participate in a fruitful dialogue on research in existential psychotherapy. Despite having read the latest edition of the *Hermeneutic Circular*, I do not have the proper context for understanding the dialogue about research within the SEA. I’m a friend of Mick Cooper and other colleagues in the SEA. I don’t pretend to tell people what they should or should not do. It doesn’t make sense to me to do it, either as a person or as a psychotherapist. I just want to share my perspective, only one among many others, but I want to share it freely without being concerned about whom I please or don’t please. I saw things written in the last *Circular* with which I disagree, in content and form. I will not focus on them, instead I would like to propose some aspects that may be important to consider if we address the question of research on existential psychotherapy.

R: *I remember you being closed on your assumptions.*

D: *But you also told me there was only one way of doing things. Do you remember that too?*

R: *Do you see how our dialogue is difficult!*

D: *Listen, none of us is owner of the reason or of the truth, let us go, let’s have a drink together...*

I’ve been trying to develop some research in existential psychotherapy together with colleagues and students. However, I haven’t been able to do it as often as I’d like. We do not do research in order to have our pictures posted in public spaces, which would be a threat to the environment. But, I must say, I like to do research in psychotherapy and would enjoy deepening my knowledge of this activity. My creativity is limited, thus I will repeat some ideas I have already outlined a few years ago at a SEA meeting (at which I argued the importance of doing research on existential psychotherapy). But first, I would like to mention...
what is the main motivation, what most attracts me to research: curiosity. Curiosity is an extraordinary human characteristic that children display with contagious intensity, but that we as adults seem to lose in the depth of our memories. It makes no difference to me if we call it research, investigation, or anything else. In my opinion, the quest for research is like a child’s curiosity: to know more or to be in a constant expectation of what will happen next. Einstein said it best: ‘imagination is more important than knowledge’.

In my opinion, there are some good reasons to get involved in research on existential psychotherapy:

Epistemological: No area of knowledge, including psychotherapy, can develop if it doesn’t maintain an endless interrogation of its own knowledge and its own assumptions. To stick closely to the same epistemological beliefs is synonymous with leading an area of knowledge to a dead end. Research is only a means, among others, by which it is possible to question what we know (or we think we know) as psychotherapists. The existential-phenomenological tradition left us several legacies. One of them was that capacity to make questions about the way we produce knowledge – not only about other forms of thought, but also about our own way to produce knowledge, about our assumptions. To do research is in itself an epistemological activity. How do we produce valid knowledge? The existential-phenomenological tradition was always involved in answering this question. Not always with consensual answers, but always with participative answers. It doesn’t make sense not to take advantage of this legacy and bring it to the psychotherapeutic world. For example, one of the big controversies in psychotherapy research is the use, explicit and implicit, of the medical model, supposedly, as the gold standard of doing research. However, we know how that can be a fallacy, and we know how the existential phenomenological tradition can provide very important input on issues like this one.

D: Well…its true that you often get on my nerves!
R: Maybe because you were so caught up in your own philosophies ...were you truly willing to question yourself?
D: Look who’s talking! Did you know I felt you excessively controlled our relationship?
R: Well, sometimes you have to have different perspectives on the same phenomenon, and all of them make a contribution on their own....
D: Sometimes you seem so cold hearted.
R: Sometimes you seem so deeply romantic.

Politics: Since I do not agree with many policies applied to psychotherapy in several countries of the western world, I am keen to contribute, also, by doing research. Whether the policies are considered NICE or UGLY, I think by being involved in research we can have a more active voice in changing policies and stand in defence of what we understand to be best suited for people who wish to use the psychotherapeutic services. Once again, research is not the solution to the problems that, in my opinion, psychotherapy faces in the present and that will worsen in the future. Nonetheless, it is one way, amongst others, to try to change something from within. This is a crucial point to be alert and participative about. Psychotherapy, like any other human activity, suffers pressure from economic constraints and different views on the definition of economic policies. When we actively participate, we may show how negative the effects of such economic policies are, or at least we have a better chance to do so. To have knowledge about the roots of the arguments we wish to fight is just a way to face them (to have a look from within). That doesn’t mean we will be caught up in the system we want to challenge.

Pedagogical: Psychotherapy research is a learning tool. One is not born a psychotherapist; one learns to be a therapist just as we learn how to live. It is an open and endless process. One learns how to be a psychotherapist through specific training, reading, doing supervision, sharing information with colleagues, doing personal therapy and being with patients (who are the best supervisors one can have!). However, we may learn how to do psychotherapy through research too. Doing research in psychotherapy doesn’t mean one will do outcome research or will create rigid manuals of psychotherapeutic interventions. There are multiple ways of doing research in psychotherapy, all of them framed by different ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives. The problem arises when someone tries to impose a totalitarian vision of what is supposed to be good research. And that is precisely why it is so important to maintain an open dialogue on research, also participating in it, in order to avoid a totalitarian outlook, and in order to promote a plurality of views on research. It is no surprise that many of the most renowned international researchers have changed their views on how to do research. Many have changed from a purely quantitative approach to a posture that favours qualitative investigation of psychotherapy processes. That doesn’t mean that the big issue reverts to the difference between quantitative and qualitative research. Rather it is just an example of how the research field is also an area that like the others goes through different phases and experiences different influences. The so called clinical-researcher model offers one more way therapists might learn about their own activity, by considering some aspects of their own practice, that they didn’t realise were important, or even, to consider others not previously examined. Nevertheless I also think therapists have to develop specific skills to do research that are different from those used in their therapeutic practice.

D: I feel like we talk but we still remain deaf to each other.
R: So what now? Do you suggest we move to another bar?
D: And if we changed our position?
R: I’m fine sitting here, thanks.
D: I appreciate your irony, or maybe not, but my question is, are we willing to listen to each other?
R: I don’t know if it’s possible...

For the client: Research allows us, in my view, to practice one of the most important principles of existential psychotherapy: giving a voice to the client. There are multiple ways of carrying out research with different possible levels of involvement of the person who has the greatest influence on the therapeutic process: the client. Psychotherapy research is more influenced than ever by the so-called ‘feedback systems’. In its essence, the feedback systems obtain information from the client in order for the psychotherapist to know how the client is feeling during their sessions and if the therapy sessions are being useful. This is just a very short and simple example of how the existential approach can or could interact in areas of research and contribute to the field.
A World of Dichotomies

The world of psychotherapy is divided. There are those who defend research as the only way to obtain answers for a set of questions. Others are convinced that if they collaborate in research, it will align their views with a status quo with which they disagree. Some therapists argue that psychotherapy is exclusively a human relationship. Other therapists believe that only when certain techniques are actively used does therapy become effective. Some therapists believe that only their theoretical model is right. Others believe that only an integrative vision is the way to understand what psychotherapy is and how it works.

I do not stand for existential psychotherapy! Neither do I defend a phenomenological therapy. I argue for an existential-phenomenological psychotherapy. Perhaps the analysis of existence can benefit from a phenomenological perspective.

Maybe there is a difference between promoting dialectical thinking and stimulating dichotomous thought.

D - When can I see you again?
R - Call me.

I’m very sad to have to let you know about the passing of Jill Cooper, a valued friend and colleague who died in July.

Jill was an existential therapist, who trained with me at Regent’s College, on one of the earliest cohorts of the Advanced Diploma in Existential Psychotherapy, in the Eighties and early Nineties. She became a trainer and staff member at Regent’s College and the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and ran her private practice in existential therapy in Islington for many decades.

I first got to know Jill when we were both involved in the Arbours Association in the Seventies, where she was a helper in one of the therapeutic communities. In this role she met her 40-year partner and husband John Newman, himself an engineer and psychotherapist. Jill was very committed to alternative ways of dealing with problems in living, for which reason she was for many years an active member of the Society for Existential Analysis.

Jill’s early life was quite eventful and challenging and she was a late bloomer whose contributions to others became greater as the years went by. She was a formidable force of nature with strong views about many things. She had a fierce commitment to life, after her own struggles for survival, and this enabled her to appreciate the value of human existence and enable others in making the most of their own lives. She also had a very strong social conscience and was wonderfully loyal to old friends. Her wicked sense of humour could spark laughter on even the most serious of occasions and she never took herself so seriously that she could not laugh at herself. She was so youthful that many were surprised or even disbelieving when finding out her real age. Her dress sense and visual perceptiveness were astounding.

When I saw her for the last time, in the Hampstead hospice where she died, she was scathing about the idea of a memorial service or an obituary, as she thought it embarrassing that people might want to say nice things about her. I can’t help but feel that she would nevertheless have been chuffed to see how many people cared for her and how much genuine sadness her death has caused them. One of the last things I said to her was that she was much loved and she gave me a most beautiful smile that lit up her face as she said in wonder: ‘I am just beginning to realize that’. People from distant neighbours to close friends and colleagues have said they felt honoured to have known her.

She was deeply grateful to John and to her almost-adoptive granddaughter Sophie for looking after her with such dedication throughout her illness. She was terrifically brave throughout her treatment for a rare form of blood cancer that eventually proved fatal.

Jill’s life was testimony to the terrible challenges that life’s struggles can bring and she was a shining example of the human ability to rise and rise again, through persistence, hard work, generosity, and trust in others. I will remember her always with great respect and love.

IN PRAISE OF INAUTHENTICITY

BY MANU BAZZANO

What is Authenticity?

In spite of its declared bias for the therapeutic relationship and the dialogical domain, the notion of authenticity prevalent today in existential and humanistic modalities of psychotherapy inevitably focuses on the individual. It is after all the individual who is said to be authentic/inauthentic, having opted for one of two narrowly-posed alternatives between the only two modalities of Dasein.

An authentic life – so goes the popular refrain – implies an unwavering resolution to live one’s life in the awareness of finitude, of its being-towards-death, whereas an inauthentic life presupposes denial of finitude and the refusal to recognise the reality of death. Only a mode of living able to embrace reality – the refrain goes on – can be called authentic. And only by living authentically as an individual (by ‘being real’), may I adequately respond to my being ‘thrown’ into this world.

The notion summarily sketched above contains three fundamental flaws:

a) It presents a two-dimensional picture of the human predicament, dualistically dominated by the modes of authenticity/inauthenticity.

b) It represents an ontological rather than dialectical method of investigation entirely devoid of historic consciousness.

c) It is an individualistic (and elitist) depiction of human agency, delegating the latter to the capabilities of a creative and superior individual – the philosopher, the poet, the head of state – who alone can be authentic and produce effective change in history. Let us now look a little more closely at each of these flaws.

a) A two-dimensional view

The binomial cluster authentic/inauthentic reflects similarly narrow dualisms found in Heidegger: ontological/ontic, science/philosophy, Vorhandenheit/Zuhandenheit (givenness/instrumentality) and so forth. One could argue that such generalizations are helpful in navigating the complexities of the human condition, but this is not the case here: this is not Newtonian parsimony (useful, when applied non-dogmatically, in navigating the complex causes of human behaviour), but quasi-theological over-simplification. Conspicuously absent from this rather simplistic view of the world are all historical and social differences, ‘variations of consciousness’ (Goldmann, 1977, p. 13), as well as specificities of culture, gender, and ethnicity.

As we shall see, the very notion of inauthenticity, when seen through a different prism (ie that of concrete historicity), escapes this limited understanding in favour of a view that translates it as alienation, in turn a product of reification and of the emergence of a new dominant class.

b) Ontological vs. dialectical

There are several modalities of investigation within existential therapy, most of them plotting a course between two polarities: ontological and dialectical. I would like to suggest that approaches to existential psychotherapy mainly draw from either an ontological or a dialectical matrix.

The ontological matrix (largely inspired by Heidegger and only partly by Husserl’s early work) enjoys greater popularity in the ‘UK school’ of existential therapy. The dialectical matrix is equally present yet marginal; it draws (indirectly) on Hegel via a host of influential thinkers including Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and de Beauvoir.

Husserl’s example is more complex and I will not discuss it here but only say this: a stark demarcation needs to be made between his earlier and later work: one only needs to consider Husserl’s early version of *epoché* (first, to regard phenomena as the intentional objects of consciousness; second, to move from instances to essences; third, to see essences as necessary rather than contingent) (Bazzano, 2013) – and compare it with his more nuanced formulation of the same notion in his later years. In this later version essences are put *back into existence* – a move which, although nowhere near the dialectical method (concrete historicity being thoroughly absent in Husserl), opens up a fruitful avenue for Merleau-Ponty’s exploration. Husserl’s later work perhaps indirectly sowed the seeds for a phenomenological exploration that was to move away from the ontological mode and towards a dialectical perspective. This was persuasively achieved in the work of Sartre, de Beauvoir and especially Merleau-Ponty, all of whom attended (and were significantly influenced by) the Parisian lectures of Kojève (1969) and Hyppolite (1969) on Hegel.

The dialectical method of investigation is steeped in concrete historicity – in Hegel’s blood, sweat and tears of real historical events, or in Adorno’s reading of ‘throwness’ as ‘fear of unemployment, lurking in all citizens of countries of high capitalism’ (Adorno, 1973, p. 34). This is different from the Heideggerian notion of historicity, a ‘bad abstract’ rather than ‘a conceptual vehicle to comprehend ... real concreteness’ (Marcuse, 1974, p 156). A dialectical approach understands the human subject as situated (de Beauvoir, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 2000); it does not stoop to the arbitrary separation between ‘ontic’ and ‘ontological’ domains – between the attempted solution of everyday problems and conflicts and the supposedly higher purposes of Being – between (for instance) psychology and philosophy. Whereas the ontological perspective sees inauthenticity as a fall from grace, the dialectical view historicizes ‘inauthenticity’ as *alienation*, in turn a product of reification. The most lucid expression of this is found in Lukács (1972) for whom ‘the separation between subject and object ... appeared in a certain historical condition, with the development of the Western bourgeoisie and of the generalization of market production, with ... reification’ (Goldmann, 1977, p 33). Although I would not go as far as Lucien Goldmann (1977), for whom Heideggerian inauthenticity was appropriated from Lukács’s notion of a colonised and alienated everyday (*Alltäglichkeit*), the bold comparison between the two philosophers’ view of inauthenticity provides food for thought. As I have written
Whereas Heidegger sees the everyday as falling short of the lofty authenticity of Being, Lukács perceives it as being colonized by the greed and mechanization of capitalism. Where Heidegger’s measure and criterion are [ontological], Lukács’s notion is steeped in ethics, social justice, and the redemptive function of art. (Bazzano, 2011)

A dialectical perspective acknowledges (without endorsing it) the inescapable separation between subject and object. It goes one step further, beyond mere contemplation and towards active transformation. Without a dialectical relation of subject and object, as Lukács reminds us,

Dialectics ceases to be revolutionary. For it implies a failure to recognize that in all metaphysics the object remains untouched and unaltered so that thought remains contemplative and fails to become practical; while for the dialectical method the central problem is to change reality. (Lukács, 1968, pp xlv-xlvii)

c) Individualism
What makes the world go round? Or, in more philosophical terms: who is the real agent of historical action? Is it the individual (poet, philosopher, scientist, politician), the ‘shepherd of Being’ – one who, having gone beyond the common escapism and infantilism of das Man, has reached a certain degree of authenticity? Or could the real agent of history be a plural subject? The second scenario presents us with a subject becoming increasingly aware of itself – hence is both subject and object (Lukács, 1972). Whereas the Heideggerian authentic individual is chained to ipseity, i.e. sees herself as consistently equal to herself, holding ‘the superstitious belief in the self as an entity identical to itself’ (Bazzano, 2012, p 12) – and this in spite of having allegedly apprehended her embeddedness in the world – the plural subject is fluid and comes into existence as response to an event. Example: who could have predicted the emergence of the Occupy movement in response to widespread corporate greed?

The path of the client undergoing ontological existential therapy is potentially a rather narrow affair: it travels from inauthenticity to authenticity. Not a small feat, some might say. Yet the journey happens within the four walls of ipseity, of a self identical to itself. Moreover, any therapeutic methodology motivated by the desire to unveil through so-called aletheia anything such as ‘truth’, ‘being’, pre-existing substance, essence or client’s true self (or optimistically aspiring to decode a particular constellation/dilemma/situation the client struggles with) will be altogether different from a more exacting phenomenological/empirical methodology, i.e. observant of what the contemporary Brazilian phenomenological psychotherapist Virginia Moreira, echoing Merleau-Ponty, aptly calls ‘emergent phenomenon’ (2012, p. 52). As argued by Moreira (2012), it is precisely by ‘keeping the person in the center that the psychotherapeutic process stagnates’ (ibid.). 

Whereas ontological existential therapy relies on an abstract notion of being, dialectical existential therapy labours (and plays) under the matrix of becoming. The former is subjugated to Heidegger’s essentially Kantian idealism, demoting phenomena to mere propaedeutic to metaphysics and reducing the rich art of phenomenology to a preliminary drill before the ‘mighty unveiling’ of being. For Kant the study of phenomena was subservient to the existence of noumena or pure concepts, and Heidegger essentially replicated this move. More importantly, the stolid, traditional notion of individuality which the notion of Dasein had vainly promised to unfasten is alive and well in ontological existential therapy. ‘This entity in its very Being’ – Heidegger says in relation to Dasein – ‘is in each case mine’ (Heidegger, 1967, p. 113, my emphasis).

A dialectical form of existential therapy will instead be alert to non-idealistic developments within phenomenology, ie the ones that acknowledge, via Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and de Beauvoir, Hegel’s fundamental lessons of concrete historicity. It will be more attuned to the emergent phenomenon rather than fixated on an ill-conceived notion of individuality, the authentic individual and the abstraction of ‘being’.

What is Inauthenticity?
Who knows what the ostrich sees in the sand?
(Samuel Beckett, Murphy)

One thing ‘they’ (das Man), those inauthentic individuals out there are said to be doing is idle chatter (Gerede). Let us bracket for a moment the decisive fact that, as Adorno (1973) remarks, Heidegger ‘condemns idle chatter, but not brutality, the alliance with which is the true guilt of chatter, which is in itself far more innocent’ (p. 102), and look instead at the implications for clinical work. A client who lapses into long spells of chit-chat during a session is said to be avoiding the real issues, diverting from the welling up of painful emotions or meaningful topics, resisting therapy and so forth. I have taken the above view as existential Gospel. Until, that is, my work with ‘Isabelle’, a woman in her late twenties. Born in Scotland from Sicilian parents, she came to therapy with the desire to ‘navigate more successfully’ the intensity of her emotions. Whether grief or euphoria, she had often felt they would ‘take over’, make her life ‘unmanageable’. 

A year into therapy she told me, with tears in her eyes, of the death of her grandfather, who she had been very close to. She often felt they would ‘take over’, make her life ‘unmanageable’. 

Her death was also the end of an era. It coincided with major changes in her life and represented in many ways the death of the old life. Her granddad had been for long spells like a parent to her. His death was also the end of an era. It coincided with major changes in her life and represented in many ways the death of the old life. 

Our exchange reached a deep level of feeling. I felt tears welling up in me: I know they were my tears as well as hers; I was absorbing her sorrow but also being stirred by sudden recollections. This lasted for some ten, fifteen minutes, after which she unexpectedly changed the subject and started to talk about a present she had bought for her cousin’s birthday, about her cousin’s lovely one-year old girl, and about an ambivalent remark made by a colleague at work. I thought she was avoiding, not wanting to feel the
intensity of her grief. Nevertheless I went along with it: I listened, nodded, kept silent and attentive. She did eventually come back to talk of her sadness, yet I was still a little puzzled. What later emerged in supervision was a surprise. We both wondered, my supervisor and I, whether her chit-chat was perhaps a natural way to regulate her affects. I recognized something parallel in my own upbringing. Like Isabelle, I also grew up in a culture where grief is not only expressed and encouraged but also considered somewhat as duty. This can contribute to bereavement reaching a paroxysm where the pain is unbearable. The organism collapses, or, more often shuts down and becomes numb. And the numbness then can extend to other areas of the person’s life. This is when ‘idle talk’, the alleged superficiality of talking about recipes and clothes and the weather, provides one with a healthy counterpoint to paralyzing pain and hopelessness. This is only the first of several examples encountered in my clinical work when ‘inauthenticity’ saves the person from drowning.

Naturally inauthentic

We have seen how an understanding of inauthenticity from a dialectical perspective contextualizes it as historical alienation, as the by-product of the commodification and colonization of everyday life operated by late capitalism (Lukács, 1968, Lefebvre, 1991; Debord, 1973; Goldmann, 1977; Bazzano, 2012).

There is another perspective of inauthenticity, recently advocated by various writers (Critchley, 2008; Bazzano, 2012) who speak of original inauthenticity. This notion draws on the work of anthropological philosopher Helmut Plessner, for whom ‘the human position’ is seen as inherently ‘eccentric’ (Plessner, 1970, p 36).

For Plessner, human beings find themselves in an eccentric position. We do not coincide with ourselves but inhabit a gap between a physical and a psychological dimension. Embedded in the animal kingdom, we have deliberately placed ourselves outside it via an act of Abgehobenheit, or apartness. In this peculiarly human situation of ‘mediated immediacy’, the human being experiences herself as and within a thing, a thing differentiating itself from all other things because she is herself that thing. She finds herself sustained and surrounded by something that keeps resisting her. To fully recognize this condition liberates us from the obligation to tag along the latest epistemologies and invites us to accept the ambivalence between presence and apartness, proximity and remoteness, objectivity and subjectivity.

In order to be able to say ‘I’, a human being needs to withdraw somewhat from the body and the world. In such temporary withdrawal (Abgehobenheit) from physical existence the world is presented to her as a mediated immediacy, a strange limbo between transcendence and immanence, between being-in-the-world and being a cogito, between closure from or openness to what there is.

Psychotherapy, the secret & the Knight of Good Conscience

The reader may have gathered from the necessarily brief discussion above that an idealized (or, equally, a quasi-metaphysical) notion of authenticity does not do justice to the multiplicity, complexity and the sheer eccentricity of the human position. There is one more aspect I would like to sketch here, relating to the Derridean notion of the secret (Derrida, 1989, 1989a, 1995). First though, please consider the following two questions, the first in relation to the private, the second to the civic dimension:

a) What is the relation between authenticity and absolute transparency? (Or: does authenticity imply a life of openness and transparency?)

b) Does a desirable idea of democracy imply complete transparency or would it be rather defined by the right of the individual to protect her secret?

Let’s say one holds that authenticity implies transparency. Could this mean that I am clinging to a ‘Garden of Eden’ notion of first principles, to a state of being that, (once inauthenticity, conditionings and so forth are dealt with) will be revealed (aletheia, again) in all its pristine innocence? Or could it be instead that the ‘origin’ is already divided, already tainted? Could it be that fall from authenticity is our human intrinsic dimension? Derrida, a formidable interpreter of Heidegger, calls this possibility ‘origin-heterogeneous’ (Derrida, 1989). If so, every experience contains an element of lateness. I am always late for the origin. For Hamlet, time is always ‘out of joint’. For Plessner, we never ever coincide with ourselves.

The right of an individual to maintain a secret acquires, in this light, a twofold meaning, the first psychological, the second political. First of all, keeping a secret implies auto-affection: in order to truly have a secret, I must tell it to myself. I speak of the secret to myself. I am bound to singularity rather than generality. Secondly, keeping a secret preserves oikonomia, the law of the private, intimately linked to the domain of the sacred, against a panoptical and absolutist ‘transparency’, the perverse democracy of CCTV where even Pascal’s ‘hidden God’ is filmed, before being subjected to evidence-based ‘research’.

A claim to authenticity would be as anachronistic (as well as arrogant and smug) today as the claim that one truly embodies the Kierkegaard ‘Knight of Faith’, when all one can be at the most in our current climate is what Derrida (1995) aptly calls a ‘Knight of Good Conscience’. He develops this notion in The Gift of Death, his luminous commentary on Kierkegaard and on the Christian Czech philosopher Patočka, who had been a pupil of Husserl and Heidegger. Incidentally, Patočka had been part of ‘Charter 77’ a democratic group of intellectuals that included the dramatist and future president Václav Havel. The philosopher was arrested and imprisoned by the authorities. He died in prison, after a brutal interrogation. No such dangers loom for the Knight of Good Conscience. Having pushed aside passionate commitment, sense of vocation and the last shreds of courage in favour of a bland obedience to generalities – a key word in The Gift of Death as well as in Derrida’s The Postcard (Derrida, 1980), all a Knight of Good Conscience can do is tick the box of this or that ‘code of practice’, in the name of ‘ethics’ – often a byword for good conscience and conformity.

A claim to authenticity sounds at best ironic in the way in which the existential paradigm is currently taught in various institutions. Lecturers and tutors who like me have marked hundreds of essays recycling the usual clichés about authenticity in therapy (or, in person-centred training, the equally tiresome formula of ‘relational depth’) will know what I mean.

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Come to discuss and develop these ideas further on Tuesday 19 November 2013, 7pm at the Society of Psychotherapy,
254 Belsize Rd London NW6 4BT, where Manu will give a talk on Inauthenticity.

Manu Bazzano is a writer, psychotherapist, supervisor and visiting lecturer at Roehampton University. He was ordained in the Soto and Rinzai tradition of Zen Buddhism. Among his books: The Speed of Angels (2013); Spectre of the Stranger: towards a Phenomenology of Hospitality (2012); Buddha is Dead: Nietzsche and the Dawn of European Zen (2006); He edited the best-selling anthologies Zen Poems (2002), Haiku for Lovers (2004), and the forthcoming After Mindfulness: New Perspectives on Psychology and Meditation (Palgrave Macmillan).

References

I have long been intrigued by the Philosophy Now Festival and last year provisionally booked a couple of spaces for my children in one of the children’s workshops. Unfortunately it clashed with a football match my son was due to play that day. I was faced with that age old dilemma – what comes first, philosophy or football? Last year it was football and this year the choice was between watching the Arsenal Ladies team play Bristol Academy in Borehamwood, or venturing to Conway Hall for the 2013 Philosophy Festival. As much as I would also have liked to have attended the former, philosophy won out on this occasion.

The Festival started at 10am and went on through to 10pm! A variety of lectures, workshops, debates, informal chats, light refreshments, and even face painting were on offer, and it was free! We arrived at just before 11am and took our children to the Philosophising with Children workshop (for 9-13 year olds ) called ‘Tricks of the Mind’ – workshops for 4-8 year olds were also on offer.

A friendly dismissal of parents from the workshop allowed...
my wife and I to attend a lecture by Richard Baron entitled ‘When is certainty justifiable?’ My wife was somewhat reluctant to attend as she felt she would be out of her depth there. However, Richard Baron’s lecture was excellent, pitching at a level that I thought would engage perfectly with seasoned philosophers, absolute beginners, and those somewhere in between.

He spoke about the work of philosophers Quine, Popper and Wittgenstein to support a view that at times we do need certainty to function in the world but that there are varying degrees of what is certain and what we cannot be sure about.

In Quine’s 1951 paper ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’, he argues that, all of our beliefs form a fabric. At the periphery of this fabric, our beliefs interact with the evidence. When the evidence conflicts with beliefs at the periphery or because of internal tensions between beliefs, we have a choice about where to make adjustments. If I understood Baron (and Quine) here, the deeper into our fabric we go, the more certainty we have about certain propositions about the world (e.g. 2+2 = 4). However, if those beliefs deeper in the fabric are challenged some form of reconciliation may be needed. In his paper ‘Holism and the Subject’, Baron offers this example,

For example, attempts around 1900 to reconcile traditional views of space, time and length with the observed behaviour of light simply did not work. Something had to give. Adjustments could have been made at the periphery, allowing physicists to preserve deeper principles such as the constancy of the length of objects or the expectation that motion relative to a beam of light would change the observed speed of the light. But it turned out that by far the most satisfactory solution, as put forward by Einstein, was to abandon those deep principles. That in turn had far-reaching effects elsewhere in the fabric of our beliefs. Physics and astronomy were profoundly affected.

(www.rbphilo.com/nontechnicaltalks.pdf)

Baron said that Karl Popper would say that certainty is never justifiable. Even the equation 2+2=4 is not always correct (Baron gave a couple of examples here which I can’t recall, but basically the fundamental mathematics of this equation remain intact thus not threatening the deeper Quinian fabric).

Popper’s work on falsification theory is complex but it seems to open the door to allowing a more evolutionary view of scientific theory based on the best that we can propose at any given time.

It would have been nice to hear something here about the work of some of Popper’s critics e.g. Thomas Kuhn, or even Paul Feyerabend, to introduce the context around scientific, rational thinking and to challenge that. However, time was limited here and Baron had yet to talk about Wittgenstein, and God!

On the former he focused on Wittgenstein’s later work On Certainty (Wittgenstein 1969). Here Baron said that Wittgenstein was arguing against a notion of doubt. I was somewhat surprised to hear this but intrigued and, not being that familiar with Wittgenstein’s work, decided to purchase a copy of Avrum Stroll’s book on Wittgenstein (Stroll 2002) from the bookshop in the foyer.

Stroll’s book is very well written and attempts to explain in clear and accessible terms what Wittgenstein’s philosophical thinking was, in the last chapter specifically around the time of writings that would later be edited together to form On Certainty.

Here Wittgenstein seems to be challenging the place of skepticism in philosophical discourse where skepticism as a total doctrine (Stroll 146) seemingly proposes that everything can be brought into doubt. However, Wittgenstein seems to be saying this is a pointless argument at the level of theory since it overlooks the grounding that invites us to doubt in the first place. To have certainty here is not necessarily to know the truth but to understand the language games that we have been raised with and learned in our communities.

Here Wittgenstein is not referring to an absolute certainty or truth but rather to something that ‘stands fast’ (‘feststehen’, ‘festhalten’, ‘festlegen’) (ibid p130).

The child learns to believe a host of things i.e. it learns to act accordingly to these beliefs. Bit by bit there forms a system of what is believed, and in that system some things stand unshakably fast and some are more or less liable to shift. What stands fast does so, not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it.

(On Certainty, p144)

Here, as Stroll points out, by denying what stands fast because it is ‘intrinsically obvious’, Wittgenstein disassociates himself from Cartesian foundationalism (ibid p136).

Stroll argues that one of Wittgenstein’s greatest achievements is to have demonstrated the self-defeating nature of skepticism, which sounds to me something akin to a pre-Derrida deconstruction (ibid p149).

Never less than ambitious in his lecture, Baron then went on to introduce the theme of certainty to ethical and political matters, and the possibility of justification for rigid rules. At this juncture I was feeling a little bit like I’d attended several lectures amalgamated into one. I felt this section of the lecture didn’t do justice to the issue of ethics, mentioning briefly a proposition about Utilitarianism to highlight what to my ears was beginning to sound like choice about an ethical standpoint rather than any certainty.

Baron finished his lecture with what he described as the paradox of his own position against the certainty of having a religious faith, but that he is happy to be certain in his own atheism. He returned to Quine here, saying that his interaction with the evidence is sufficient to sustain his own belief here and to feel sure that God does not exist.

I was reminded of Wittgenstein at this point and that we are caught up in language games, and so what may leave us with no doubt doesn’t necessarily mean it is true. Rather than knowing any truth about the existence of God, opting one way or another in the atheist/theist debate may offer grounding for a particular world view but does not establish any truth as such.

Unfortunately we couldn’t stay for the Q&A at the end of the lecture so couldn’t hear what would be picked up by the audience. My wife said she had felt engaged by Baron’s lecture and it provoked plenty of discussion between us both later.

However, the ‘Tricks of the Mind’ workshop had finished and unfortunately we couldn’t stay for the Q&A at the end of the lecture so couldn’t hear what would be picked up by the audience. My wife said she had felt engaged by Baron’s lecture and it provoked plenty of discussion between us both later.

However, the ‘Tricks of the Mind’ workshop had finished and we had to go and retrieve our children from the philosopher upstairs. My son (who is 11) told me that he felt the point of the session was to question what we see and that what we see may not always...
be the truth, or the whole picture. My daughter (7) said ‘they just did some tricks’, and rushed off to get her face painted. We left at this point and headed off to have some lunch. I would have loved to have stayed for the Balloon debate ‘Aristotle vs Nietzsche vs Sartre vs Charles Taylor’. I found out later via Twitter that Charles Taylor won, with Aristotle as runner-up! A favourable tweet was also posted with regards to revisiting existentialism and its possible therapeutic benefits, which I assumed was linked to Sasha Smith’s presentation on ‘Existentialism and Coaching’ later in the day.

I enjoyed my excursion to the Philosophy Now Festival and so did my family. Can’t say now what might win out next year, but with some certainty I can give you the result of Arsenal Ladies vs Bristol Academy, 0-0!

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References

VOICES FROM THE MINDFUL RELATIONSHIPS COURSE

Editor’s note: Jyoti Nanda wrote on ‘Relationships – A Mindfulness and Existential Therapy Approach’ in the July 2013 issue of Hermeneutic Circular. She facilitated a course on the same topic in September. Here are voices from that course.

Jyoti Nanda: Susan Iacovou’s email to me enquiring if I would like to contribute to the Hermeneutic Circular arrived half way through the Relationship course that I was facilitating over four consecutive Saturdays in Guildford. I had already contributed on this subject in the July issue of the Circular. My initial fleeting response was to pass it. However, Susan’s email and our email exchanges set the ball rolling and ideas started emerging. Instead of writing for the Circular, I wondered, how might it be if the seven participants on the course wrote of their reflections and experience? Wouldn’t it be fascinating to hear multiple voices rather than just my account of it? And how might it be if participants sent their reflections and experiences directly to Susan so they could write freely? Moreover, it would give them an opportunity to be published. Of course, I needed to check with them and their ease with this. Equally, my trust in Susan’s sensitive handling of this was crucial, giving them the choice to remain anonymous, and an assurance that their contact details would not be passed on without their permission.

These emerging ideas were also in keeping with an existential stance of ‘not knowing’ what the outcome might be. Yet it felt quite fascinating to see what might emerge!

I felt privileged to teach this course, which is based on my therapeutic work on an embodied integration of mindfulness and existential thought in individual and relationship therapy. The integration of the two traditions feels seamless and quite natural to me.

I could go on, but enough from me.

Victoria Ward: I couldn’t do justice to the richness of Jyoti’s four workshops within the limitations of a few words. It was an experiential exploration of the application of a Mindful and Existential approach to one’s relationships; with oneself, with others (be they in a professional or personal sphere) and with life’s complex, ever evolving journey.

I learnt, and experienced, that Mindfulness has its own energy. The energy co-created in the group was, for me, safe, nurturing, curious, accepting and compassionate. At times, I cried. At times, I laughed. I was, throughout, present and engaged; open to the unfolding of the day. Often, I was surprised to notice how clock-time had brought us to the end of a session in which I had been engrossed.

The unfolding of the workshop was fluid around & within Jyoti’s plan. At times, Jyoti offered choices or invited agreement to follow a theme that was generating interest and energy within the group present. She interspersed philosophical and psychological concepts and theories with Mindfulness practice, both in terms of formal meditation practice and informal practice of being fully present, in our bodies, in the moment, for each other, intentionally and without judgement.

I will take away with me many elements, one of the most fundamental being the invitation to pause, to notice and to choose. This gives us the opportunity to experience and live our lives as we consciously intend to experience and live our lives, with the understanding that all conscious experience is relational. There is no knowing of an absolute reality; we are all experiencing our own reality based on our interpretation of how we relate to ourselves, people and the world around us. And, for each of us, that experience is different, equally valid, and deserving of respect and compassion. If, for each of us, our experience is unique and can only be known in the act of experiencing itself – words are too limited a medium with which to accurately capture and convey the full richness
& subtlety of an experience – then differences, and conflict, are inevitable. What is not inevitable, and what is within our conscious control, is how we choose to respond, not react, to the conflict.

As we progressed through the four workshops, we shared how we were experiencing Mindfulness in our day-to-day lives. I for one, even in the short time I have been practicing, have experienced a transformational shift in how I relate to myself, to others, and to situations. In the pause and the noticing – be it dropping down into my body, noticing the impermanence of thoughts and feelings or being fully present to another in Mindful Dialogue – I have felt better equipped to make wiser choices regarding my responses. My own improved clarity of awareness is having an effect on others around me through my interactions with them, particularly within my family. Mindfulness has its own energy, just as anger, for example, has its own energy, and its effects are far-reaching and profound.

Thank you, Jyoti, for inviting me to experience this and thank you, also, to my fellow participants for the space and the energy that we co-created together.

Kathy Maggs: I am an integrative counsellor and opted to attend this course as I wanted to find some way of connecting with my clients at a deeper level. I had considered exploring mindfulness for some time as a way of being more present for my clients and in relationships generally. My exploration had led me to read The Mindful Therapist: A clinician’s guide to mindsight and neural integration by Daniel J Siegel, a book which includes a number of mindfulness exercises. I now wanted to learn more about the theory behind mindfulness and the existential approach and how this might be introduced into client work.

I found Jyoti’s way of teaching refreshing and stimulating as the theory flowed from group discussion and reflection on our responses to the various mindfulness exercises that were introduced. In this respect the course was co-created and I presume that further courses would not be identical to our course. Jyoti supplied an ample amount of background reading and a very helpful summary of each of the sessions.

One thing that impressed me was the speed with which the group gelled – Jyoti’s compassionate and accepting presence freed us to share our responses to the various exercises, quickly bringing the group to a place of mutual respect and caring.

The personal impact of mindfulness practice was perhaps less dramatic for me than for some others in the group as I have for many years regularly engaged in Christian meditation. However I was able to incorporate my personal worldview into the practices we were given and this gave fresh impetus to my personal times of reflection. Although it is only a week since our last session I believe that I have seen changes in myself and my client work. For myself, I have used mindful meditation to underpin my Christian meditation and prayer, bringing about greater acceptance of on-going difficult situations in my life.

In my client work I am more comfortable with sitting with my clients’ not knowing. I am more consciously offering compassion and loving-kindness to my clients and this has positively influenced the atmosphere in the room. At the moment I am only using mindfulness practices for myself. However, reflecting on my current clients, I can see how mindfulness practices could help them deal with their on-going situations and will continue to reflect on using mindfulness more directly with clients. This course has benefited me as a counsellor and will influence my future work.

Katherine Jantzen: I have had an interest in mindfulness and mindful meditation for some 12 months. Having completed a short introductory mindfulness based stress reduction course, I was interested in meeting Jyoti to take my knowledge to the next level. What struck me first upon entering the room for the first session was the absolute serenity of our teacher, Jyoti. Total presence and calm. A seeming absence of expectation. This tone continued for the whole four weeks and I could see that Jyoti was imbued in the essence of mindfulness – which is simply to be and to see what unfolds.

I have often been goal driven and have a tendency to set up stepping stones on the way to those goals – expectations of myself and perhaps others. A clear path, littered with tick boxes along the way. This course taught me to take a step backwards, to understand that we can still strive, still achieve but that we can do this with a much more ‘present’ attitude.

I have no doubt that our interpretations of the events and behaviours around us can be confused if we charge through life at high speed. We are more likely to be at the mercy of our assumptions, driven by our past experiences of life. Mindful practice slows everything down just that little bit, putting a pause between the stimulus and our response. It allows us to develop an attitude of understanding, of loving kindness and of compassion. This in turn allows for smoother resolutions to conflict – aggression dissipates, as does contempt, defensiveness, sarcasm, criticism. I believe it allows us to look for a ‘win-win’ outcome.

I was able to put my knowledge of mindfulness into practice two thirds of the way through the course when one of my children suffered a head injury. I was able to remain calm and able to present for her at a time of extreme stress, fear and responsibility. Through being aware of my body, my breath and my fluctuating emotions, through remaining absolutely present to what was emerging, I was able to acknowledge my racing thoughts – the ‘what if’ thinking – without engaging with any of it. This gave me the freedom to stay calmer than I had imagined in a crisis situation.

Day to day living has also become enhanced for me. I have learned to be more present to my senses and have experienced so much more ‘aliveness’ as a result – a spark, an energy and a sense of being part of a much bigger universe.

I enjoyed the structure of each training day. We would start with an extended meditation practice. This was necessary to set a contemplative tone to the day. Though there was structure, there was also an element of fluidity to each day so that we were able to have interesting discussions based on whatever emerged. Through mindful eating together, larger and smaller group discussions, meditation and observation, our experience of mindful living was enhanced. I would not hesitate to recommend the course.

Michael Hickes: I was expecting a process over the four sessions that would somehow quieten me down, lead me towards a way of being more present with myself and others. It was a somewhat idealised expectation on reflection, because, whilst that still is my intent, I now see that the path is longer and more difficult than I had somewhat naively anticipated – but excitingly the possibility is now there for me in a realistic form.
The meditative exercises provoked strong internal responses for me, and rather than disappearing into some better place, resulted in my becoming acutely aware, ‘noticing’ as Jyoti put it, a deep bodily felt sense of agitation — something that I had always been aware of in terms of my external behaviour — purposeful, results oriented, always onto the next thing — but something I now became intensely aware of as an inner experience, and this I found most uncomfortable, something I felt a deep desire to flee. And it’s still there.

This has not only given me important insight that I am working with in my own personal therapy, but as a result of the continuing learning from the course as to the benefit of adopting a more mindful way of being, I am now starting to find a greater day to day awareness of myself as I go about my life. I am noticing more what is there and trying not to react to it, increasingly finding times when I can hold an attitude of being with and staying in the moment with what I am actually engaged with. I am also beginning to see the effect these changed stances — when I stay with them — can have in how things are for both myself, and others around me.

Starting from the self, as this course did, leads naturally and seamlessly into integration of the process with existential thought and therapy, and how one is in one’s own relationships. It will be some time though I feel before I would feel competent and sufficiently grounded in my own mindfulness to use this directly in work with clients — if that was what they were seeking.

Yolaine de Carné-Parsons: As a therapist I was really curious to find out and learn more about Mindful relationships and how Mindfulness may impact the therapeutic relationship. I was desirous to expand my knowledge and practice of mindfulness, both professionally and personally. I had no idea that it would take me on a profound and edifying experiential journey of self-development.

I thought Jyoti managed to link mindfulness and existential theories very well. From my perspective, her teaching was coherent and profound. As Jyoti stated, this workshop encourages awakening of my (our) heart to loving-kindness and compassion for self and others. In the most respectful, wonderful and gentle manner Jyoti guided us through our human maze. When asked what I (and others) truly wanted from the course, during an amazing mindful meditation practice, I realised that there were two deeper reasons why I came on this course. One was to gain a sense of peaceful self-confidence. The second was to heighten my awareness of the interconnectedness of all life, but especially of self and others.

Mindfulness is an awareness of the present without judgment or criticism. Through various practices of mindfulness and Jyoti’s teaching of phenomenological-existential themes I have gained a distinct understanding of what it entails. It provided me with further and deeper insights into how to relate with compassion and ease within any kind of relationship. Jyoti’s teaching facilitated deep listening, acceptance of (my) self and others, greater compassion to (my) self and others, but, more significantly, a wish in me to commit to my deep self-care and well-being. I understood that nothing is more valuable than turning inward without trying to analyse, judge, criticise or fix and finding my breath as the anchor/touchstone of my being. At times, it became quite a spiritual experience for me. I was able to move from a ‘jagged’ energy and mind to being in complete stillness and seamlessly connecting in the moment as if I was surrendering to something greater than my own being. In those moments, I experienced and understood the significance of loving kindness towards myself so that in turn I can extend my loving kindness in the most natural and calm way to others and any situation. As the programme progressed I noticed a release of energy in my self and a real sense of calm and better clarity of mind as well as a place for freedom in my life.

Anthony Ward: For most of my adult life, I could not have imagined myself signing up for a course like this. With a sporting background in my youth and a career in financial services, I have spent a lot of time in rather macho environments and this has rubbed off on me. I would have regarded such a course as navel gazing and dismissed it without a second’s thought in the unlikely event that it caught my eye in the first place. However, times and people change and so I found myself here sitting with my wife, five other students and Jyoti feeling slightly unsure what was going to come next.

Right from the beginning, Jyoti set the tone with her incredibly welcoming presence. The group responded to Jyotis’s lead and a very open, accepting and supporting atmosphere rapidly developed. Each of us was able to reflect our own thoughts and personalities and understand that we were contributing to a co-created experience.

The mindfulness practice incorporated into the course made me much more aware of my reactions and gave me the time and space to pause for a moment and have a much clearer understanding of myself and what was going on for me at the time.

The experience when two or more people interact is of course seen differently from each pair of eyes and, even more significantly, is processed differently by each mind. Not only is each person different to each other but we are also different to our previous selves at different times — we are never exactly the same person twice! At the same time, the combination of those individual perceptions feeds back into creating a different dynamic for others and a different experience for each member of the group.

The great gift that mindfulness brought to my experience of relating to others was to give myself space to stand back from my own desire to process what the other person was saying and formulate responses and instead give that space to them — to really let them talk, to listen and to let them feel heard.

Jyoti is a remarkable person and her course has helped me enormously in how I relate to people, especially my family, and I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to have shared this time with her and my fellow course mates.

Susan Iacovou: It falls to me as Editor to conclude this experimental collaboration facilitated by, and created in, the virtual world of emails. I am reminded of the value of embarking on a journey with an open-heart, forsaking the need for a destination, and welcoming fellow travellers as and when they choose to fall in step with us.

As J.R.R. Tolkien noted wryly in The Fellowship of the Ring, ‘Not all those that wander are lost’.
The New School is buzzing with activity as the new term has started and new cohorts have joined us. In contrast to the diminishing light and heat we experience as we make our way through day to day involvements, the energy and enthusiasm of our new students never fails to amaze and enrich us. It is a privilege to hear, at first hand, stories of the meaningful journeys, ideas and influences that have led to this diverse collection of people making a commitment to study with us. It is a fascinating exercise for us as a school to take on board these rich narratives and to understand what it is that touches people the most in existential therapy, so that they make a significant life change to commit to its practice. The encounter with the students alters us each time anew and helps us to stay alert to what is changing in the world. For many of our new students this is the first time that they consider themselves existentially, something that leads to unpredictable and yet always transformative results; it is a rare delight and honour to witness these knowledge-seekers become the reflective existential practitioners of tomorrow.

We have a full programme of short courses for the academic year, which is open to anyone who wishes to come for a taster course or a CPD workshop. We also look forward to the launch of Emmy van Deurzen’s new book Existential Perspectives on Relationship Therapy, which she co-edited with Susan Iacovou and which will be out this autumn.

We also look forward to the SEA 25th anniversary conference on 23rd November, where Emmy will speak on ‘Love and its Shadows’. NSPC will be at the conference and you will have an opportunity to come talk to us to get further information about our courses.

NSPC, in collaboration with Dilemma Consultancy has now been running a low cost existential therapy clinic, in the building next door to NSPC, at 258 Belsize Road, NW6 4BT. The clinic is staffed by our doctoral students and supervised by Profs Digby Tantam and Emmy van Deurzen, who do the intake interviews. If you want to benefit from the availability of existential therapy at £25 per hour, don’t hesitate to call us on 0845 5577753.

The 2013-2014 Programme of talks at the Society of Psychotherapy, a meeting place for friends of psychotherapy. All events take place at 254 Belsize Road, London NW6 4BT from 7.00 to 8.30pm, and thereafter in the Priory Tavern. Further details at www.societyofpsychotherapy.org.uk

19 November: Manu Bazzano
In Praise of Inauthenticity

17 December: Daniel Mirea
Existing with the CBT

21 January: Mo Mandić
Relevance of later Heidegger to Existential Therapy

18 February: Chloe Paidoussis
Phenomenology of Trauma and Loss

18 March: Digby Tantam
Coaching People with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Today I saw you, really saw you.
Like a shard of light through the forest
It lighted the you
I had failed to see before.

I glimpsed a part of you
That remained closed to me yesterday,
Because my eyes were partially shut
To seeing without construing.

Perhaps I did see you
Through the haze,
But for my own faults
My ideas and constructs failed me.

Tomorrow I may not see you again
As I did today.
Maybe the shadow will again descend
On my thoughts, through my eyes.

Georgina Dyson (Confidential Counselling, Jersey)
ACROSS
1 Having the capacity to reason (8)
5 Says something (6)
10 The state of having no significance or meaning (15)
11 (of food) Having a more pleasant, distinct flavour (7)
12 A letter (as in the New Testament, one from an Apostle) (7)
13 What is meant by words, texts, concepts or actions (8)
15 An official order or proclamation (5)
18 Does not win (5)
20 Administer medicine or a drug to (8)
23 A love affair, especially a relatively brief and lighthearted one (7)
25 Not conforming to accepted standards of morality (7)
26 The state of being careful not to harm or inconvenience others (15)
27 Remained operating or usable for a considerable or specified length of time (6)
28 The state of being in good order, tidy or carefully arranged (8)

DOWN
1 Far away in space or time (6)
2 Move someone to another team, department, etc. (9)
3 A view or judgement not necessarily based on fact or knowledge (7)
4 A strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure or hostility (5)
6 Accepting or allowing what happens or what others do, without active response or resistance (7)
7 Quick to notice and respond to potential danger or problems; intellectually active (5)
8 Believes someone to be guilty of a crime or offence (8)
9 Set free; allowed to move or flow freely (8)
14 Included as a member of a group; counted (8)
16 Prevent from continuing or being carried out properly (9)
17 Concerned with or relating to the routine work of an office clerk; relating to the clergy (8)
21 A remark expressing an opinion or reaction (7)
22 Brings or comes to an end (6)
24 To be distressed, annoyed by; to feel concern about (5)
25 Extremely angry (5)
SOLUTION TO CROSSWORD JULY 2013

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AN EXISTENTIAL LIFE

Welcome to our new feature in which we get up close and personal with one of our fellow SEA members and find out what inspires, comforts and intrigues them about existentialism. The first volunteer to take the hot seat is Martin Adams, who is Book Reviews Editor for the Existential Analysis journal and is also responsible for its marketing and distribution.

Tell me a bit about yourself.
That’s a wide-ranging question. What can I say? I’m married with 3 children and 2 grandchildren and I’ve lived most of my life in London. I teach and supervise at Regent’s University and the New School and work as an existential psychotherapist in private practice. I’ve found the combination of teaching and practicing is extremely beneficial to both activities.

How/when did you first come across existential ideas?
I first came across Sartre through his novels and plays. I also read Laing and seeing him talk was inspirational. My degree was in Experimental Psychology so there was no space for existentialism or phenomenology but I used the time to refine my understanding of phenomenology and to read fiction. I tried to feed the ideas into my essays – without any great effect it has to be said – but it made writing the essays more interesting.

What about existentialism drew you in/attracted you?
That’s easy. It’s a description of life as I see it. It’s obvious. It remained an interest for many years, but this was before phenomenological research, and existential therapy did not exist in the UK. There was not much I could do with my interest, so I continued to read fiction and this has always been my greatest source of understanding of existential issues. I still prefer it to philosophy or psychology – reading about people struggling with everyday randomness, chance and tragedy in their various ways.

So how did you become an existential therapist?
When I started there was no way I could be the therapist I wanted to be so I became a Youth and Community worker instead. At least this allowed me to follow my ethical value of politicising and empowering everyday life, something I still passionately believe in. I left this when youth and community work stopped being funded, by which time there was more possibility to be a therapist. I became interested in the existential and phenomenological strand of psychoanalysis – Bion, Bowlby, Fairbairn, Peter Lomas – and gradually moved over to Existential therapy which was becoming established and was speaking the language I had always been looking for. So I then trained with Emmy, Ernesto, Hans and Freddie at Regent’s College.

So how do existential ideas influence the way you live/practice?
Two ways. But basically I see no difference between how I live and how I practice. Any differences are just contextual. But firstly existential ideas remind me that we all struggle to make sense of life and I am no different from anyone else. It’s a reminder of my relativity but also my total responsibility for my own life and of my care for the autonomy of all those people I come into contact with.

Secondly, and this relates to my practice as an artist, everything comes down to quality of attention. Drawing is simultaneously a technical task – you have to learn what the pencil can do – and a phenomenological task – you have to concentrate. Attention is Intention. The more I look, the more I see, and the more I understand about how difficult it is to say anything definitive about what I am attending to. All reflection is selection. The dilemma is that we have to find some way to say ‘this is how I see things, now, from here’. So it is with therapy, and everyday life.

Have you a favourite existential thinker/philosopher?
Sartre, every time, and Beauvoir and Camus, of course. They are indivisible. For their fiction and their philosophy but mainly for the way they combined the personal and the political in all aspects of their lives. They lived existentially, in their way.

What’s your favourite existential quote?
I’ll pick Picasso who said, ‘We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth’
Someone else who lived existentially.

Where do you see existentialism being most useful in the future?
Its use will never diminish, it’s ontological. But neither will it ever be very popular. Existentialism is a product of mankind’s capacity for consciousness. The threat we face has always been from the way technology can seduce us into losing our autonomy and rather than using tools, we allow them to use us. We need to reconnect to the simple pleasures of working with our hands – of making and mending things. The way global capitalism and fundamentalist religion sells fraudulent notions of choice and freedom while delivering the opposite is also a huge danger. They won’t win but it will be a constant struggle. Life, human life, is a constant struggle between the two. Its what makes life interesting and worthwhile.
SE 2013 Conference

Saturday 23rd November
Registration 8.30am - programme from 9.00am to 6.00pm

Ticket sales via: www.existentialanalysis.org.uk
Students £70, Members £90, Non-members £100

Venue: NCVO, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9RL
(Nearest Tube: Kings Cross)

Love and hate are passions that shape our lives and our practice. The 2013 SEA Conference will explore these emotions and the tension between them: their creative and destructive aspects, the consequences of favouring one over the other, the truths and lies they engender – and more.

We will hear from Emmy van Deurzen on existential relationship therapy, from John Heaton on the ecstatic as the mediator and from Trevor Butt on hatred as an elaborative choice.

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- as 'magnificent monsters' in today's cultural landscape
- as experienced in educational and child psychology
- in relation to addiction
- as experienced and explored in philosophy and the arts.
- as expressed in psychoanalysis and existential phenomenology

The 25th anniversary of the SEA will be marked with a screening of its first conference, a book-signing by its founder, Emmy van Deurzen, as well as experiential workshops and presentations by other founding members and former SEA Chairs.

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