

EMMY VAN DEURZEN

EVERYDAY
MYSTERIES

A HANDBOOK OF
EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOTHERAPY

Second Edition

Everyday Mysteries

This book provides an in-depth introduction to existential psychotherapy. Presenting a philosophical alternative to other forms of psychological treatment, it emphasises the problems of living and the human dilemmas that are often neglected by practitioners who focus on personal psychopathology.

Emmy van Deurzen defines the philosophical ideas that underpin existential psychotherapy, summarising the contributions made by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre among others. She proposes a systemic and practical method of existential psychotherapy, illustrated with detailed case material. This expanded and updated second edition includes new chapters on the contributions of Max Scheler, Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel and Emmanuel Levinas, as well as on feminist contributors such as Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt among others. In addition a new extended case discussion illustrates the approach in practice.

Everyday Mysteries offers a fresh perspective for anyone training in psychotherapy, counselling, psychology or psychiatry. Those already established in practice will find this a stimulating source of ideas about everyday life and the mysteries of human experience, which will throw new light on old issues.

Emmy van Deurzen is an existential psychotherapist, counselling psychologist and philosopher, who has published numerous books and who lectures internationally on a broad range of existential topics. She was the founder of Regent's College School of Psychotherapy and Counselling, of the Society for Existential Analysis and of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling in London, which she continues to direct. Her private practice, Dilemma Consultancy Ltd., is based in Sheffield and London.

Everyday Mysteries

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psychotherapy

Second edition

Emmy van Deurzen

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To Anne Hensel, my mother, and in
memoriam of Arie van Deurzen, my
father, for having given me life.

'Wouldst thou'—so the helmsman answered,—
 'Learn the secret of the sea?
Only those who brave its dangers
 comprehend its mystery!'

(The Secret of the Sea, H. W. Longfellow)

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Preface

This book proposes a multilayered description of the mysteries of human existence, as we experience them every day in ordinary living, simply in being alive and going about our business. These descriptions come from the work of a number of philosophers and practitioners who have devised their own theories and methods to better understand human existence in order to tame and master it. None of them tried to reduce it to formulae and none of them has provided us with quick steps to short-term interventions, yet each of these authors has added some gems of insight that we can choose to ignore or treasure. These pages are intended as a resource for thinking, contemplating, understanding and practising psychotherapy. Parts I and II cover theory, and Parts III, IV and V are concerned with practice. The book is intended for psychotherapists and counsellors who wish to sharpen their view and clarify the human realities that they may otherwise feel blinded, overshadowed or overwhelmed by. I hope it helps some of you in elucidating and clarifying your own struggles with reality.

It is indeed the human struggle that is at the forefront of the writing of each of the philosophers and therapists considered in this book. And it is the human struggle that often stands in the way of our connection to the mystery that is being human. The methods of existential psychotherapy, phenomenology, hermeneutics, deconstruction, dialectics and dialogic conversation are nothing without a clear and clean focus on human reality, which is to say on human possibility and human limitations. We cannot truly encounter and connect with our clients, who struggle to survive and make sense of their confusing, anxious or oppressed and depressed realities unless we are willing to step into the struggle of life ourselves, to full immersion, not just up to our own necks but to full underwater engagement with plunging, floating and swimming in the water of our trials and tribulations. I do not see how we can help others to survive in the rapids of reality unless we have learnt to be equal to such tricky situations ourselves.

I have never slouched in my own life and have taken on many challenges, some deliberately, some by default or destiny. I have found that there are some things that are required if we are to do justice to the mysteries of life: to be

open, to be able and willing, to be active, to be committed, to be persistent, to be fair and to be clear and perhaps most of all to be loving of life and of being itself as well as of others and of the things in this world and sometimes also of oneself. In this book I have tried to show some of the miracles, adventures and wisdom of the everyday that I have collected by connecting profoundly to the theories and practice of others and also by learning much from my own mistakes and difficulties and musings about life. In passing on what riches I have gathered I simply hope that it will be of use to those who are struggling like many before us, to practise psychotherapy as a human being and to be enlightened and thoughtful rather than dogmatic and superior. May these pages help you to be a decent and liberating therapist who shines light instead of throwing more shadows over the lives of those who consult you. Just remember that they come to you in the hope that their work with you will free them and make them better human beings.

Acknowledgements

I have been fortunate to have been given much by others in order to come to the insights and understanding I am able to pass on. I am deeply grateful to many people who have inspired, challenged or supported me over the years, some of them through their writing and some of them through their presence. All of them are like personal friends to me, whether near or far, alive or deceased. On the whole they know who they are. This book is the expression of my thanks to them for helping me to make life possible.

Introduction

The whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking . . . One may say: the eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility.

(Einstein 1936: 290–292)

Existential thinking is a steadfast and loyal endeavour to reflect on everyday human reality in order to make sense of it. As a practice it is probably as old as the human ability to reflect. Every now and then the human mind becomes so engrossed in itself that it replaces its humble search for the truths that surpass and define us with the illusion of absolute knowledge and mastery over these same truths. This may lead to technological progress, but we inevitably pay an enormous price by losing touch with the mysteries that command our everyday lives.

The more alienated people become from life, the more uncertain and the more frantic they grow. This insecurity makes them increasingly inclined to create explanatory systems that can reassure and demystify their startling and stark realities through the force of sheer rationality. Kierkegaard spoke of this human tendency to isolate ourselves as an attempt to ‘emigrate to a sixth continent where it is wholly sufficient to itself’ (Kierkegaard 1846: 295). Many theories of psychotherapy are just such attempts at describing human experience within a self-sufficient framework, isolating people within an anthropocentric universe of their own making. These theories also tend to be based upon complex developmental theories which purport to know what is supposed to go on for infants and young children in secret places referred to as ‘the unconscious’ or in terms of the acquisition of schemas and building blocks of consciousness that allegedly need to be stacked up in preformulated and predictable ways. These theories often mistake depth for truth or short-term effectiveness for integrity. They penetrate into one shaft of living and become isolated in it, paralysed from further exploration because everything can now only be seen in one narrow way. However, as Edgar Allan Poe once said: ‘Thus there is such a thing as being too profound. Truth is not always in

a well. In fact, as regards the more important knowledge, I do believe that she is invariably superficial. The depth lies in the valleys where we seek her, and not upon the mountain-tops where she is found' (Poe 1841). We need to search further afield and let ourselves be confronted with as much of human existence as possible if we are to make any progress in mapping it. Much of the mystery of life stares us in the face every day – but we insist on looking away towards what we think we already know and so continue to miss it.

An additional problem with psychological, cognitive and psychoanalytic theories is that such frameworks render it quite easy to make judgements about others. They give us clear definitions of what sanity and madness are supposed to be. We can separate the wheat from the chaff and make decisions about who are deficient in some way. We can know with apparent certainty where parents have gone wrong and where psyches are damaged or arrested in their development. We can lead people by the hand and teach them to follow our interpretations and predictions. We can even teach them how to think in a new way. We end up believing that those who are willing to follow our dogma will find salvation. Sometimes it seems as if the exorbitant amounts of money that people spend on endless sessions of psychotherapy are a modern equivalent of the medieval practice of buying indulgences. People obtain the illusion that they have been redeemed but it is doubtful whether they could not have gained some of their new insights more effectively by living more intensely and reflectively, letting themselves be challenged by new experiences in their lives.

What is most disturbing about the current situation in the field of psychotherapy is the tendency on the part of some professionals to make grandiose statements about the state of a person's mental world, purely based on a set of assumptions that cannot be easily challenged, debated or disagreed with. Having been at the receiving end of some such attempts to lead me and having watched many others struggle with interpretations or edicts about their states of mind that have set them back rather than moved forward I have long searched for a truthful therapy that is non doctrinaire in nature and flexible enough to encompass the good ideas that can be gleaned from therapeutic theory. Working with the professional bodies for many years in a central position, I was well placed to oversee what was happening in the profession and to discover that the churches of psychotherapy can sometimes become oppressive forces that hamper progress and confuse the struggle to survive with deficiency. (I was chair of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy 1993–1995, chair of the Psychotherapy section of the British Psychological Society 1998–1999, chair of the Universities Psychotherapy and Counselling Association 1997–1999 and External Relations Officer and co-chair of the Registration Committee of the European Association for Psychotherapy 1995–2002.) The ubiquity of 'pathology' and 'trauma' in psychotherapeutic systems is not unlike the omnipresence of sin in religious systems. In a negative sense, the more trauma there is, the greater the need for

therapists, in the same way that 'sin' guarantees the need for the clergy. At the same time on the positive side, psychotherapy fulfils an important role in keeping people aware of their moral and emotional needs, rather as religion has kept people's minds on spiritual salvation. Throw religion out and you rid society of much naive superstition – but you also create a gap in terms of moral standards. As long as people do not have the backbone to explore spiritual values on their own, religion is a necessary evil.

Similarly psychotherapy provides many with the opportunity to plunge into much needed self-examination and a chance to make sense of lives that seem out of control. My criticism of psychotherapy's dogmatism and extremism is made against the background of recognition that there is indeed a dire need in this world for some kind of emotional and personal support and clarity. Psychotherapy is a resource that has become essential, especially in conjunction with the faltering of religion.

We should not throw out therapy, for it may be our best bet for the future. We certainly need to rethink it radically and reform it where it is found wanting. We cannot dispense with theories and methods that seek to get a hold of the seemingly intangible thread of life. We should, however, have the courage to question any dogmas that monopolise claims to truth in this area, especially when such approaches claim to be 'evidence-based'. Any approach that becomes well established, be it psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural, systemic, humanistic or integrative, is in danger of becoming rather too cocksure, predictable and prescriptive. It is all too easy to lose track of the fact that we are all in this business of living together and that there can be no authority higher than that of our own experience as it is understood in the light of reflection and in comparison with the experience of our fellow humans. We should be careful about which kind of evidence we choose to believe.

This is where the importance of philosophy comes to the fore. Existential thinking throughout the history of humankind has arisen in reaction to dogmatic and pedantic attempts at controlling human destiny. People like Socrates or Jesus of Nazareth can be seen as existential thinkers who set themselves against the brutality and bigotry of their respective cultures of Sophists and Pharisees. More recently philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche set themselves against the dominance of the rationalism of their era. They reacted in particular to the philosophy of Hegel, which alleged his potential for explaining all mysteries in one final, ultimate system. Husserl similarly devised the phenomenological method as a protest and alternative to scientific investigation.

At the present time, there are many similar threats to those who would claim their independence of thinking about life. Scientific terrorism or the tendency to base one's life on statistics and the most recent scientific data, no matter how limited or flawed they may be, is omnipresent. But an emotional terrorism that prescribes how we should think about ourselves and others is

no felicitous alternative. Thinking independently about life is just as taboo now as it ever was, though it is more within our grasp, with knowledge more widely available.

But we need to know how to apply and use knowledge. Everywhere people crave answers, when they have lost the ability to ask the right questions. We so often are after certainty and abdicate the responsibility to seek for truth that comes with the acquisition of knowledge. It is hard to deal with doubt and insecurity and so it is no wonder that psychotherapists busy themselves attempting to cure people of their anxiety so as to reinsert them into this desacralised world. One wonders if they should not instead be allowing people to experience the call of conscience that makes them anxious and leads to explorations of life that can entrance and fascinate even though this experience may often be rather uncomfortable. How can we cure ourselves of life, when life and its everyday mysteries is all that we have got?

Existential psychotherapy does not seek to cure or explain, it merely seeks to explore, describe and clarify in order to try to understand the human predicament. It aims to do so with an open mind or at least with a willingness to observe candidly the manifold ways in which the mind is closed. The objective is to enable people to stand courageously in the tensions of life in a way that ennobles and revitalises them, while taking account of the context and horizons of the world in which they live. Existential psychotherapy has been practised in many shapes and guises since the beginning of the twentieth century and has been one of the most consistent and enduring alternatives to psychoanalysis and behaviourism on offer. Existential practitioners, on the whole, tend to reject systems and schools, preferring freedom and individuality. Unfortunately, this attitude has prevented the tradition from being documented and taught as widely as it deserves to be. Efforts to summarise and systematise such an approach are inevitably counterproductive and, because of this, the profile of the approach can never be raised without damaging its integrity. To know that this is the case has led many existential therapists to remain silent about their convictions. I believe that such silence rests on the false premise that one should speak only in truth and with certainty. It seems to me preferable to accept that any formulations one makes are necessarily flawed and that we can only aim for truth, but never fully achieve it. I accept the limitations of my attempts to capture some of the intensity and vibrancy of the existential way of looking at things, but I want to at least try to speak up about it. I have often found that my presumption that others would not be able to understand what I had to say was wrong. There is a strange kinship between people once one starts talking about everyday experience and the challenges that life throws at us. Here is an area we all know something about and we all know we need to know more about. It is a mystery to me why psychotherapists are not more interested in these dimensions of human questioning, preferring to focus on the areas that they think they already know something about.

Existential approaches to psychotherapy do not have magical answers, nor can they demystify, integrate or simplify the field. All they can do is to open up new horizons, new dimensions, new continents of meaning and invite those who want to explore these to do so for themselves and in their own way. There are however a lot of stepping stones that have been gathered over the years by many different authors and they are worth taking notice of when we try to reappraise life. I have brought many of these together in this book, which in this way provides a much needed guide to the theory and practice of existential analysis and psychotherapy as it has been practised in the past. It gives an overview of the philosophical underpinnings of the approach and presents brief summaries of the contributions of the most significant existential philosophers. A thorough study of the entirety of our philosophical heritage would be far preferable, but I have neither the competence nor the space to do justice to such a project.

It will be obvious that much of what the different philosophers and practitioners had to say is contradictory. None of their assertions should be taken as gospel: all they provide are multiple narratives about human existence. In the end we have to do our own thinking about it and add our own version of reality.

This book does not seek to convince or convert. It merely seeks to serve those who want to open their eyes to what stares us in the face: namely, that we are still extremely amateurish at helping people to live their lives constructively and well. Its objective is to provide an introductory tour through landscapes that deserve to be explored more widely and deeply by everyone on their own. If one is willing to take a look there is every chance that one becomes fascinated by what one finds. If we can discard the blinkers that usually block our view we can see life unfolding before us as it draws us into its unfathomable, always paradoxical and seemingly infinite spaces.

The truth about life is more complex and diverse than we can imagine. The individual quest to find meaning in living is an essentially personal one. We can learn from each other's explorations, however, if only to be humble enough to stop thinking that we are the centre of the universe or that we ever can know the answers to our questions with certainty.

Embarking on our existential journey requires us to be prepared to be touched and shaken by what we find on the way and to not be afraid to discover our own limitations and weaknesses, uncertainties and doubts. It is only with such an attitude of openness and wonder that we can encounter the impenetrable everyday mysteries, which take us beyond our own pre-occupations and sorrows and which by confronting us with death, make us rediscover life.

Part I

Philosophical underpinnings

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

A very individual approach

It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards.
(Kierkegaard 1967, in Hong and Hong 1967–1978, entries 1030 and 1025)

Introduction

One day, in Copenhagen, in the early nineteenth century, Søren Kierkegaard decided to take it upon himself to shake people out of their bourgeois complacency. In order to do so he knew that he had to start with himself, questioning his own human tendency to take the soft option. This is how he later described the moment of his commitment to that process.

So there I sat and smoked my cigar until I lapsed into reverie. Among other thoughts I remember this: ‘You are now,’ I said to myself, ‘on the way to becoming an old man, without being anything, and without really undertaking to do anything. On the other hand, wherever you look about you, in literature and in life, you see the celebrated names and figures, the precious and much heralded men who are coming into prominence and are much talked about, the many benefactors of the age who know how to benefit mankind by making life easier and easier, some by railways, others by omnibuses and steamboats, others by telegraph, others by easily apprehended compendiums and short recitals of everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age who by virtue of thought make spiritual existence systematically easier and easier, and yet more and more significant. And what are you doing?’ Here my self-communion was interrupted, for my cigar was burned out and a new one had to be lit. So I smoked again, and then suddenly there flashed through my mind this thought: ‘You must do something, but inasmuch as with your limited capacities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm as the others, undertake to make something harder.’ This notion pleased me

immensely, and at the same time it flattered me to think that I, like the rest of them, would be loved and esteemed by the whole community. For when all combine in every way to make everything easier and easier, there remains only one possible danger, namely, that the easiness might become so great that it would be too great; then only one want is left, though not yet a felt want – that people will want difficulty.

(Kierkegaard 1846: 165–166)

No wonder then that Kierkegaard liked to write under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus (John the Climber), though he did take on other pseudonyms at various other points.

Overcoming the human dilemma

Kierkegaard's contribution to psychotherapy is in his poignant observations of the human struggle and the acceptance of this struggle as the core of existence. Kierkegaard shows us how we can paradoxically rise above the ordinary contradictions and difficulties of living, by facing them rather than by trying to eliminate them. When Kierkegaard talks about people or about how to achieve a life worth living this is directly relevant to psychotherapy and sometimes looks like a blueprint for psychotherapeutic work. To understand Kierkegaard's conception of a person's progress towards self-improvement, we must begin by looking at his conception of the self.

Kierkegaard's philosophy was essentially dualistic, for he believed in the separateness of body and mind. But in spite of his strong disagreements with Hegelianism, which was fashionable in his day, he used Hegel's notion of dialectics and regarded it as essential that the dualism of body and soul should be overcome and surpassed. For Kierkegaard, the dialectical movement of overcoming was not a gradual, historical and cultural one, as Hegel described it. The transcending of the dilemma of either/or would happen suddenly and through hard individual effort and development and it would lead to the subjective experience of faith and the flourishing of one's spiritual life.

Kierkegaard's observations of human development remind one of the modern description of complex dynamic processes, which are now known to develop discontinuously rather than continuously: 'In the sphere of historical freedom, transition is a state. However, in order to understand this correctly, one must not forget that the new is brought about through the leap' (Kierkegaard 1844: 85). Kierkegaard sees humans as the synthesis of psyche and body, which leads to the generation of spirit. For Kierkegaard one achieves full humanity only to the extent that body and psyche interact in such a way that spirit results in the dialectical and productive overcoming of what starts out as an opposition and a dilemma. We begin by being interested in our bodily, sensual, aesthetic pleasures, which we pursue blindly at the exclusion of all else. In the process we discover the limitations of this pursuit

and we discover the mind's capability of ruling our pleasures through the imposition of a rational code of conduct. In our ethical phase we may oppose our original inclinations quite fiercely and warfare between the two extremes ensues. This tension eventually brings us to an insight into the limitations of both the aesthetic and the ethical, when we realise that it is precisely our suffering of these contradictions that make us the spiritual creatures that we are. With a leap into faith we then discover our ability to surpass the contradictions and paradoxes of human nature and we commit ourselves to a truly religious dimension. The leap of faith is a necessary step to take if we want to become a true individual. It is risky, for it requires us to abandon our rationality, but it is a risk that pays huge dividends.

The finite and the infinite

At this point, Kierkegaard introduces another, more complex, opposition which it is our task to overcome, namely that of the temporal and the eternal. He explores the possible synthesis between these in some detail. People, as he describes them, are caught in the tension between the reality of their everyday experience and the demands of the universal and the eternal. In search of a way forward from this opposition, he comes to the conclusion that the paradox is actually the *sine qua non* of human temporal existence. Humankind is the place where the concept of the moment arises, because it is only when spirit is generated out of the interaction of body and mind that the synthesis of time and eternity produces the succession of moments that is typical and exclusive of human existence. When spirit is introduced, the eternal ceases to be mere present and becomes the possibility of continuous past, present and future.

Kierkegaard looks at the underpinnings of Christianity for the guidelines to our existential challenges. He analyses and reinterprets some of the biblical stories in existential terms. His version of the Fall and Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise shows sin as the essential road that connects us to the spiritual. The possibility of spirit is introduced when the temporal is taken over by sin, for he who sins 'lives only in the moment as abstracted from the eternal' (Kierkegaard 1844: 93). By sinning, Adam asserted the synthesis between his body and his mind: he decided to follow the demands of his senses, against the explicit prohibition from above. Instead of staying merged with the eternal or the ethical, Adam, in this, manifested his spirit and posited the moment, the temporal, making the opposition between the temporal and the eternal a possibility. If he had not sinned he would have remained the same into eternity. If this had been the case then anxiety would not have come into existence, for anxiety is synonymous with nothingness, which is brought into being through sin. In other words, it is when we give in to earthly temptation that we finally become human and gain access to the mysteries of life and death. The price we pay for this is that of our own mortality.

It seems, therefore, that humans are a synthesis of the eternal and nothingness, which results in temporality. Temporality can be experienced fully only to the extent that the tension between the eternal and nothingness is fully experienced. Anxiety is the direct by-product of this experience.

Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. Hence anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs in this dizziness.

(Kierkegaard 1844: 61)

The role of anxiety

In other words anxiety is a necessary condition of our sinning and aspiring to becoming synthesis and spirit but, at the same time, it stops us from achieving the synthesis, because of its characteristic weakness. As Kierkegaard puts it: ‘Anxiety is a feminine weakness in which freedom faints. Psychologically speaking, the fall into sin always takes place in weakness’ (Kierkegaard 1844: 61).

So it is one of the essential human paradoxes that we are weak when we sin and aspire to place ourselves in opposition to eternity and when we do so we experience anxiety and make it difficult to transcend the opposition. ‘In anxiety there is the selfish infinity of possibility, which does not tempt like a choice but ensnaringly disquiets with its sweet anxiousness’ (1844: 61).

Kierkegaard sees anxiety as a way of becoming more self-reflective about the process of overcoming the opposition between nothing and the eternal. In picking up the challenge of experiencing anxiety ‘the nothing that is the object of anxiety becomes, as it were, more and more a something’ (1844: 61).

It now becomes possible for the person to assert himself as a potent influence on the outside world. Kierkegaard likens the person of genius to an omnipotent in-itself that can rock the whole world. Nevertheless such a person is still dependent upon fate. Fate is the ‘unity of the necessity and the accidental’ (1844: 96) and can be likened to the force of ‘nothing’, which inevitably reasserts itself over humanity, no matter how much we accomplish. Genius recognises fate, because genius is itself an expression and anticipation of providence (1844: 99). Anxiety is its best guide:

this is an adventure that every human being must go through – to learn to be anxious in order that he may not perish either by never having been in

anxiety or by succumbing in anxiety. Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate.

(Kierkegaard 1844: 155)

Anxiety as the basic experience of our confrontation with our essential paradox cannot be avoided without cost. If we try to avoid it, we will either go under in it or we will be simply insensitive to existence and unable to truly live.

This is a remarkable insight, which is of great relevance to twenty-first century psychotherapy. Most forms of psychotherapy have the objective of relieving people of anxiety and reducing this experience to its lowest possible level. In fact, psychotherapy is often deemed necessary precisely because levels of anxiety are high in a person. Kierkegaard seems to suggest a rather different approach to mental health as he considers anxiety to be crucial to spiritual life and a sign that the struggle with human paradox is taken seriously. Anxiety indeed should be the starting point of therapy, not in order to alleviate it, but rather because anxiety must be considered the starting point of a well-lived life.

Becoming a true self

For Kierkegaard it is essential that people should learn to stand in the tension between the finite and the infinite, even though this generates anxiety. Rather than contenting ourselves with immediacy and the acceptance of our finite nature and role in the world we should reach out to the infinite but, instead of becoming entangled in a merging with the infinite, we should be able to reach out while remaining grounded in the finite. We should be like a bow spanned between the two extremes and in this way we shall become a self. We shall then be the individual that we specifically are and can be.

We should not hide either in God, or in the trappings of social role or status. We must recognise the singular individual that we are in the face of the eternal, without the paraphernalia of secular life and without the cloak of religion. It is only in standing alone and facing up to our personal challenges that we can be true to the self that we are. To achieve this can never be a simple matter of changing: change would imply that the self is nothing but an external that can be altered in the same way in which our appearance can be altered. Kierkegaard refers to this misconception as that of the man of immediacy.

The man of immediacy does not know himself, he quite literally identifies himself only by the clothes he wears, he identifies having a self by externalities. There is hardly a more ludicrous mistake, for a self is indeed infinitely distinct from an externality. So when the externals have completely changed for the person and he has despaired, he goes one step

further; he thinks something like this, it becomes his wish: what if I became someone else, got myself a new self. Well, what if he did become someone else? I wonder if he would recognise himself.

(Kierkegaard 1849: 53)

What Kierkegaard clearly indicates in this passage is his scepticism of any form of upbuilding (as he calls it) or psychotherapy (as we would call it today) that is based upon a mere altering of a person's character, appearance or personality. According to Kierkegaard we cannot essentially change: we may be able to appear in different ways, do different things or look different or even think in different ways, but deep down, essentially there is an entity which remains the same. It is that entity that can only be called a self and it is this self that people try to avoid.

This amounts to a revolutionary perspective in contrast with many contemporary forms of psychotherapy that aim, on the contrary, to adjust or superficially transform people, clearly from an assumption that selves are nothing but the appearance and the social skill and the self-assertiveness. For Kierkegaard the self is defined as:

the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, which can be done only through the relationship to God. To become oneself is to become concrete. But to become concrete is neither to become finite nor to become infinite, for that which is to become concrete is indeed a synthesis. Consequently the progress of the becoming must be an infinite moving away from itself in the infinitising of the self and an infinite coming back to itself in the finitising process.

(Kierkegaard 1849: 29–30)

The self is a process of becoming, for ever moving from one pole of its existence to the other. If it ceases to move in this manner and it ceases to seek itself it is doomed to despair.

The place of despair

It is this despair that Kierkegaard calls the 'sickness unto death'. Despair can be generated in two ways: either by plunging too completely into the infinite or by plunging too deeply into the finite. When one is thus absorbed by the infinite, one in despair wills not to be oneself. When one is absorbed by the finite, one in despair wills to be oneself. Neither of these is ultimately feasible, for being a self is about being in the paradox between finite and infinite. Because of this paradoxical situation it is not mortally possible for a human being to avoid being in despair. Some of us are aware of our despair and some of us are not. Therefore, the physician of the soul (the

psychotherapist!), according to Kierkegaard, has to first identify the sickness and has to ascertain whether ‘the supposedly sick person is actually sick or whether the supposedly healthy person is perhaps actually sick’ (1849: 23).

Arguably the physician of the soul should not try to cure this despair, but simply make the patient aware of it and of its paradoxical nature, for the fact is that one cannot be cured of it. Moreover, it would be the greatest misfortune to not have known or know the despair.

Only that person’s life was wasted who went on living so deceived by life’s joys or its sorrows that he never became decisively and eternally conscious as spirit, as self, or, what amounts to the same thing, never became aware and in the deepest sense never gained the impression that there is a God and that ‘he’, he himself, his self, exists before this God – an infinite benefaction that is never gained except through despair.

(Kierkegaard 1849: 27)

Despair, like sin and anxiety, is the very backbone of life. Without them we cannot attain awareness and real spiritual being; without them we cannot be a true self. In our deepest challenges lie our greatest achievements. When God closes a door somewhere, it is so that we may discover the window he has opened, so that we may find the light that would have eluded us otherwise.

Such a view of life and the human condition is indeed not about making things easier for ourselves. We see here the outcome of Kierkegaard’s perspective on nineteenth-century society as a place where everything was being made easier and easier and where, as he put it in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), he could only take it upon himself to attempt to make things difficult again. Rather than smoothing our path and becoming shadows of what we really are, we should take the rugged hard road and discover our true capabilities.

Becoming true to oneself

The man who is all prey to the finite is absorbed by temporal goals and in the process becomes empty.

What is called the secular mentality consists simply of such men who, so to speak, mortgage themselves to the world. They use their capacities, amass money, carry on secular enterprises, calculate shrewdly, etc., perhaps make a name in history, but themselves they are not; spiritually speaking, they have no self, no self for whose sake they could venture everything, no self before God – however self-seeking they are otherwise.

(Kierkegaard 1846: 35)

In other words: social and personal success is by no means the measure for a

person's well-being: a strong ego is no recipe for becoming a self. The standards of success of much of modern psychotherapy are all wrong if we are to follow Kierkegaard's path. Instead of seeking to help people to become capable of enhancing their life in a temporal fashion, Kierkegaardian therapy would shake successful people up until they would start questioning themselves and rediscover the self that is before God.

But equally Kierkegaard is scornful of the self that would be all infinite, for such a self becomes unreal. In such a self there is too much possibility and not enough necessity. The self needs both finitude and infinitude in order to become actual. The paradox between the infinite and its possibility and the finite and its limitation is thus resolved by modulating between the two and dialectically arriving at actuality and self. The person who does not understand this and who errs on the side of the infinite, abandoning all concrete secular challenges, becomes so light-headed that everything seems possible. But this infinite possibility will be the abyss that swallows one up. All possibilities following in rapid succession lead to the point where the individual becomes a mirage.

What the self now lacks is indeed actuality, and in ordinary language too, we say that an individual has become unreal. However closer scrutiny reveals that what he actually lacks is necessity . . . Actuality is the unity of possibility and necessity.

(Kierkegaard 1846: 36)

Kierkegaard goes on to tell us how a balance between possibility and necessity can be maintained. It is by submitting to necessity and limitations in one's life that the balance can be found again in case we are too much with our heads in the clouds of infinitude. Kierkegaard warns against the mirror of possibility in which we do not see the truth and counsels us to see what is concrete and given in ourselves as well as reaching out to God.

Mullen (1981: 157) summarises Kierkegaard's recipe for human living well: 'The self-conflict between the sublime and the mundane exists at all levels of the individual's life, The task of properly relating them is life's dialectic, to choose to avoid this task is human failure (despair, sin).'

Kierkegaard's way of life

Psychotherapists would provide a very different perspective on human troubles if instead of attempting to cure their clients' conflicts they would take heed of Kierkegaard's views. This means following the client's lead, while reminding the client of the ways in which they need to contend with their contradictions and overcome them.

Kierkegaard was a lonely, self-absorbed, and highly articulate individual, who thought deeply about his own predicament and who came up with a

number of statements that, even a century and a half later, strike many a chord with those who might turn for psychotherapeutic assistance. He did not concern himself with writing in order to impress or attain glory. He wrote in order to become more and more truthful to the reality that he sensed to be there, below the artifices of early nineteenth century industrialised Danish society. He was on a quest to discover his own soul and with it, more generally, the human soul. He embodied the values of the Knight of Faith, who lives so as to be true to the values he discovers on his way, no matter what. The Knight of Faith is willing to make sacrifices in order to be true to the eternal. He resigns himself to the fact that suffering is required for us to come close to the eternal. We can do so only if we sacrifice the secular. Kierkegaard wanted to explore the eternal and was happy to let go of the superficial comforts of the temporal. He wanted to establish what mysteries lay hidden behind the miracles of science and the ease of bourgeois culture. Kierkegaard undertook this search the hard way. He made personal sacrifices, such as that of his promised marriage to Regina Olsen, the most eligible girl in Copenhagen, in order to retain the purity and freedom required to fully commit himself to the search for truth.

It is safe to say that Kierkegaard suffered as a human being. It is even safer to conjecture that it is precisely because he suffered as a human being that he was able to put his finger so precisely on the issues that matter most to people who are suffering. It is this that makes Kierkegaard worth reading for all those who are daily confronted with human distress, be it as professionals or as individuals. He distilled much wisdom out of a deeply lived life. Some of this can be distilled even further, so as to provide us with a series of reminders about human existence. According to Kierkegaard the human being starts out in a state of passive vegetative living, but then it becomes sentient, conscious, knowing, self-knowing and finally aware of the fact that it is self-knowing, at which stage autonomy is reached and the person can be said to have spirit (Mullen 1981: 26).

Kierkegaard went well beyond Hegel in his views on where to take humanity, for Hegel's system entailed a vast compromise: it demanded of people that they should recognise what was sensible to do in order to create a good society and conduct their business in accordance with universal law and logic. For Kierkegaard such a compromised life was not worth living: he believed in making choices and paying the price no matter what. His *Fear and Trembling* (1843b) with its detailed discussion of Abraham's commitment to making a seemingly unethical decision to sacrifice his son, when so demanded by his faith and loyalty to God, is an explanation of Kierkegaard's own sacrifice as well as the blueprint for the way in which he thought human life ought to be lived.

The function of irony

But in addition to living a life of choices where he went beyond the either/or of the aesthetic and the ethical in order to achieve the spiritual, Kierkegaard believed that he needed to alert others to the possibility and desirability of awakening from the easy bourgeois and unexamined life. In order to achieve this he learnt to employ the strategy of irony to great effect. Like Socrates before him, he proceeded to detach himself from his own preoccupations and importance as he believed that ‘mastered irony’ was crucial in evaluating one’s life. ‘Irony now limits, renders finite, defines and thereby yields truth, actuality and content; it chastens and punishes and thereby imparts stability, character, and consistency’ (Kierkegaard 1841: 339).

In mastering irony one becomes capable of distancing oneself sufficiently of what one at the same time ardently believes in or aspires to. In irony one is saved from the two main hazards of ideology: that of fanaticism or blind belief in something and that of nihilism and blind denial of something. In irony one learns to combine the subjective and the objective views. ‘Most men are subjective toward themselves and objective toward all others, frightfully objective sometimes – but the task is precisely to be objective toward oneself and subjective toward all others’ (Kierkegaard 1967: IV, 4542).

Being objective towards oneself would mean that one were capable of seeing one’s own predicament in perspective, that one could view one’s own characteristics in the guise of a caricature and that one would consider one’s strengths and weaknesses as entirely relative. At the same time being subjective toward others would mean that one would gain the ability to identify with other people’s yearnings and preoccupations, that one would understand them instead of condemning them and that one would constantly expand one’s consciousness by exercising one’s ability to travel inside of another’s mind and experience.

These propositions of Kierkegaard’s are interestingly the opposite of what psychotherapists are usually taught. They are admonished to plunge into their own subjectivity and to spend many hours and years familiarising themselves with their inner experience. Even though analysing it might bring some objectivity to this experience, more usually the analysis requires the analyst to be objective, while the analysand or trainee re-experiences memories vividly, intensely and highly subjectively.

It may well be that Kierkegaard has something invaluable to teach psychotherapists, namely the fact that learning to take oneself with a pinch of salt may be a better attitude for those who are going to work so closely with other people than the extreme seriousness with which the therapeutic interaction is usually approached. To teach one’s clients to also become capable of such self-irony may be more helpful to them than to be taught to wallow in self-pity and indulge in endless and morose self-contemplation. At the same time, Kierkegaard teaches us to use such irony with the ability of being subjective

towards the other. This means that the irony should always apply to oneself, never to the other.

Introspection and subjectivity

Kierkegaard's exhortation to us to know ourselves, and to put an emphasis on our subjective and passionate being and becoming truly like ourselves, is not to be confused with a passion for endless self-analysis.

Inwardness was not to be equated with a habit of introspective reflection on our own mental states; that would make it a mode of detached contemplation, not of active involvement, and would amount to assimilating it to the observational outlook Kierkegaard associated with objectivity. Rather it manifests itself in self-commitment and the spirit in which such commitment is undertaken: a person exhibits inwardness through the resolutions he forms, the sincerity with which he identifies with them, and the degree to which they govern his approach to the situations that confront him.

(Gardiner 1988: 92)

In this sense psychotherapy usually makes the error of substituting objectivity for the true inwardness required, as it tends to focus on observation, contemplation and interpretation. Even the more action-orientated forms of psychotherapy, such as cognitive-behavioural methods tend to favour action as dictated by reason and common sense, rather than on engagement with a personally elected course of action and on the resolute dedication to a cause.

Psychotherapists would do well to heed Kierkegaard's words in *The Point of View* (1851):

That if real success is to attend the effort to bring a man to a definite position, one must first of all take pains to find HIM where he is and begin there. This is the secret of the art of helping others. Anyone who has not mastered this is himself deluded when he proposes to help others. In order to help another effectively I must understand more than he – yet first of all surely I must understand what he understands.

(Kierkegaard 1851: 27)

Further in this paragraph he describes how all true effort to help must begin with self-humiliation, for the person coming for help and the person giving help both need to understand that

to help does not mean to be a sovereign, but to be a servant, that to help does not mean to be ambitious but to be patient, that to help means to

endure for the time being the imputation that one is in the wrong and does not understand what the other understands.

(Kierkegaard 1851: 27)

Kierkegaard tells us to be amazed at what the learner has to teach us and that to be a teacher in the right sense is to be a learner. Yet at the same time he reminds us that the object of helping a person is to inspire to come to the spiritual life, away from the mere aesthetic or even the ethical life. Sometimes he seems to indicate that between the aesthetic and the ethical there is also the intellectual life, before one achieves the spiritual life

In *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing* (1847a), Kierkegaard shows us that going for the latter requires courage. He beseeches us to pluck up this courage to take the leap and he shows us that to do so means to become transparent to oneself and that not to do so is double-minded and deceitful. He also reminds us that this is cowardice, which tends to love company. The person who goes for transparency stands alone and becomes an individual. Much of Kierkegaard's work is an illustration of, rather than just a guide to, becoming an individual or a teacher of individuals. Kierkegaard lived what he preached and meant what he said and did, in spite of his own use of irony. We can learn much from Kierkegaard, but only if we are willing to take the example of the man who wanted to be remembered as 'that individual'. It is perhaps in *Works of Love* (1847b) that he sums up the demands he makes on us most clearly. It is here that he shows that to live in a Kierkegaardian way is by no means a soft option and that it requires courage and fortitude to be open to hardship and pain as well as to love:

I do not have the right to become insensitive to life's pain, because I **shall** sorrow; but neither do I have the right to despair, because I **shall** sorrow; and neither do I have the right to stop sorrowing, because I **shall** sorrow. So it is with love. You do not have the right to become insensitive to this feeling, because you **shall** love; and just as little do you have the right to warp this feeling in you, because you **shall** love. You shall preserve love, and you shall preserve yourself and by and in preserving yourself preserve love.

(Kierkegaard 1847b: IX, 46)

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

With passion and intensity

Why does man not see things? He is himself standing in the way: he conceals things.

(Nietzsche 1881: V, 438)

Introduction

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market-place and cried incessantly: 'I am looking for God! I am looking for God!' – As many of those who did not believe in God were standing together there he excited considerable laughter. 'Have you lost him then?' said one. 'Did he lose his way like a child?' said another. 'Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? Or emigrated?' – thus they shouted and laughed. The madman sprang into their midst and pierced them with his glances. 'Where has God gone?' he cried; 'I shall tell you. We have killed him – you and I. We are all his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is more and more night not coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives – who will wipe this blood off us? With what water could we purify ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we need to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? There has

never been a greater deed – and whoever shall be born after us, for the sake of this deed he shall be part of a higher history than all history hitherto.’

(Nietzsche 1882: III, 125)

Nietzsche, who is often accused of being the first nihilist, was arguably the first philosopher who wrote about the human condition as seen from the post-scientific, post-modern perspective. But he does not fall into the trap of secular humanism or nihilism, he does not glorify human self-assertiveness, nor does he ridicule the human search for truth and understanding. Nietzsche’s madman is torn by the tragedy of human presumption and he has great spiritual aspirations. Nietzsche claims that religion is defunct and can no longer save humankind and that with the disappearance of God as the guarantor of our morality, our established values have also become obsolete. In this he goes well beyond Kierkegaard and prefigures the deconstructionist movement. Nietzsche, however, has a far wider vision on the human situation than results from our sceptical era: for him it is not deconstruction we need but reconstruction. If God is no longer there to rely upon, then humankind needs to take over the helm. Nietzsche’s insights into the consequences of our godless society for human psychology are invaluable and largely unexploited. He clearly recognised and resonated with the distress and madness that is likely to result from a loss of meaning and direction, but he also devised his own solutions and ways forward out of this impasse. Some would argue that his manic search for the *Übermensch* was his attempt to overcome his own weakness and eventual madness.

Nietzsche’s contribution to psychology

If Freud was the healer of the neuroses created by capitalist cultures, Nietzsche was the healer of its psychoses. It is, in addition, a matter of little doubt that Nietzsche’s writings had a considerable indirect impact on Freud’s work. Freud’s library contained two sets of Nietzsche’s works (one bought by himself and one offered to him by Otto Rank) and many of Freud’s apparently original ideas were based upon or inspired by Nietzschean concepts. Ludwig Klages, another significant early psychologist, referred to Nietzsche as the true founder of psychology (Klages 1926). He argued that Nietzsche was probably the most eminent representative of ‘uncovering’ or ‘unmasking’ psychology, which was popular around the end of the nineteenth century and which was also evident in the literary works of Dostoyevsky and Ibsen.

In *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, Ellenberger (1970) argues that Nietzsche constitutes the common root of Freud’s, Jung’s and Adler’s ideas. All three men pursued the same path of ‘unmasking’ psychology and in their own distinct ways each of them pursued Nietzsche’s original insights in different directions. It was not even necessary for any of them to have studied

Nietzsche, for by the turn of the century the cultural climate was permeated with Nietzschean notions. Kaufmann (1974) says:

hardly any educated German after 1900 was not somehow 'influenced' by Nietzsche, for it is the mark of a truly great personality that it subtly affects the whole atmosphere and climate of contemporary life – a change no-one can escape altogether.

(Kaufmann 1974: 417)

It was hardly surprising therefore that Freud, for instance, claimed that he needed to avoid reading Nietzsche, precisely because the philosopher thought along such similar lines as himself.

Nietzsche referred to the unconscious, as the realm of the wild instincts that cannot be allowed in normal society. He was intent on showing how much of everyday life is a lie, aimed at hiding the true state of people's motivations and preoccupations.

Even the term 'id' (das Es) originates from Nietzsche. The dynamic concept of mind, with the notions of mental energy, quanta of latent or inhibited energy, or release of energy or transfer from one drive to another, is also to be found in Nietzsche.

(Ellenberger 1970: 277)

But although Nietzsche recognised the sexual instincts as an important aspect of this id, he put rather more emphasis than Freud on the destructive and self-destructive impulses, in this prefiguring Melanie Klein's contribution.

Nietzsche's goal for humankind

Lou Andreas-Salome, who had a short-lived but intense relationship with Nietzsche when she was 21 years old and who also, much later, was one of Freud's close friends, and who therefore in some ways is the most tangible golden thread between the two, claimed that Nietzsche's notion of the 'Übermensch' was intrinsically the same as the goal of psychoanalysis. The Übermensch or superhuman is the one who has achieved true freedom, by overcoming all the usual moral prejudices and repressions and who is capable of transvaluing all values to establish a personal and autonomous mode of functioning.

It would seem, however, that the notion of the Übermensch, as Nietzsche described it in what he considered to be his most significant book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche 1883), goes well beyond the goals of psychoanalysis.

Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous going-across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous

looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and staying still. What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal; what can be loved in man is that he is a going-across and a down-going.

(Nietzsche 1883: 43–44)

Nietzsche makes a point of showing that currently we are nowhere near ready for creating or becoming the superhuman that we aspire to becoming although we are clearly no longer just animals either. We are precisely this in-between, and it is the reaching out which is our greatest challenge. Nevertheless Zarathustra (i.e. Nietzsche) possesses the superior insight into how people could achieve the crossing over. In this sense the whole of the *Zarathustra* book is a blueprint for psychotherapeutic work of the Nietzschean kind. It is well worth pursuing in some more detail what its guidelines are.

The first thing that is worth noting here is that Nietzsche's goal for humankind is not achieved through a wilful striving for superiority. He does not preach a super-egoistic mode of functioning, but one where the body (the id) is respected and heeded, sometimes even glorified, as the only master that we have. Here again the commonality of Nietzsche's and Freud's work is noteworthy: think of Freud's famous 'Wo Es war soll Ich werden', indicating that the goal of psychoanalysis is for the ego to fully emerge out of the id.

But there is a huge difference between Freud and Nietzsche in terms of their conception of humankind's overall objective. Freud perceives the process of ego-strengthening primarily as a struggle with outside reality. The superego is a largely oppressive force which keeps the ego under control, thus serving to tame the wild id in accordance with the pressures and ideals of society. The ego is an adaptive structure, a compromise between the primary force of nature and the unconscious drives on the one hand and the secondary principle of reason and reality on the other hand.

The primacy of the body

Nietzsche's views are far more revolutionary. For him the superego does not exist: he merely sees a lack of courage in those who live obedient lives, adjusted to the norms of society. There is not even a notion of an ideal ego for Nietzsche: the *Übermensch* is a person in whom the force of the body has become eminently reflective and intelligent, where the body, soul and self are truly integrated. Nietzsche is not concerned with adjusting humans to normality, for normality is mediocrity and split between body and mind. Freud is concerned with curing humans, but Nietzsche seeks to overcome humans.

Nietzsche insists on the importance of the unity, the oneness of body and soul and escapes from the Cartesian dualism that so often creeps back into Freudian theories, in spite of the latter's commitment to a materialistic

stance. In Part 1 of *Zarathustra*, in a chapter entitled ‘Of the Despisers of the Body’, Nietzsche says: ‘I am body entirely, and nothing beside; and soul is only a word for something in the body. The body is a great intelligence, a multiplicity with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a herdsman’ (1883: 61).

The body is firmly claimed as the totality of our being. The soul or the self are nothing but function of that body. Nietzsche accepts that the body has many different instruments to play on and modulate itself through (for example, the senses, the brain, the intelligence, the soul, the spirit), but these are never anything other but functions of the body, which itself is essentially what we are. He is not willing to envisage the secret unconscious that Freud devised and which ruins the single-mindedness of the individual that is so dear to Nietzsche.

For Nietzsche, the body-self is in a constant state of alertness, there is no need to split the human being in two or three separate parts: there is only one being, with many different attributes. In fact Nietzsche’s descriptions of the self sound rather like Spinoza’s descriptions of God: there is one substance only, which is however reflected by multiple manifestations. It seems only logical that the bodily self substance replaces the God substance, now that God is definitely dead.

The Self is always listening and seeking: it compares, subdues, conquers, destroys. It rules and is also the ego’s ruler. Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage – he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body.

(Nietzsche 1883: 62)

It is the last part of the last sentence that is the most significant here. Although we may believe that our self inhabits our body and end up with dualism, Nietzsche disputes that view and reiterates that after all we are nothing but that intelligent body. Body and self are one and the same. It is a view which psychoanalysis has forgotten.

In this context it is interesting to go to the recent work of people like Flanagan, Soloman or Searle on this same theme (Flanagan 1986; Soloman 1987; Searle 1992). Searle, too, while discussing the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious, comes to the conclusion that what Freud termed the unconscious would more properly be described as the neuro-physiological level of the mental, allowing in this way for the unified theory of the mind that eluded Freud. It is important to note that Freud himself was after such a theory and that he believed that it would be achievable once we had more knowledge about psychophysiology, for he too considered mental phenomena and neural states to be identical. Freud thought it would take approximately another century before these issues would be back on the agenda. It is interesting to note that this way of looking at mental events and

the self is most compatible with phenomenology and with Sartre's distinction between reflective and pre-reflective modes of operating.

Understanding our bodily self

Nietzsche had no need of such theories and justifications: he observed and investigated his personal experience and came to the conclusion that his body was the location and the key to all that he was. He found that to pay adequate attention to it and to heed its advice was the secret of being at one with oneself, the way to be oneself or, as he put it: to become what you are. In another chapter of *Zarathustra* entitled 'The Pale Criminal' we get a clue as to what happens when people do not heed their bodily self in this manner. They become like 'a heap of diseases that reach out into the world through the spirit' (1883: 66). Of course the bodily self always relates to the world and if it is not in harmony internally then the reaching out will be done in a destructive and catastrophic manner.

What is this man? A knot of savage serpents that are seldom at peace among themselves – thus they go forth alone to seek prey in the world. Behold this poor body! This poor soul interpreted to itself what this body suffered and desired – it interpreted it as lust for murder and greed for the joy of the knife. The evil which is now evil overtakes him who now becomes sick: he wants to do harm with that which harms him.

(Nietzsche 1883: 66)

This is a significant statement in at least two ways. First, it introduces the notion of interpretation and demonstrates that interpretation of the body's feelings and desires can lead to error: that in fact interpretation of the body's experience is the origin of much of our trouble. This throws an interesting light on psychoanalytic interpretation, which could be argued to be equally dangerous if it, too, is based on rationality trying to translate what the bodily self can only live in its intrinsic truth.

Second, in the last sentence of the quote, there is an indication of Nietzsche's conception of what Freud referred to as projection. Nietzsche, instead of considering that the confused person merely projects his confusion onto the outside world, recognises that there is an essential oneness between the world as it is experienced by the person and the world as it is related to externally. It is not because there are snakes in me that I see snakes out there, but because my bodily self is both internally and externally affected and affecting in similar modality: that is, the snakes exist both out there and in myself. Instead of the split between the subject and the object, Nietzsche assumes continuity.

He argues that it is of crucial importance for us to enlighten ourselves and realise our oneness with the body, instead of remaining passive and thus

become the powerless prey of a confused body. In the *Genealogy of Morals* he starts his preface by saying ‘We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge – and with good reason. We have never sought ourselves’ (Nietzsche 1887: 15).

In other words: in spite of all our scientific achievements and knowledge, we still have not succeeded in finding the source of ourselves and focusing on knowing ourselves. We still have not lived up to the demand of the oracle of Delphi. We do not truly know ourselves, although we may know a lot more about the world we live in. One may well wonder why so many centuries of scientific and philosophic endeavour have kept us alienated from our inner awareness, from, in Nietzschean terms, the knowledge of our bodily self. One may wonder also whether the psychologies that have emerged in the century after Nietzsche wrote this have better succeeded in going deeper into the self.

Following Nietzsche’s path

Let us listen to what Nietzsche had to say on this score. In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche (1895: 382–388) makes it clear that he believes any philosophy or psychology or morality that seeks to submit the body and the impulses and the passions will not succeed in living in harmony with the bodily self, nor for that matter will be able to acquire any true knowledge of it.

Instead of employing the great sources of strength, those impetuous torrents of the soul that are so often dangerous and overwhelming, and economising them, this most short-sighted and pernicious mode of thought, the moral mode of thought, wants to make them dry up.

Instead of overcoming the power of our emotions we need to learn to employ them: in order to do this, we must first know them. Undoubtedly, this is what psychoanalysis was after: the liberation of our true feelings and instincts from the tyranny of Victorian morality. But far from describing the feelings themselves, it has largely concentrated on a description of the defensive processes of the self in the face of culture and the contradictory demands of body and external world.

As already shown, Nietzsche did not consider these demands to be contradictory, nor did he intend psychology to focus on the pathological modes of operating our bodily selves in the face of external (or internal) pressures. What Zarathustra is after is the rediscovery of the power and strength that can be gained from our inner source so that we become capable of living deeply and passionately, overcoming precisely those external and internal pressures that Freud merely sought to accommodate.

Some might argue that it is humanistic psychology and Maslow’s different levels of needs and his aim of self-actualisation (Maslow 1973) that matches Nietzsche’s ideal, but this is surely not the case. Maslow and humanistic psychology may have understood the constructive and enthusiastic

admonition of Nietzsche, but they were unable to match his search for inner knowledge and philosophical clarity. Humanistic psychology fails to recognise what Nietzsche and Freud saw: the importance of remaining faithful to human impulses and animal nature, without glossing over the experiences and challenges faced in everyday reality.

Nietzsche's project for psychotherapy

Nietzsche's idea of achieving mental health is to start from our most base animal nature and educate it to withstand almost anything until it can stand the strain of the everyday while reaching well beyond. So let's follow Zarathustra's path and consider how it would alter the fate of psychotherapy. Zarathustra shows us right from the start what is required of those who are prepared for the challenges of overcoming humankind. A human being is essentially a going-across and a down-going: those who sacrifice themselves to the earth and those who live for knowledge in such a way that they will their own downfall are getting ready for the superior life. The superior life is the life of those who make a 'predilection and fate of virtue' and whose soul is lavish enough to not need thanks or return thanks (Nietzsche 1883: 44). The soul of such a person is deep and willing to take chances, performing always better than promised, justifying the future, redeeming the past and being easily wounded. Such a person is a free spirit and always wills his own downfall. The super person is thus a bow spanned between great pride and great humility: he is both all and nothing. Psychotherapy clients who start out with nothing are thus well placed to aspire to go on this path.

To achieve the right state of mind, Nietzsche (1883: 54) argues that humans have to go through the ordeal of the three metamorphoses, through which the spirit will become a camel, then a lion, then a child. The challenge of becoming like a camel, is that of becoming capable of bearing all the heavy loads that life holds out to one. The spirit as camel will not refuse anything that needs to be borne, but will bear it, no matter how heavy: 'The weight-bearing spirit takes upon itself all these heaviest things: like a camel hurrying laden into the desert, thus it hurries into its desert' (1883: 54). A Nietzschean psychotherapist would clearly be extremely tough minded on clients, expecting them to learn to tolerate rather than seek to extirpate their troubles.

As soon as the person has become capable of carrying the burdens of life and is able to live with them alone, it then becomes necessary for the spirit to become lion. The spirit as lion captures freedom in order to rule and be independent of duty. The lion wills and creates a new beginning, but then the spirit has to transform once more and become child, for only the child can be innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning and a 'sacred Yes' (1883: 55). The Nietzschean psychotherapist would thus hold out a rather strict ideal of self-sufficiency, individualism and eventually a requirement of enthusiasm in living life.

Nietzsche shows us how the new virtues to be created are arrived at by some simple actions and attitudes. But he also retains a cynicism towards such projects and is self-mocking about these ideas, as when Zarathustra encounters a sage who says that we must aim to overcome ourselves ten times a day: exhausting our energies and living to the full in the process. We must ten times also reconcile ourselves with ourselves, for bitterness is a bad way to be and stops us sleeping at night. We must also discover ten truths a day, in order to quench our thirst for truth. Finally we must laugh and be cheerful ten times a day.

And when night comes I take good care not to summon sleep! He, the lord of virtues, does not like to be summoned! But I remember what I have done and thought during the day. Ruminating I ask myself, patient as a cow: What were your ten overcomings? And which were the ten reconciliations and the ten truths and the ten fits of laughter with which my heart enjoyed itself? As I ponder such things rocked by my forty thoughts, sleep, the lord of virtue, suddenly overtakes me uncalled.

(Nietzsche 1883: 57)

We might well hope to find such easy recipes for virtuous living, but really these are nothing but a means to the greatest 'virtue' of them all: peaceful sleep. Nietzsche's tongue-in-cheek treatment of our search for virtue shows us that such recipes for living are simplistic and make us be nothing but basically human: Mensch rather than *Übermensch*. Our challenge is to go beyond this and to reach out for exceptional challenges. Where Mensch becomes *Übermensch* is when we gain access to the notion of the eternal return: the idea of living with the realisation that moments will endlessly repeat themselves and that the only time we achieve divine status is when we assume this eternal recurrence in such a way that we create a different universe, one more fully experienced and less oppressive.

The ultimate objective

While psychotherapeutic philosophies generally assume that life is underpinned by a need for improvement, change and cure, Nietzsche asserts that life is about a never-ending succession of moments that can be enjoyed and relished, no matter what they are. The eternal recurrence of the same is the apogee of humankind, not the striving for a promised land in heaven or on earth. There is a distinct Leibnizian tone here, suggesting that somehow all is already given and for the best in the best of all possible worlds. What is wrong with humankind is that we are incapable of appreciating this and of making the most of it. There are also resonances of Spinoza again, with the express implication that freedom in the end is nothing more than our recognition of necessity.

If we are able to live in such a way that it would be all right for our lives to be repeated in exactly the same way, over and over again, to eternity, then we live the sort of life that is worthwhile. According to Nietzsche such a life will be characterised by lightness, dance and laughter, in spite of all the burdens that need to be carried. There is no room for precious complaining or pompous theorising: ‘When I beheld my devil, I found him serious, thorough, profound, solemn: it was the Spirit of Gravity – through him all things are ruined’ (1883: 68). The only remedy for the spirit of gravity is not to fight it, but to laugh at it. Those who are unable to grasp these simple secrets of living and who preach death and meaninglessness by doing so do not refute life, but only themselves (1883: 72).

According to Nietzsche, when we understand that life is a battle that is worth putting all one’s energy into, a battle that is worth fighting and winning, then victory will be our reward, for no matter what happens, we will live life fully, to exhaustion, creating a work of art worth repeating endlessly.

It is a very similar conclusion as the one arrived at by Camus (1942a) in his book on Sisyphus. He, too, concluded that life may seem hard and mostly futile, as we have to repeat the same thing over and over again. He showed how Sisyphus could find meaning from the very process of rolling the stone up the hill repeatedly. In the last analysis such meaning is sufficient to fill a human heart (Camus 1942a). Nietzsche refers to such acceptance of one’s human destiny as *amor fati* – the love of fate. Our combat is essentially a lonely one, and we need to love our lives and ourselves fully if we are to fight properly. Nietzsche argues that love of our neighbours is nothing but a flight from ourselves: to love ourselves fully requires so much effort from us that it is easier to preach the escape of ‘love thy neighbour’. The joy of the herd is more essential than the joy of the ego, Nietzsche contends, and the real friend is the one who ‘has a whole world to bestow’ (1883: 88), in other words someone who is complete in himself and approaches the other only in order to share his plenitude.

Clearly the work a person needs to do to be sufficient to himself is crucial before it makes any sense to engage in human relationships. Only constant renewal of oneself is the answer: ‘You must be ready to burn yourself’, Zarathustra admonishes (Nietzsche 1883: 90). Not even a god’s or a saint’s guidance should be followed, however, and Zarathustra reminds his followers to ‘lose me and find yourselves’ (Nietzsche 1883).

Self-healing

This has direct implications for psychotherapy, for if a person is to do the labour of living strictly alone, the idea of following a therapist must be anathema. Nietzsche speaks of this directly when he says: ‘Physician, heal yourself: thus you will heal your patient too. Let his best healing-aid be to see with his own eyes him who makes himself well’ (1883: 102). It is then only by

observing how others can manage the battle of life with laughter that those of us who are still having trouble with it can get an inkling of what is possible. But beyond that aspect of learning from example we cannot help each other.

It is not only medicine that cannot help, but also religion. Nietzsche objects to the many false prophets who preach about values and life and who are themselves incapable of living the higher life. We may well ask if Nietzsche's life was proof of him being a false prophet himself. This is an important question to raise in relation to psychotherapy and its vast literature which is full of implied prescriptions about the healthy or virtuous life, but which is often not lived by the therapists who preach it. Nietzsche recognises twelve false prophets of virtue and he denounces them vociferously. Some, he says, believe that virtue consists of martyrdom, others think that when their vice has become lazy they are therefore virtuous. Others think they know virtue by recognising their own low status, deducing that all that they fail to be must be virtue. Others go downhill, but with the brakes on and they call their brakes 'virtue'. Others live by routines and rules alone and call these virtues. Yet others are so righteous that they inflict unrighteousness upon others in the name of virtue. Some sit back in their swamp and call this sitting back 'virtue'. Others like to pretend to be virtuous and seem to think that virtue is a pose. Some believe that virtue is nothing but the police enforcing rules. Others, who see how bad people are, end up believing that being able to see this is enough to be virtuous. For some, virtue is simply being raised to a higher or lower position in life (1883: 118–119).

Overcoming our troubles

Whatever all the errors people commit on this score, we need to reconsider and forget about goodness being synonymous with unselfishness or any of the other usual religious notions. Values have to be rediscovered anew, but not in order to establish some new form of idealism. We must face the difficulties and realities of life and of the human condition. All too often when people profess to be fed up with life it is simply because their idealistic notions have come up against reality: 'And many a one who turned away from life, turned away only from the rabble: he did not wish to share the well and the flame and the fruit with the rabble' (Nietzsche 1883: 120).

For it is often because we are unready to accept diversity and adversity that we fail to appreciate life. 'Life has need of enmity and dying and martyrdoms' (1883: 124), says Zarathustra, and in addition life has need of the rabble too. Because of this it is only if we are willing to accept what life contains that we can reorganise values in line with reality. Then we can learn to go up high in the mountains of life where we can find the pure springs again. This is the path of the superman.

In order to achieve such movement upwards we need to give up our

vengefulness, our envy, and our self-conceit. We need to dispense with notions of good and bad and rich and poor and noble and mean.

Life wants to raise itself on high with pillars and steps; it wants to gaze into the far distance and out upon joyful splendour – that is why it needs height! And because it needs height, it needs steps and conflict between steps and those who climb them! Life wants to climb and in climbing overcome itself.

(Nietzsche 1883: 125)

All that exists is necessary for us in order to overcome what we are. In Nietzsche's view there is nothing that is to be deplored, but everything has to be used as a stepping stone. It is the 'what doesn't kill me makes me stronger' of *Twilight of the Idols* (Nietzsche 1888). The same thought is differently expressed in the earlier *Daybreak* (Nietzsche 1881) under the title of 'Field dispensary of the soul': 'What is the strongest remedy? – Victory'. Psychotherapists would do well to consider the implications of such assertions. It is easy to forget that it is not regretful wallowing in past mistakes and misfortunes but a renewed vigour towards future victory that matters. There is an implicit warning against psychotherapeutic culture in Nietzsche, when he warns us that:

My greatest danger always lay in indulgence and sufferance; and all humankind wants to be indulged and suffered . . . I sat among them disguised, ready to misunderstand myself, so that I might endure them, and glad to tell myself: 'You fool, you do not know men!'

(Nietzsche 1883: 204)

The courage of fatalism

It is a poignant remark for those who make their living indulging others and who often think how little they still understand of the real problems that they are up against. Nietzsche's concept of '*amor fati*' (the love of destiny) is crucial in this respect, the observation that nothing that is may be subtracted, and nothing is dispensable:

My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing other than it is, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternities. Not merely to endure that which happens of necessity, still less to dissemble it – all idealism is untruthfulness in the face of necessities – but to *love* it . . .

(Nietzsche 1908: 37–38)

If it is the case that whatever happens in life is grist for the mill and has to

be accepted happily as one's fate, then the psychotherapeutic project must be completely redefined. It cannot be sufficient to dig into the past or present in order to remedy a person's experience; it becomes necessary to help a person review their entire attitude to life, the world and self, and accept their experience. This leads to seeing the psychotherapeutic interaction as a philosophical discussion, where clients are given the opportunity to begin to re-evaluate their lives in order to regain their individual grip on life and accept their fate.

In such a project it is not insight that is most valuable, for insight has now been denigrated to the level of false interpretation. What replaces insight as the prime therapeutic mover is courage. Zarathustra speaks of courage in relation to the will to power. For those of us who set out upon the journey through the ups and downs of difficult living, while climbing up to those heights of living that we aspire to, there is much discouragement to be found on the way: 'But there is something in me that I call courage: it has always destroyed every discouragement in me . . . For courage is the best destroyer – courage that attacks: for in every attack there is a triumphant shout' (1883: 177).

This courage, Zarathustra tells us, also destroys giddiness at abysses. This is a very useful quality for those of us who are set on our upward struggle and who, in looking down, discover the real depths of life and the human heart – a depth that makes us feel dizzy and weak and ready to abandon our task. We indeed need much courage on the way. In addition, courage destroys pity and 'pity is the deepest abyss'. Although we need to look deeply into our suffering, we need most of all to overcome it.

Much of what Nietzsche speaks of sounds like the words of the fitness instructor who has discovered that medicine alone would eventually only weaken a body: that indulging our pain and sickness would just increase them, and that lying on a couch for too long would merely make us soft and unsuited to the real world. What the fitness instructor has found is that it is far better to work at strengthening the muscles and preparing the body for the hardest work and the toughest conditions. In training the body's muscles a sense of well-being is generated and in learning to flex and move the body with grace and pleasure a sense of vitality is achieved that no amount of medicine could possibly provide. Although medicine is sometimes essential when the body is sick, on the whole it is prevention that should attract our greatest expense of energy.

Similarly the spirit can be strengthened and made tough and flexible rather than complacent and self-indulgent. Mental health can be actively promoted and breakdown prevented. If we are to climb up to the regions of the super-human, we had better begin by getting our spirit used to the tough regime of real life. Psychotherapy, in Nietzschean terms, should only be the gymnasium of the spirit and should not make the mistake of taking its inspiration from medicine. Even if it did this, then Nietzsche's view would be that the best

doctor would be the one who could demonstrate what good health consists of and how it is achieved, rather than the surgeon who intervenes when all else has failed.

The joy of life

In this spirit Zarathustra teaches us to be dancers and admonishes us to: 'Lift up your hearts, my brothers, high! higher! And do not forget your legs! Lift up your legs too, you fine dancers: and better still, stand on your heads' (1883: 305).

He reminds us that all wisdom is false that brings no laughter with it and encourages us to reconsider what we think we already know about life.

And I bade them to overturn their old professorial chairs, and wherever that old self-conceit had sat. I bade them laugh at their great masters of virtue and saints and poets and world-redeemers. I bade them laugh at their gloomy sages and whoever had sat as a black scarecrow, cautioning, on the tree of life.

(Nietzsche 1883: 214)

If psychotherapy had been more widely spread when Nietzsche was alive, he would undoubtedly have had much to say about its erroneous and well meaning but self-important and vain purpose.

Zarathustra has no doubt that it is not happiness that should be sought after, for he knows that suffering and pity are easy enough to dismiss as of little importance. What one should aspire to is not the easy effortless happy life, but the work of living, the labour of life with all its challenges and difficulties: 'My suffering and my pity – what of them! For do I aspire after happiness? I aspire after my *work*' (1883: 336).

And so, following in Zarathustra's footsteps, psychotherapy might well turn a corner and consider depth to be found, not in unconscious motivations, but in the aspiration to live the eternal return of inevitable woe, joyfully.

O man! Attend!
What does deep midnight's voice contend?
I slept my sleep,
And now awake at dreaming's end:
The world is deep,
Deeper than day can comprehend.
Deep is its woe,
Joy – deeper than heart's agony:
Woe says: Fade! Go!
But all joy wants eternity,
Wants deep, deep, deep eternity!

It is no longer within the individual that psychotherapeutic answers can be found, but rather in the realisation that the world itself has depths we must come to terms with. Though much pain is to be found in that world, joy itself is deeper, for it draws us towards the unending circle of eternal repetition of events; its roots reach deeply into the eternity to which it draws us. Psychotherapy, Zarathustra style, is about learning to go towards that eternity and, in the process, overcoming individual problems, which become the very essence of our labour towards joy.

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938)

Phenomenology – a new science of psychology

A new fundamental science, pure phenomenology, has developed within philosophy.

This is a science of a thoroughly new type and endless scope.

(Husserl 1981: 10)

Introduction

Husserl wanted to find the Archimedean point at which we could lever the world and change our whole way of doing science and understand reality. He argued that no study of the mind can proceed until we have clearly separated out consciousness from the objects in the world that it is preoccupied with. Objective science has failed to take into account subjectivity and intentionality. Until I am able to describe accurately what it is I observe in the world, how the process of my consciousness arrives at awareness of the world and what that consciousness amounts to in the first place, we can not rely on any scientific data about either the world or the process and experience of consciousness itself. We have to return to the things themselves, as they appear to us, was the motto of phenomenology, the science of the way in which things appear to us.

Husserl was a mathematician who became a philosopher through reflection on the limits of human knowledge. He founded the philosophy and method of phenomenology, which is commonly known for its call to return to the things themselves as they actually are while setting aside one's assumptions. Husserl was born a Jew in Moravia, but studied in Vienna with Brentano and converted to Lutheranism. He attracted many famous students when he held the chair in Freiburg, including Gadamer, Arendt, Marcuse, Carnap and Heidegger. But he found himself nevertheless barred from the University of Freiburg after Hitler came into power, even being denied access to its library by his former pupil Martin Heidegger. His most well known book is *Logical Investigations* (1900), which inspired much of later existential philosophy in

that it set out to establish what was to be known about the pure, apodictic truths of existence that are founded in tautology. His book *Ideas* (1913) is nearly equally well known. Husserl is not easy to read for non-philosophers and his introductory text *Cartesian Meditations* (1929) and his article on 'Phenomenology' in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* are a good way into his philosophy. His book on *Phenomenological Psychology* (1925) is also noteworthy. Husserl based his work initially on that of Franz Brentano and in particular he retained Brentano's notion of intentionality, although he applied it in a novel way.

Brentano argued that intentionality is the defining characteristic of human consciousness. 'Intentionality' is the capacity for object-directedness, the ability to have mental contents. I think something, I do something, I hope for something, I imagine something, I remember something. I cannot exist in isolation. My mind is an instrument for making connections with the world and it can only function in relation to the world. Mind and world are essentially interlinked. In fact the mind is nothing but a connector. All I am and all I do is set in relation to the world. There is no more room for the Cartesian distinction between me and the objects that I relate to, or between mind and world, or body and soul. I am essentially related to the world, in a sense one with the world. My body and mind and the world function in conjunction. They are part and parcel of the same phenomenon of human existence and consciousness.

People are used to making objective observations about the things out there in the world and calculating their existence on the one hand (as in empiricism or materialism) and are also used to separating out their subjective experience on the other hand (as in idealism or romanticism). Husserl's challenge is to grasp the unity of phenomena and self and to understand the connections between the objective and the subjective, transcending both. The activity of my consciousness is utterly linked with the intended object and it is only because I am in this way connected to the world that things are meaningful to me.

From intentionality to phenomenological reduction

Husserl took the idea of intentionality further than Brentano. For Husserl intentionality is what dictates the way in which we are in the world. We create meanings out of our connections to the world and apply these meanings to other parts of the world. We relate one 'noema', or block of meaning, to another. We apply our existing noema to the world we encounter and mould it thus into a certain kind of meaningful world. By reflecting upon this act of meaning attribution, I can move away from the natural attitude, which consists of merely being plunged into the world and conferring meaning without noticing that I do so.

I normally make judgements about the world and let myself be drawn into

it without realising this. We get drawn into particular ways of thinking about things and about the meanings they automatically suggest. This suggestive, illusory reality that I observe and am drawn into, is what Husserl refers to as a 'hyle', a shroud of meaning that, with the natural attitude (based on common sense or previous learning), I take for reality. What phenomenology shows is that we have the possibility of drawing away from this usual habit of unconsciousness that is the natural attitude. Some may say this is the task of unknowing, but Husserl insisted that it was the natural attitude that was like a cloud of ignorance, an unknowing. By removing this cloud by suspending all our previous presuppositions about the world (which is the 'epoché' – the suspension) we stop jumping to conclusions and can start knowing genuinely for the first time. We can employ our sceptical abilities to focus anew on what is actually there, on what is real, on what is truly the case and shines out at us (*phaino* in Greek means to shine or appear) if we are willing to make the effort to see it. Husserl, who was a mathematician, suggested that we needed to bracket our presuppositions about the world (and deal with them separately). Then we can also bracket the specific meanings we normally attribute to the objects in the world and look at them purely as phenomena instead. The phenomenological attitude is a systematic form of wonder and questioning of what we normally take for granted. It allows us to suspend our normal prejudice and clear a space for this new kind of observation. Husserl claims that it is this epoché, the setting aside of our usual interpretations, that lets us come to the things themselves afresh with full awareness of what is confronting us. This task of epoché is a form of withholding of instant judgement. This is a fundamental part of the 'phenomenological reduction'. It enables me to temporarily set aside my immediate response and focus on the matter in hand, before looking at the wider context of the equation.

Once I have enabled myself to focus on whatever phenomenon is confronting me at any given time, I can reduce my natural response even further through what is referred to as the 'eidetic reduction', which allows me to look for the very essence of the phenomenon I am facing. So rather than be led astray by the detail of a situation or a thing, I look for its internal essential, apodictic validity and relate to that. A further reduction allows me to focus on the very internal process by which I am focusing on the phenomenon in this way and this further reduction is referred to as the 'transcendental reduction'. This brings me face to face with what Husserl referred to as the 'transcendental ego'. This pure centre of consciousness emerges from a phenomenological reduction of the very source of my consciousness. It is the pure essential self that underlies all mental operations and is not to be thought of as the psychological ego of Freud, which is only one aspect of self. The transcendental ego is the pure unit of selfhood which relates to noemata (blocks of meaning) through the noesis which is basically consciousness or more specifically the process of conferring meaning. Husserl's search for the

a priori of our experience of the world in many ways matches Kant's search, but it goes beyond it in proposing a consistent methodology.

Doing phenomenology

Phenomenology as the study of the essence of consciousness focuses on different aspects of the process of consciousness according to the three levels of reduction described above. Through the phenomenological reduction I focus on the noesis, or the act of my consciousness, to purify it of its usual assumptive and presumptive tendencies. I try to see the essential nature and hidden quality of being rather than going about my perceptions and judgements in the usual pre-established manner, jumping to conclusions before I have taken a careful look. In the eidetic reduction I focus on the actual contents of my consciousness in the outside world, which is called the noema: the object of the process of my intentionality. I bracket the meanings I normally confer to the noemata and look again. In the transcendental reduction I focus on the transcendental ego or the source of my consciousness and similarly clear my mind and reflect on what is actually the case.

In every case I use my intentionality (including my intuition) in a new, systematic way to achieve the seeing of essences (*Wesenschau*) and at each stage I do so because I am committed to the process of *epoché* (suspension of my usual beliefs about the world) and by the concrete bracketing or temporary setting aside of distinct aspects of meaning that might otherwise get in the way.

Normally through my intentionality, I

- *Objectify*: I put out there in the object of my consciousness the content of my consciousness itself.
- *Unify*: I create poles of meaning around which I organise the world.
- *Relate*: one object of my intention is connected to another.
- *Constitute*: I actually make something become real for myself through the intentional act.

Every intentional act is therefore in fact a complex process of creation and interpretation, even though there is a world that it refers to which holds a truth we cannot fully capture. We always aim for the certainty of the familiar but need to learn to check back and validate our experience more carefully.

Every correction of an opinion, whether an experiential or other opinion, presupposes the already existing world, namely, as a horizon of what in the given case is indubitably valid as existing and presupposes within this horizon, something familiar and doubtlessly certain.

(Husserl 1938: 106)

Normally we perceive the world, as stated above through ‘the natural attitude’, attributing meaning without being aware that we are doing so. We do this regardless of whether we are practising literature, introspection, mathematics or physics. We construe meanings as we are naturally inclined to because of the assumptions we have arrived at through previous learning. It is the recognition of this active aspect of intentionality and consciousness that allows us to do phenomenology, which is the dismantling of this same process and the perceiving of the essences underneath all of these interpretations. It is a clearing away of the lenses that we have interposed between ourselves and the world, or at least a cleaning of these lenses so that we can see through them more clearly. Husserl, far from preaching the relativity of all experience, was concerned with the discovery of universal essences underlying our experiences, ending up with something not so dissimilar to Plato’s idealism.

Some of the rules I follow in doing this (Giorgi 1970) are to do the following:

- 1 Set aside my pre-set assumptions by bracketing them.
- 2 Describe my experience (rather than attempt to explain it), and describe it over and over again and again until all aspects of what I observe have been done justice.
- 3 Equalise all aspects of it (rather than allowing some aspects to stand out).
- 4 Through a process of horizontalisation, set all that I observe against the background against which it arises naturally, setting it in context.
- 5 Through a process of verification ensure that I check all observations carefully against what is really the case.

In following these rules of phenomenology, I form a clearer conception of, and come closer to the world I relate to, the process with which I relate and the self which is created in the process of relating. I will invariably find that I get a much sharper outlook on the world in doing so. My comprehension of what is in the world and of my acts of intentionality comes into focus at the same time as my sense of myself becoming brighter.

I move from experience to understanding and then back again to experience to verify my understanding. I emerge from the world by lending my consciousness to this process of systematic observation and in observing carefully what it is that I am doing, thinking, willing, imagining, remembering, acting or experiencing, I immediately cease to be fully immersed in the world. By carefully describing the phenomena I gain further consciousness, which allows me to distinguish noema, noesis and transcendental ego. I can then begin to organise the experience and articulate it sufficiently to make connections to the wider context. This allows me to achieve understanding of the phenomena and furthermore provides me with a road into the pure ego. Though Husserl’s work is extremely complex

and sometimes contradictory, it can be summarised as follows for the purpose of practice, be it in existential therapy or in phenomenological/existential research.

Phenomenological reduction: focus on the noesis, the act of my intentionality

- 1 *Epoché*: I suspend my assumptions about the world, noting and setting aside my prejudice and point of view, by being aware of my own perspective on the matter.
- 2 *Description*: I describe the phenomena under observation carefully, again and again, until the description is faithful to the actual phenomena under observation (multiple descriptions from different points of view are particularly helpful).
- 3 *Horizontalisation*: I bear in mind the horizon against which I view the phenomenon in question, by tracking it and seeing how it affects the phenomenon in question. I distance myself from the usual empathy with others that makes me jump to conclusions about the world, fitting in with those around me.
- 4 *Equalisation*: I aim to attach equal importance to all aspects of the phenomena or noemata that I am observing and without favouring or foregrounding any particular element, initially.
- 5 *Verification*: I verify that my observations and descriptions are in line with what is actually the case (this means checking back all the time that our understanding is correct).

Eidetic reduction: focus on the noemata, the objects of my intentionality

- 1 *Bracketing*: I put into temporary brackets any specific assumptions I already have about the object of my intentionality. I may refer back to them to check their validity later on.
- 2 *Abschattungen or adumbrations*: I increase my awareness of the fact that anything I observe shows itself under a number of different facets or profiles and that all of these need to be observed to do full justice to the phenomenon (or client or aspect of experience) in question
- 3 *Wesenschau or grasping essences*: I aim to pierce through the phenomena under observation by using my intuition, i.e. my capacity for directly grasping essences. This requires me to put myself on the same wavelength as the object under observation and so learn to resonate with its most profound inner reality.
- 4 *Genetic constitution*: I remember that phenomena are never static and that they are genetically, i.e. dynamically constituted so that they have a history of becoming and a destiny. We do not confuse an observation of

one state of the object with the truth about its overall potentiality and capacity for being.

- 5 *Universals*: I look to the universal characteristics of whatever it is I am focusing on to go beyond the immediate properties that may be in evidence. This also means making connections with other phenomena that this phenomenon is related to.

Transcendental reduction: focus on the cogito, in search of the transcendental ego that is processing the observations

- 1 *Transcendental ego*: I become aware in looking for the cogito that is actually processing the phenomena in question that there is a pure awareness that I am capable of that takes me beyond my own psychology or my personal character.
- 2 *Solipsism overcome*: The mark of achieving this reduction is that we are no longer separated from the world of other human beings, since in the transcendental ego, we are like monads connected to each other, intrinsically and inexorably: we become the eternal and infinite 'we'.
- 3 *Horizon of intentionality*: I describe carefully the horizon of my own intentionality and become aware of the point of view that my vision is necessarily restricted to.
- 4 *Self as point zero*: This makes me cognisant of the way in which my world is always focused and centred around a central point of gravity, which I call my self and which is actually the point zero for the start of any observations I make.
- 5 *Transcendental intersubjectivity*: As I become clear about my personal perspective and can see how it connects and fuses together with other perspectives to form a wider horizon of awareness I become capable of transcendental intersubjectivity that is just as ineluctable, though usually invisible, as the way in which the world of objects is also interconnected.

Doing phenomenology

So let us see how this method works out in practice. Say I am walking through a park, exercising my dog, and I am absorbed by the usual routine of taking him off the lead, passing by the weeping willows and crossing the bridge. At that moment I function in the natural attitude: taking the world for granted and hardly paying attention to all the assumptions I am making in order to function in the usual way. Now suddenly, either because I am practising phenomenological contemplation or because I am shocked into awareness for some other reason, I look at the willow again and notice the way in which the sunlight catches on its budding leaves. As I cross the bridge, my gaze passes to the water in the stream, where I detect a myriad of sparkles in the softly flowing water. I am alarmed at the marvel of it all, which I usually

miss in my haste to get the dog-walking over with. I am ready for the phenomenological reduction. I set my ordinary use of the world I live in aside and I look at my environment anew. It is with an openness of mind that I now begin to receive the wonders of the world around me. The blinkers have fallen from my eyes and I appraise the tree and the brook with a painter's eye which sees far more than I ever saw there before.

The objects before me take on a new life, not only in the detail that they now display to me, but also by the very intensity of their existence laid out there before me. The world is offered to me in splendour and fullness rather than in single-minded purposefulness. By disconnecting from the meanings I usually put on to the world, I open myself to perceive again and to retrieve new meanings. The strangeness of this new consciousness leads me on to the eidetic reduction, where the water of the brook begins to stand out as a world of its own (water and fluidity, coolness and movement). (Putnam (1975) would say that the real essence of water is H_2O , and that Husserl describes what Locke called its 'nominal essence'.) I penetrate the secret essential world of water and wonder at the act of attention that I employ to create this new connection to the world before and around me. The noesis of my own perceiving of the brook holds me entranced for a minute, though it is hard to grasp it in its intangibility.

I sense and know my connectedness to the world I now choose to admire and consciously relate to. I am aware of the very process by which this transformation in me and the world around me is happening. It is a quality of attentiveness and focus that puzzles me and that leads me to the transcendental reduction by questioning the essential quality of my selfhood that allows me to sometimes rush along and at other times take notice and watch the world being itself. I sense the transparency of my transcendental ego, which is the processing plant of this whole experience or rather the place of the very possibility of awareness. I begin to see myself as I saw the tree and the brook and the bridge before: suddenly not taking my self for granted, but penetrating to the depth of my ability to be in relation to the world and at the command of the quality of my experience. I am rediscovering my transcendental ego: the very core, locality, possibility and essence of my consciousness and its essential capacity for intentionality. Usually I am wrapped up in my intentionality unreflectively, but by suspending my usual mode of operating and taking stock I can unfold the world around me that usually enfolds me and purify the source of its meaning: me, but no longer just a selfish me, but a me that is merely an aspect of shared consciousness.

None of this is achieved through a process of technology or external application of knowledge, but through a becoming aware of my own acts of being, knowing, thinking and relating. As Husserl put it in his book on phenomenological psychology, this new way of proceeding should form the basis of a rethinking of all the sciences. Although a mathematician, Husserl began to think it imperative that psychology would form the new starting point for scientific theory (Husserl 1925). We simply have to retrieve the

qualities that are essential and necessary for human living and experiencing, those qualities without which nothing else makes any sense at all. There is no doubt that consciousness is central to this and that we cannot build a science without connecting it to our understanding of consciousness and the way in which it makes sense of the world. The explanation of facts should be utterly secondary to the much more essential process of reconnecting to the source of our experience. But of course in phenomenology it is the totality of cogito, noesis and noema that needs to be studied, rather than going through only one part of the process.

Intentionality, consciousness and meaning

The essence of our knowledge must be determined by this kind of inner seeing, by this kind of recognising of what it is that actually goes on in us and what is revealed of the world by the same token. Of course this simple recognition of what is actually there, is hampered by the attempt at interpreting inner experience and framing it in theoretical concepts, as is done by psychological or psychotherapeutic theorising. This take-over bid of the most personal mode of existing and relating can only alienate us further from the source of our knowing.

The essential characteristic of psychic being is intentionality: psychic life is the life of consciousness and consciousness is always consciousness of something. Even in the so-called unconscious, psychic life still consists of a relationship to an object, an event or an experience, although this relationship may take place in a non-reflective manner. According to Husserl most of our psychic life unfortunately occurs in this unreflective, unconscious mode. Following Husserl's views, there is no need to hypothesise an unconscious: our consciousness itself is only moderately conscious most of the time. There is no need to mystify the unconscious and raise it to such a high status: unconsciousness rules as it is and it is the mysteries of consciousness itself that remain hidden and obscure. But equally we should not confuse consciousness and rationality: cognitive thinking and the objective rules of rational science distort the overall quality of conscious being.

There is so much of our intentionality of which we are imperfectly aware. Most of our psychic acts are not reflected on or not even recognised: it is as if we go about the world with veils drawn over our eyes. We blind ourselves and remain unknowing even as we go about the world and our business. A degree of consciousness is always available to us, but for the greatest part it remains a fraction of what we are capable of. Husserl claims that, with the discipline of phenomenology, it is possible for us to increase the intensity and reflectiveness of our intentionality considerably, extending our connectedness to the world and life a hundredfold.

When I make myself more fully available to my intentional process I recognise that it is my very intentions that generate the meaningfulness of the

world. They generate me at the same time as they seem to be generated by me. I marvel at the paradox of the situation and the more I lend my ear and eye to my own awareness, the sharper it becomes. What is usually referred to as intuition could be no more than this very process of tuning into my awareness of what is taking place in and around me. In making myself available to my own sensory processing, I realise something of the complexity of my stance in the world. The precise manner in which I tune into the world tells me volumes about both the world and myself and therefore can reveal aspects of reality that otherwise remain hidden. Intuition comes from a more sophisticated and intense use of my consciousness. It consists of my ability to be self-aware and aware of the process and the object of the process all at the same time. In recognising that ‘me’, with the object of my attention and the process of my attention forms a unit, which itself is connected to other such units in a distinguishable pattern, I make new connections available to my consciousness, and so on and so forth.

Fundamental principles

Husserl aimed for us to become able to articulate the most basic forms of consciousness and find the axioms – the basic unquestionable principles underlying human intentionality. These would then form the underpinnings of a new science that would be more far-reaching than the sciences based on mathematics, which is no more than a humanly created system using some of the principles that can be observed in nature. If we could articulate and systematise the fundamental principles underlying human experience this would improve our scientific endeavours immensely and take us beyond the imperfections of mathematics. It would, for instance, reveal the basic categories of space, time, causality and substance that we constantly refer to in our intentional relating to the world and make sense of these in a more systematic and complex manner.

In his later work Husserl focused more on the subjective aspects of phenomenology as he began to take more of an interest in the notion of the *Lebenswelt* or ‘lived world’. He was interested in Von Uexkull’s idea that every animal lives in a particular *Umwelt* – a physical environment that is meaningful only in certain ways. A cat or a mouse, a bird or a human, would all relate to the same room in very different ways: the cat would pick out the places it could jump on, the mouse the places it could scuttle over to and crawl into, the bird would construe the plan of the room around places to perch on and humans would see it in terms of, for instance, size and colour, light and dark. Each would be convinced of the truth of their understanding of that particular environment.

Similarly we create for ourselves whole atmospheres, moods, ambiances, that are the lived world that we thrive on, know about, and to which we attach ourselves. This lived world is characterised by some of it being ‘near’ or

'homeground' and some of it being 'far' or 'foreign ground'. The texture and fabric of our world becomes co-constituted by us through our intentionality in this manner, and then has a constant impact on the way in which we experience the world. This world is also in constant movement. It is altered in time and much of the time we are not even aware of any of what is going on.

The consciousness of the world, then, is in constant motion; we are conscious of the world always in terms of some object-content or other, in the alteration of the different ways of being conscious (intuitive, nonintuitive, determined, undetermined, etc.) and also in the alteration of affection and action, in such a way that there is always a total sphere of affection and such that the affecting objects are now thematic, now unthematic; here we also find ourselves, we who always and inevitably belong to the affective sphere, always functioning as subjects of acts but only occasionally being thematically objective as the object of preoccupation with ourselves.

(Husserl 1938: 107)

Heidegger was obviously inspired by many of these ideas, although Husserl felt betrayed by Heidegger's unfaithfulness to the scientific spirit of the phenomenological enterprise. To Husserl, *Being and Time* was of the order of anthropology rather than ontology: it was a description of casual human experience rather than of the essence of consciousness itself. In his later work, especially in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl (1938) held out phenomenology as a radical philosophical method that would enhance human freedom by giving us the capacity for self-responsibility. Philosophy can serve humanity by helping it overcome a barbarian hatred of spirit that leads to the crisis of human existence. Husserl inspired many philosophers who all took his ideas in different directions. It is only in the past decades that phenomenological research has become accepted within the psychotherapy and counselling field as a viable and even a desirable alternative to positivistic research.

But Husserl's own project was to help people transform their consciousness rather than just to add another scientific method. He was all too aware that this would only be possible by a person's willingness to carry out important work of self-awareness on themselves in first instance.

Perhaps it will even become manifest that the total phenomenological attitude and the epoché belonging to it are destined in essence to effect, at first, a complete personal transformation, comparable in the beginning to a religious conversion, which then, however, over and above this, bears within itself the significance of the greatest existential transformation which is assigned as a task to humankind as such.

(Husserl 1938: 137)

Karl Jaspers (1883–1969)

The way to wisdom

There are situations which remain essentially the same even if their momentary aspect changes and their shattering force is obscured: I must die, I must suffer, I must struggle, I am subject to chance, I involve myself inexorably in guilt. We call these fundamental situations of our existence ultimate situations.

(Jaspers 1951: 20)

Introduction

Karl Jaspers has been much underestimated and has contributed a large amount to existential thinking and practice (see also the section on practitioners). He was unique in being both a psychiatrist and a philosopher and so his work is particularly relevant to existential psychotherapists. Jaspers was initially trained as a doctor and psychiatrist and he had a considerable impact with his seminal book on psychopathology (Jaspers 1963), which he continued to revise and update during most of his career. His interest gradually shifted towards psychology and he became a lecturer in this field, moving eventually to a chair in philosophy. He acknowledged that his later work could also be seen as a form of theology.

His work on psychopathology seeks to address the experience of the suffering human being and his descriptions are largely phenomenological. Jaspers draws heavily on the concept of empathy or rather that of *Einfühlen*, which he defines as a process of participation in the other person's experience. It is Jaspers' objective to bring the art of understanding to the level of knowledge and his contribution to this endeavour is considerable.

The importance of first-hand experience

As a philosopher, Jaspers was deeply influenced by the work of Spinoza, Kant, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, who used their personal experience to develop their philosophical ideas. Jaspers coined the term 'periechontology' to refer to the existential exploration that starts from the description and

understanding of first-person experiences. This emphasis on subjectivity is even more evident in his philosophical writing, which was greatly influenced by the thinking of Dilthey and Weber, who had argued for the need for understanding and interpretation over that for explanation and analysis in the human sciences.

Jaspers eventually wrote up his philosophical ideas in his three-volume magnum opus, *Philosophy* (1969), the second volume of which deals most specifically with the existential issues that are relevant to psychotherapists. A summary of his thinking can be found in his short book *The Way to Wisdom* (1951), which was generated from the text of a radio series on his ideas.

Limit situations

As the above quote indicates, Jaspers first and foremost put the emphasis on what he called 'limit situations' (*Grenzsituationen*). These are the inescapable realities that human beings must face. They cannot be altered or surmounted, only acknowledged and borne. People are always in situations and to some extent they can influence the situations that they are in, but there are some situations which carry inevitability and which bring us to the edge of our existence.

In our day-to-day lives we often evade them, by closing our eyes and living as if they did not exist. We forget that we must die, forget our guilt, and forget that we are at the mercy of chance.

(Jaspers 1951: 20)

Jaspers argued that these limit situations should not be avoided, but faced. There is something about the fundamental limits and tragedy of human life that brings out the best in people as well. To be in despair makes one aware of things beyond this world. It is through our suffering and our finality that we become aware of what is not within our grasp and that we begin to aspire to improving ourselves while understanding our limits and finding peace and redemption within these. Jaspers claims that the source of philosophy is not just wonder, as Plato believed, but also doubt and the sense of forsakenness. It is uncertainty and suffering that bring us to life.

The reason that we can bring ourselves beyond these sufferings is that we are motivated by them to begin to communicate with our fellow human beings. The ultimate source of philosophy, according to Jaspers (1951: 26), is the will to authentic communication. From this notion of communication with our peers Jaspers then moves on to the consideration of what he calls 'the comprehensive', which is the overarching principle that holds us together, not just with other people, but with all that is in the world. For Jaspers the comprehensive is named God.

In his *Philosophy*, Jaspers considers what human existence can afford to be

and become when faced with limit situations and the comprehensive. He speaks of my being myself as 'Existent':

I am Existent if I do not become an object for myself. In Existent I know, without being able to see it, that what I call my 'self' is independent. The possibility of Existent is what I live by; it is only in its realisation that I am myself. Attempts to comprehend it make it vanish, for it is not a psychological subject.

(Jaspers 1969 (3): 1932)

In other words I am only myself when I live as self. I become authentic in as much as I am willing to face up to my freedom and possibility as well as to my limitations and my loneliness.

Freedom

This definition of self as action, rather than a thing, is the essence of existentialism and Jaspers was far more influential on such authors as Heidegger and Sartre than is commonly recognised. His lack of professional philosophical status has not helped him to get the recognition he deserves. His philosophy is a systematic description of the many states and experiences of Existent and includes views on everything from will to guilt, from consciousness to death.

Jaspers investigates what happens to humankind once it has rid itself of God. The first thing that happens is that we become free, for real freedom begins only when we are responsible only to ourselves. Jaspers argues that many people are lost in our world today because of this freedom and the lack of order that it has engendered. Life needs order if it is not to become diffuse and meaningless. Human nature is fickle and lazy and without discipline life will return to chaos. Philosophy is the way to reawaken ourselves and discover what it is that we need to do with our new-found freedom. It requires us first of all to perform our everyday practical tasks and meet the demands of life, but that in itself is not enough.

To lead a philosophical life means also to take seriously our experience of men, of happiness and hurt, of success and failure, of the obscure and the confused. It means not to forget but to possess ourselves inwardly of our experience, not to let ourselves be distracted but to think problems through, not to take things for granted but to elucidate them.

(Jaspers 1951: 122)

We can achieve this kind of inwardness not only through philosophical contemplation and self-reflection, but also through living carefully and reflectively with others. The principle of the comprehensive – in other words, all that is beyond ourselves, but which also includes us – should remain our

point of reference, for only God can be like our northern star. The comprehensive, or the ultimate, is the only point that does not move with our constantly changing horizons. In terms of psychotherapy, this would mean encouraging people to refer to principles of life beyond their current predicament.

Jaspers encouraged a vitality and passionate way of life that was very much like that of Kierkegaard's. He believed that one should not evade anything and learn to be transparent to anything that arose in our lives, letting the transcendence of the situation shine through us, remembering that we are capable of all of this, whatever it is. In this way, through confronting my limit situations I can strengthen my 'worldview' (*Weltanschauung*), and I can allow myself to experience my 'passion for the night' (*Leidenschaft zur Nacht*), which is what breaks through every order that I have established. It is the urge that befalls one to ruin oneself in the world, in order to complete oneself in the depth of worldlessness. It is our irrational urge to darkness, to ruin and the end of all order.

This is opposed to the 'law of the day' (*Gesetz des Tages*), which orders our existence, demands clarity, consistency and loyalty, and which binds us to reason, to the One and to ourselves. This is what makes us live our lives in a way where we actualise ourselves, completing our existence on an endless road.

Making sense of contradictory forces

To understand ourselves means to discover the inner causality of the interplay of these forces. Life demands of us that we do so with eagerness and enthusiasm, no matter what the cost.

Contrary to a life either without solid substance or a life in which this substance is never affected, only the enthusiastic attitude means a life awake, a life in totality and authenticity . . . Enthusiasm is becoming oneself in the act of devoting oneself.

(Jaspers 1971: 119)

This way of life means that I hold myself in the tension between being truly independent and at the same time being surrendered to the world and transcendence. In this tension my uniqueness and individuality can come to the fore. It is only when I make decisions and commitments that I come truly into existence. In existential choices I come to myself as a gift. It is only when I live and am confronted with difficulties that I create a self out of the original givens of my body and its temperament and disposition. I can adopt myself as me only after I have created this selfhood in action. I am at first liberty and only when this encounters obstacles and constraints do I fully come into being. Constraints are a means to my being born. Limits are not reductive,

but maieutic: they give birth to me. If my liberty encounters no limits, I am nothing. Limits are the frontiers where transcendence and possibility are met. 'Man as such inclines to self-forgetfulness. He must snatch himself out of it if he is not to lose himself to the world, to habits, to thoughtless banalities, to the beaten track' (1951: 121).

One of the ways in which I snatch myself out of forgetfulness and into existence is by encountering my limits. They abound. The world is full of conflict and violence, which I have to accept. I cannot bring about universal justice, peace and harmony. Imperfection, failure and fault are also everywhere. Human existence in some ways is morbid and destructive. We fail often, and even our success in anything is always partial. Even when I do good I indirectly do evil, for what is right for one person is wrong for another. When I obtain things that are good for me, they are often arrived at on the back of evil perpetrated by others or to others. When I assert my responsibility I become proud and unthinking, my liberty often makes me evil. The only way to achieve some sort of vitality and purity is to take all this into my stride and take it upon myself to face my own limits rather than denying them. Even if it were possible to live in perfection, this would not be desirable for it would lead us to mediocrity.

We fail in the tasks of our life if we try to steer clear of imperfection and failure and end up like a spectator or a mystic, not being immersed in the everyday and not taking risks. On the other hand, we also fail if we engage blindly with life, hedonistically or idealistically just immersed in the empirical experience of being-there. The challenge is to let life appeal to us and draw us into the contradictions it consists of. We have to be ready for the 'loving struggle for Existenz'. This is something we cannot do alone. The fight to manifest ourselves is delivered together with others. We encounter others in the process of living as both adversaries and comrades, without whom our loving struggle, and thus life, would not occur at all. There is never victory nor defeat in this struggle on one side, for both win or lose jointly:

Victory is not won by my superiority but by our common achievement of manifestation. Nor does defeat indicate a lack of strength; defeat lies in evasion, in hiding, and is due to unpreparedness for the crisis of my own volition and the other's. The slightest use of force, including intellectual superiority, for instance, or the power of suggestion, brings the loving struggle to an end.

(Jaspers 1951: 213)

Loving communication

This idea of people's need for each other is a strong one in Jaspers' view. He considers communication to be the most essential existential task. Even when we relate to the world, this is a kind of communication in which we interpret

the ciphers that we see around us. When we look at our own lives, there too we see ciphers – a secret text that has to be interpreted. While there can be no definitive meaning, we need to examine the testimony available to us and live our precarious existence in the tensions thus created. This leads to us leading lives with heroic intensity.

Such lives are never lived in isolation. They are lived in the world and with others. Jaspers even talks about our relationships to the dead as vital aspects of our existence. Death he concludes is like a sieve and the essential aspects of our dead can be retained with fidelity, kept alive and communicated with.

The other is indeed a vital and positive presence in Jaspers' philosophy, in a way that is unthinkable for Husserl and his solipsistic universe, Heidegger and his insistence that we gain authenticity away from others, or Sartre and his claim that the other is our hell. Jaspers' views resonate more with the work of Martin Buber, who also enlarged the existential picture to include a positive relation to other people. Jaspers' bracing philosophy and his inspiring thoughts on what it means to be human provide a kind of metaphysical reservoir for psychotherapeutic interventions. The psychotherapist who can live life in a Jaspersian way would indeed have much wisdom and much understanding to offer to anyone struggling with the human predicament.

Contrary to a life either without solid substance or a life in which this substance is never affected, only the enthusiastic attitude means a life awake, a life in totality and authenticity . . . Enthusiasm is becoming oneself in the act of devoting oneself.

(Jaspers 1971: 119)

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)

A blueprint for living

The essence of truth reveals itself as freedom.

(Heidegger 1930, in Krell 1993: 130)

Introduction

Only an entity for which in its Being this very Being is an issue, can be afraid.

(Heidegger 1927a: 141)

The fundamental question for Heidegger was: What is the meaning of ‘Being’? Although he was a faithful pupil of Husserl for many years, he took the view that phenomenology as a scientific method risks losing track of the simple fact of being. His objective was to elucidate the notion of being and throughout his career he returned to the central mystery of there being something rather than nothing. As a pupil of Husserl, Heidegger had come to believe that human beings are the privileged place where being is manifested in a special way. The investigation of the way in which human beings are in the world is therefore the first step we need to take if we want to throw light on being itself. Indeed, we have no other or better way of finding out about Being.

Heidegger thought of human beings as the custodians of Being, and said that a human being was the shepherd of Being. It is in people that being comes to light. We are like the clearing in the forest where things can be seen in a way in which they cannot be seen in the shadow of the trees. In other words, people are special and their experience needs to be taken seriously because it can teach us things about life that cannot be learnt from any other source. Heidegger’s work is of fundamental significance to our understanding of the existential dimensions of psychotherapy, for he provides it with an alternative vision of human nature and the tasks of living. The work of Binswanger and especially that of Boss are predicated on Heidegger’s philosophy and all existentialist philosophy, as we shall see later, was inspired, one way or another by Heidegger’s work.

Heidegger had the benefit of Husserl's phenomenological method, which gave him a systematic way of looking at human existence. Much of his own inspiration otherwise comes from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, as well as from a thorough re-evaluation of the history of Western philosophy, to which he constantly returned in a critical way, especially to the work of Aristotle and Plato. He was also influenced by Scheler and Jaspers, but did not necessarily acknowledge this. In addition he was inspired by poets, most particularly Rilke and Hölderlin. His philosophy provided the basis for a new form of philosophy which in turn led to existentialism, structuralism and post-modernism. His philosophy is controversial, particularly because of his one-time political connection to National Socialism and the role he played as Rector of Freiburg University, when he failed to support colleagues in need, such as Jaspers, and was apparently quite ruthless in sacking colleagues who had a Jewish background, including his own former tutor, Husserl, to whom he denied access to the library. While it is important to wonder in what ways his objectionable politics influenced his work and to what extent they are evident in it, nevertheless his philosophical ideas contain all the ingredients for a revolutionary reappraisal of human living and have generated many new insights. His ideas undoubtedly have the potential for being destructive as well as constructive however, particularly in their rather lofty appraisal of the position of authenticity which seems reserved for the elite and also for his frequent praise for the traditional Germanic homeland (*Heimat*) country way of life that contrasts sharply with the technological world of new Western societies. Heidegger's work is usually considered to be divided between an early period where he applies systematic phenomenology and uses the language of metaphysics and a later period, where he uses more poetic language and aims for a more meditative poetic stance. He referred to this change in his emphasis as the *Kehre*, or 'turn' in his work.

Being-in-the-world

Heidegger is well known for the introduction of new concepts and in order to capture the essence of being he altered the use of a number of German terms in intricate and poetic ways that are hard enough to grasp in German and that are next to impossible to translate. The first of these is that of *Dasein*, often left untranslated, but literally meaning Being-there. It refers to existence as it is experienced by human beings. Heidegger shows immediately how one of the foremost characteristics of *Dasein* is to be in a state of being-in-the-world. The hyphens in the concept of being-in-the-world mark the idea that human being is essentially always in a world, in context and in relation and never in isolation. It is his particular way of elaborating the concept of intentionality.

This *Dasein*, this 'being there', or simply, this human being, is to be understood as an ordinary everyday phenomenon. It is also always mine and I can

exist only in my own way. This means that any theories or explanations I develop must be relevant to my day-to-day experience as I know it to be real and true for me. The test is whether it is relevant to me as I live my everyday life. I must be able to find out about being-in-the-world without reference to remote theoretical concepts. I must rediscover and illuminate what is actually there for me and what makes sense to me. At the same time I must accept that everything that I throw light on will also cast a shadow and that things will therefore remain mysterious no matter how well I elucidate them.

One of the most fundamental characteristics of Dasein is that it experiences care or rather that it is care (*Sorge*, literally: *worry or concern*) for the world, which for Heidegger means that things matter to me. Things matter because Dasein is not in isolation and cannot help but connect to, i.e. care about its world. In the same way in which I cannot think without thinking about something, I cannot live without being concerned about the world. Even if I seem not to care, this is another version of care because by rejecting something I express the fact that it matters to me enough to make the effort to discard it. Things quite plainly matter to me because they are the *sine qua non* of my own existence. I am nothing without world and it is therefore important to find out in what way this world matters to me and to what extent.

What makes things matter even more is that everything for me is finite and will end with my death, the possibility of impossibility. All of my actions, experiences, relations and thoughts are full of my lingering but silent appreciation of the constant process of change to which I am subjected and that eventually comes to its end point of completion in death. This constant state of flux that we find ourselves in makes us uncertain and reminds us of the uncertainty that is one of the ontological givens of human existence right from the start. Heidegger aimed to describe these ontological givens, the factors of human being that are necessary and without which human existence cannot be. He sharply contrasted ontological givens with the ontic, real world, concrete experiences by which I live out my ontological reality. One of the fundamental ontological givens is the *Unheimlichkeit* (literally 'not at homeness'), the unease that is with us from the outset and that can never be overcome because we are intrinsically not at home in the world because we are not solid objects but are instead a constant process of becoming. We are projected, or thrown into the world towards the project that is our death. No sooner are we alive or we are ready to die and it is only with death that our life reaches the completion and certainty it lacks at any other time. We are essentially defined by our path through time.

As soon as Heidegger's description of Dasein's existence begins, he immediately introduces the notion of temporality. This has to be the horizon against which all understanding of Being takes place, because: 'Dasein's Being finds its meaning in temporality' (Heidegger 1927a: 19).

But the way Heidegger describes this is that we are the measure of time

rather than being in time. Though we are always on the way, we are projected through time and unaware of the importance of this temporality initially.

The world that we find ourselves in

All of this is highly anxiety provoking. We are ill at ease in this always uncertain world in which we are hurled towards the end. We are moved all the time by our thrownness towards death, for we are in the throw, and we are fated to continuously move towards the completion of our project, which is essentially fulfilled only in death. But human beings are not aware of their ontological position. They get caught up in ontic, everyday struggles and forget what it means to be alive.

There is much that eludes us because we do not direct our attention to it and do not reflect upon it. Much of our living is done by default rather than by deliberation, but this makes no difference to the fact that each of us has their own life to live and that we need to decide on how to conduct our own existence. In order to do this we need to find out what there is in the world.

Heidegger addresses the complexities of human experience in great systematic detail, slowly and thoroughly. He aims to describe and explore the intricate layers-upon-layers of the mysterious everyday. He does this in such a way as to reinvest ordinary concepts with new poignancy; unfortunately, this is often achieved by use of jargon and, in doing so, mystifying the ordinary. Heidegger shows that in our everyday existence the first thing that strikes us is that we are living our life against the horizon of a world, which is a given. We are thrown into this world whether we like it or not and we are fully absorbed and taken over by it.

First, we become aware that we live in a particular environment and in this world around us we encounter certain givens in the shape of objects. We come across objects in the first instance as things that are 'ready to hand' (*Zuhanden*) – that is, they are there as artefacts and tools for us to make use of. Things like a hammer and a pen, a cup or a spoon are all available to me to use as equipment and I do so without questioning this. In order to use these objects I look after them with circumspection: I have to use them in a deliberate manner. I can also become aware of these things malfunctioning, and then they are an obstacle to my experience of the world.

This is when I may become aware that the things I relate to are always related to me in a particular fashion. They are, for instance, functional or dysfunctional, close or near. I now realise that the relation and distance between me and an object is a function of my use of it. The bus that I run for seems closer than the ground under my feet. The direction of my life is determined by what I leave behind and what I am on the way towards. By concentrating on certain things rather than on others I can make things seem closer. My intentionality, the way in which I direct my consciousness towards

the world, plays a crucial role in the way in which I constitute my world. My world is always centred around the particular place in which I find myself. I am always here, never there, in the same way in which it is always today, never yesterday or tomorrow. What is yonder cannot come near, for when it is near, the yonder is no longer yonder but near and there is a new yonder which is still over there rather than here. Because of this, the world is not a neutral place, but is laden with value in accordance with what I bring near or keep far away from me.

It is only in a secondary way that I can grasp the presence of things in the world as not related to me as tools or equipment. The reality of things that do not have special meaning to me is that of things 'present at hand' or as simply there in their own right (*Vorhanden*). There is a world full of things just lying around, waiting to be used, though not yet directly at my disposal.

The world of other people

People themselves are never simply there, present at hand, nor are they to be confused with things that are ready to hand. People are not equipment and should not be used in that way. According to Heidegger the medical approach of treating individuals as objects or tools which break down and have to be fixed, rests on an essential misunderstanding of human beings. This misunderstanding arises because the true being of people is hidden and it is therefore all too easy for us to become inauthentic and think of ourselves and others as mere objects to be manipulated.

Dasein's fundamental tendency is to turn away from himself to a self-forgetful absorption in his occupations in company with other people. Before his existence can be properly his own, Dasein has usually to wrest it back from its lostness to the world.

(King 2001: 41)

But if we are to stand a chance at wresting our existence away from this lostness, it is important to realise that we are not just in a world of things, but also in a world with other people. We are not alone in the world: the world of Dasein is a with-world, in which we are bound up with others, or – as Heidegger puts it – fallen with others (*Verfallen*). Being human is always being with others, and we care about others in spite of ourselves; we have to fit in with them and try to please them. In contradistinction to Nietzsche's or Kierkegaard's emphasis on individuality, for Heidegger our relationship to others is to be seen in the context of our basic insufficiency in ourselves as separate entities, at least at the outset. We live as if we are a They-Self, a representation of an anonymous other (*Das Man*), the One or the Nobody who dictates how we ought to live.

We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they (man) take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as they see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the ‘great mass’ as they shrink back; we find shocking what they find shocking. The ‘they’, which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribe the kind of Being of everydayness.

(Heidegger 1927a: 127)

Our fundamental going out of ourselves to the world in a movement of ‘care’ applies just as much to the presence of others as to the presence of objects. Dasein is essentially ‘being-with’ (*Mitsein*) (Heidegger 1927a: 114).

As the others in my world are themselves human beings, my relationship to these others takes on a new and different quality. Our fundamental ‘care’ (*Sorge*) for the world is expressed through ‘concern’ (*Besorgen*) for objects, but as ‘solicitude’ (*Fürsorge*) for others. We have to learn to hone our relational capacity. Though we may start out with a kind of indifference towards others, through the mode of solicitude, we learn to be considerate and forbearing towards others, in the same way in which we learnt circumspection through care and breakdown in the physical world.

The existence of others evokes in us a concern for what they are and for the extent to which we differ from them. Heidegger considers that we form our judgement of what others are through what they do (*was sie betreiben*).

In one’s concern with what one has taken a hold of, whether with, for, or against the Others, there is constant care as to the way one differs from them, whether that difference is merely one that is to be evened out, whether one’s own Dasein has lagged behind the Others and wants to catch up in relationship to them, or whether one’s Dasein already has some priority over them and sets out to keep them suppressed.

(Heidegger 1927a: 126)

Heidegger particularly points out the dangers of Dasein being absorbed in the anonymous ‘They’, not only at the outset, but over and over again. This is very similar to Kierkegaard’s notion of the ‘Crowd’, and Nietzsche’s notion of the ‘Herd’ – the mass of others that terrorises and oppresses us. The ‘Nobody’ or the ‘One’ (*Das Man*) exercises a kind of terrorism over the individual and stops us from finding ourselves and each other.

Our being with others first comes to our attention when we find ourselves fallen in with others, taken over by them, at their mercy. Our solicitude is then experienced in a negative fashion. We may, for instance, find ourselves against the other or we may distance the other in a movement of indifference. Similarly, once we do begin to take care of others, our solicitude can manifest in different ways. We may care so much for these others that we take over from them and take away their care for themselves. Heidegger refers to this as

leaping in for the other (*einspringen*). When we leap in for others we rob them of themselves and of their openness to the world.

A better way of caring for the other is to address ourselves to the other as a person and to liberate the other by showing him how he can retrieve his own care for the world. This Heidegger refers to as leaping ahead of the other (*fürspringen*), which is a way of giving the other his care back in an authentic manner. It is clearly the latter that is required of the psychotherapist. Monitoring the ways in which we may find ourselves leaping in for others is a crucial bit of self-supervision we have to be capable of in order to do existential psychotherapy. On the other hand learning to jump ahead of the other in order to help them retrieve a sense of the overall perspective of their lives and of reality is exactly where existential psychotherapy is at.

Authenticity

It is Heidegger's view that we remain inauthentic, a 'They-self' (*das Man-selbst*) as long as we relate to the They in this original anonymous fashion. This is almost identical to Buber's positing of the original relational word 'I-It', through which I keep myself as an object at the same time as reducing the other to one. For both authors we define ourselves as partial and in falsehood as long as we relate to the world of others in this spirit of I-It or inauthenticity. We can retrieve ourselves out of this state, however, not by rejecting the other, but by modifying our relationship to the other. For Buber, this occurs through our occasionally becoming available for an I-Thou mode of relating in which we posit both the other's and our own fullness and truth (Buber 1923). For Heidegger, there is a similar way forward, not based upon a retreat away from others, but rather through an understanding of what the challenge of being with others is really about:

Authentic Being-one's-Self does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition that has been detached from the 'they'; it is rather an existential modification of the 'they' – of the 'they' as an essential existentiale.

(Heidegger 1927a: 168)

Heidegger highlighted the human struggle to become authentic as a struggle to better understand our inevitable connections to the world of things and people. We have a tendency to let ourselves fall into mediocrity and average-ness, living our lives like They would. This fallenness with others makes us inauthentic and incapable of being fully and truly human. The only way to stop letting the anonymous One dictate to us is to reclaim our authentic being by becoming transparent to our Being-towards-Death. Our temporality and thus our mortality is the ultimate truth of our being. The key to becoming authentic is to face our own death and with it our own limitations. In the

process of opening ourselves to this reality we find ourselves most truly. Heidegger says: 'Impassioned freedom towards death [is] a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the "they" and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious' (1927a: 266). Being anxious because of our acute awareness of our human limitations and mortality is therefore the key to authenticity and with it the key to true human existence, i.e. standing out.

But none of this is simple. Heidegger's fundamental ontology as detailed in *Being and Time* while emphasising Dasein's temporal nature and its relationship to death, also describes numerous other concepts, including the different aspects of the central concept of Care (*Sorge*) and its basic structures of thrownness (*Geworfenheit*), falling (*Verfallenheit*) and existence (*Existenz*). It goes on to discuss the existentials or existentialia, which are the basic ways of being, of disposition (*Befindlichkeit*), in particular that of anxiety (*Angst*), understanding (*Verstehen*) and discourse (*Rede*). Each of these are looked at in further detail and the distinction between Heidegger's views on inauthenticity (*Uneigentlichkeit*), actually meaning something much more like unreal or disowned existence and authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) actually meaning owned, or real existence are explored, with a central focus on fallenness and its manifestations of idle talk (*Gerede*), curiosity (*Neugier*), ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*) and self-forgetting (*Selbstvergessen*).

Heidegger also has much to say about how inauthenticity is overcome and the notion of truth (*Wahrheit*) or *aletheia* in Greek, literally meaning uncoveredness, anxiety (*Angst*), call of conscience (*Gewissenruf*) and resoluteness (*Entschluss*) are studied in some detail. This leads to a description of authentic ways of being in a situation and being-towards-death (*Sein zum Tode*). This hinges around the experience of the moment of vision (*Augenblick*), which is the brief moment, the blink of an eye in which we oversee our lives, in all three of the ecstasies, or ways in which we stand out in time, i.e. past, present and future. Then it becomes possible for us to genuinely recollect and repeat the past (*Wiederholung*) which leads us to a Nietzschean sense of the return of the eternal, but a return that we very much make happen ourselves through our consciousness of our being in all its reality and all its potential and possibility, including that of the possibility of impossibility and thus of death.

Heidegger's war on inauthentic being turns out to be mitigated by his understanding that we need both disowned and owned ways of being, rather like Buber's recognition for the need of both I-It and I-Thou relating. His descriptions of inauthenticity and forgetting show untruth to be a matter of alienation (*Entfremdung*) and closing off (*Verschliessen*) rather than a matter of deceit or self-deception.

It can be argued that Heidegger's objective for Dasein is to have vision, which

means to be capable of authentic, owned and engaged ways of existing as well as of inauthentic, disowned and disengaged ways of existing. In final analysis the challenge of human existence for Heidegger is about being true to life rather than being true to self. Being true to life is inevitably about the equiprimordiality, i.e. the equal importance and equality of both inauthentic and authentic ways of being. To be loyal to existence therefore involves increasing transparency and openness to different modes of being. But it is also crucial to remember as Mulhall (1996: 83) points out, that Dasein's true existential medium is not actuality but possibility. Heidegger himself says: 'Higher than actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] stands possibility [*Möglichkeit*]' (Heidegger 1927a: 38).

This has important implications for how we live our lives. Rather than seeking security and solidity, if we aim for our project we stand a better chance of living for real. But Heidegger never drew such conclusions, for he refused to consider that there was a moral and ethical dimension to his work. His work, as far as he was concerned, was purely ontological and spoke merely of the overall conditions of human existence. This makes his ideas tricky to apply to counselling and psychotherapy and its focus on the ontic, real life day to day issues that clients are dealing with. Interestingly in the Zollikon seminars (see Boss 1987), which were yearly seminars with Boss and his psychiatrist trainees, in Switzerland, Heidegger demonstrates how psychotherapists can be made to stop thinking about ontic problems and remind themselves of the underlying ontological dimension of the client's world instead. Pure Heideggerian therapy or Daseinsanalysis is therefore a project of staying in silence and often of asking ontological questions in order to elucidate the greater philosophical realities that have been forgotten or that the person has become alienated from. It is not always possible to do so when clients have direct and immediate ontic preoccupations and most existential therapists engage with the ontic as much as with the ontological. Heidegger's thinking serves to remind us of the challenge of incessantly returning to the fundamentals and thus achieve therapeutic clarity about human existence at all levels.

The specialness of being human

All of this is complex and essentially many of the descriptions Heidegger gives are about the structures of care that determine human existence. They take place at different levels.

We can represent some of Heidegger's ontology in Being and Time in a diagram (see Figure 5.1).

We must remember though that at the same time Dasein experiences all of these structures of care through the various modalities of the existentialia of disposition, understanding and discourse. These are, as it were, the links between the ontological givens and the ontic realities that we experience.

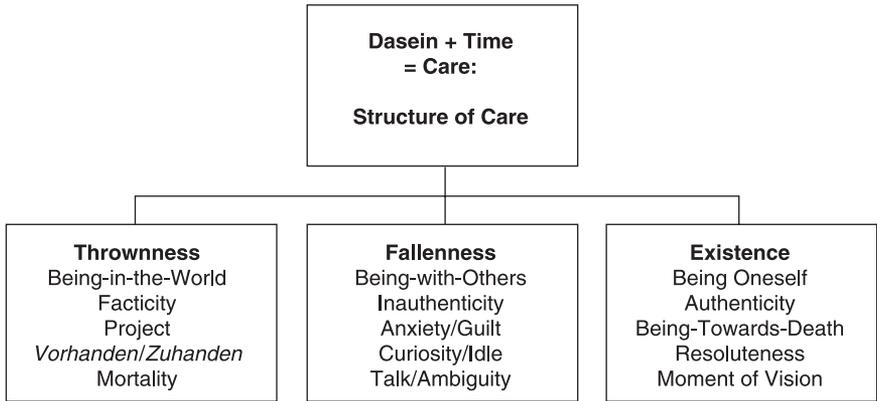


Figure 5.1 Heidegger's ontological structure of Care.

These given capacities or existentialia are as follows:

- 1 That besides living in time and with care, we always find ourselves in a particular state of mind (*Befindlichkeit*) so that we are disposed to the world in a particular way. The expression of this in an ontic fashion is that we are always in a particular mood (*Stimmung*) and our moods reveal what we are and how we are disposed in a more fundamental way than anything else can. These frames of mind inevitably reveal our being as well as the world in a particular modality, but for the most part we evade this being and we ignore what is revealed in our moods. In this way we end up as victims of our own moods. It is impossible to overcome a mood other than by replacing it with another mood. And mood cannot be avoided all together, for it is rather like the weather: there is always some mood. It is however possible to gain a certain insight into and mastery over our moods through paying attention to them and letting them reveal what we are about until we understand them and our own disposition.
- 2 Our ability to understand the world is the second essential characteristic of our being in the world. We always understand (*Verstehen*) the world in a certain way and so take position in the world. We do this pre-reflectively and inevitably, but can also do so through reflection and self-reflection. Heidegger makes a clear distinction between our reason (*Vernunft*) and our understanding (*Verstand*). Understanding is our ability to grasp the possibilities that we have (or do not have) for the future. It is dependent upon a certain openness towards what is. It requires us to project ourselves towards our future even though we do not at first know what to expect. This projective or forward understanding is called vision (*Sicht*) and it can be implemented in various ways and at different levels.

I use vision around me (*Umsicht*), or circumspection, towards the ready to hand. I use backwards vision (*Rücksicht*), or considerateness, towards other people, and through-vision (*Durchsicht*), or transparency towards myself. Intuition and thinking are both derivatives of understanding and they can be used to interpret our lived experience. It is through the use of our understanding that we make things meaningful to ourselves and it is therefore an important capacity to develop.

- 3 Our third existential ability is that of grasping situations by speech, or rather through the act of discourse (*Rede*), which allows us to make sense of the world and of ourselves in a direct and concrete manner. We articulate our being through discourse, and language is only one aspect of such discourse that can be had in many different ways (signs, gestures, images, symbols). Keeping silent can be the most powerful way of having discourse and it is a form of discourse much favoured by Heidegger. He contrasts discourse (*Rede*) to idle talk (*Gerede*). The latter is the kind of talk that is the rule in the realm of the They. Everyday Dasein is characterised by manifestations of such idle talk in the form of chatter and curiosity, which is what drives me to want to prattle about whatever is new without taking any real notice of the world I am in. The curiosity that Heidegger refers to here is that of nosiness rather than that of original philosophical wonder. It is ambiguity that rules the chatter of everyday life when we are absorbed by the anonymous nature of the other and find ourselves alienated from ourselves and being. Nothing at that time is truly open, everything is hidden and distant. I am aloof from myself and my possibilities for revealing life as it is.

The significance of death

Everydayness is precisely that Being which is ‘between’ birth and death. And if existence is definitive for Dasein’s Being and if its essence is constituted in part by potentiality-for-Being, then, as long as Dasein exists, it must, in each case, as such a potentiality, not yet be something.

(Heidegger 1927a: 233)

Human beings are defined by their relationship to their end, in death. As I dwell among the everyday, sooner or later I become alarmed at my state of alienation and poverty of spirit. I become vaguely aware of not being at home, of being ill-at-ease, uncomfortable (*Unheimlich*). It is then that I experience anxiety. It is this anxiety that calls me back to myself and that unifies the contradictions and ambiguities in my world. Anxiety reveals to me what is really there. It shows me my freedom, the possibility of my nonbeing, and it reminds me of how I stand alone. I then become aware of my caring. I care because I am free, because I am nothing, because everything changes. Things matter to me in a certain way because in myself I am nothing. In

essence, it is through anxiety that I become aware of my being in time. Anxiety is my resonance with the flux of things, my awareness that as long as I am alive I shall never be complete or in possession of myself or anything else.

Only when I am dead do I finally possess my totality, but I am no longer there to possess it. Death is the ultimate fulfilment. But most people miss the opportunity to be fulfilled by death because they never properly live towards it and, in avoiding it, make it come upon them unprepared. We flee from death through all the everyday things that we do and we fail to notice that death is our greatest potential.

We need to learn to release ourselves from our efforts to forget what is of most importance to us. If we let our conscience call us out of the everyday we shall feel the pangs of guilt, which is existential guilt, an indication of the ways in which we fall short of our destiny. This guilt is nothing to do with the narrow experience of not living up to someone else's expectations or to one's ordinary responsibilities. It is a fundamental underlying call of our conscience which exposes our vulnerability and our incompleteness. We must let ourselves hear the call of our conscience for it is a manifestation of our care for ourselves. It is only in facing this guilt authentically with our entire being that we can become resolute in the face of death and learn to live in time.

Our particular relationship to the world through our state of mind, our understanding, or our discourse about our situations, indicates a particular orientation and project. The way in which we come to the world and approach our situation dictates a particular outcome, a particular line forward into the future. Heidegger refers to this way of our limiting ourselves and committing ourselves to the world as our project (*Entwurf*). Our attunement to the world (*Stimmung*) sets a certain atmosphere, a certain tonality to the universe that we are co-creating. In a way, we are like the composers of a symphony, who can alter the face of the earth by the subtle modulation of tone that suddenly conjures out of nothingness a new world, a new melody, a different tone.

Again, Heidegger's insight is fresh and revolutionary – he renders the human capacity for having an effect on the world we live in more subtle and more complete. Like the stage director, he is aware that human tragedy or comedy can be altered considerably and significantly by a different lighting or a different tone to the music or the words. We may act out the same old plays, but we are more powerful than we realise in effecting a total change of scenery and impact of the play. The ontic may be given, but when we get in touch with the bottom line of the ontological this frees us to relate to the ontic in different modalities.

As we live in time we become capable of ecstasy, or a standing outside of the world. The three ways in which we can stand outside are through our past, present and future. Authentic Dasein is always ahead of itself, it always already has been or is not yet: it never is just so, but it stands forever outside of itself. We work with the legacy of the past (*Erbe*), the fate that determines the present (*Schicksal*) and the destiny that opens up our future (*Geschick*).

Living is a masterly interweaving of all these complex elements and our life, if we take it seriously, can be a work of art that is ours for the making.

Heidegger's philosophy can give rise to an unjustified optimism, and it could be interpreted as the foundation of an enthusiastic and rather exclusive humanism which is not intended for the masses who are lost in inauthentic living. Indeed, some of the human potential movement is based on simplistic interpretations of Heideggerian and Sartrean notions taken to their most absurd degree of self-assertiveness and voluntarism. Heidegger did not intend such a humanistic stance and he continuously pointed out that people were merely channels of being. His account of our mortality, and the need to come to grips with it, was a concrete counterbalance to any idealistic notions of freedom and choice.

When Heidegger coined the notion of the resolute attitude in the face of death, he again did not describe a self-assertive bravado, but rather a calm and composed certainty that comes from facing up to reality. That reality includes the sobering fact that we exist somewhere between birth and death. Our existence is never complete until we die and when we die we immediately cease to be complete. We are essentially a process of historicity, of creating and letting go.

According to Heidegger, death is one element of this continuous process of transformation, rather than merely the end of it. As long as we consider death as something in the distant future, we remain estranged from our fundamental relatedness to death, our embodiment of death. We need to learn to accept death as the most basic of our possibilities, for it is in fact our most certain and central potential. Facing up to the inevitability of my own annihilation is the most freeing of acts. I liberate myself only in as far as I can achieve an impassioned freedom towards death (Heidegger 1927a: 311).

The centrality of anxiety and guilt

Far from this being intended as a morbid activity, Heidegger advocates it, together with a new resonance with the anxiety that this evokes in us as the beginning of a new sensitivity to the call of conscience.

It could easily be argued that Heidegger's introduction of the term *Gelassenheit* (letting be) in his later work was a mature working out in greater detail of his original concept of anticipatory resoluteness towards death. The concept of letting be, which became so central to his work, shows up as early as 1935 in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, where he shows that we cannot avoid being plunged into nothingness and be open to it (Heidegger 1935). Both the concepts of resolution and releasement, or letting be, are about disclosing existence more effectively; in essence, both are about opening ourselves up to what is already there. Both call us to being the tuner which receives the radio waves of life more completely. This is what it means to aim for one's ownmost potential for being. However, in the early Heidegger such tuning in is

achieved by a supreme effort, whereas in the later Heidegger it is achieved by letting things be as they are.

Heideggerian therapy then requires therapists to show their clients how to dare stand steady in the face of their distress and doubt, letting it reveal the anxiety and nothingness, the awareness of which will redeem them, in first instance. Such resolute strength to hold on to what is there and what makes us anxious is not about fatalism or morbidity, but wholeheartedly about life.

Anxiety in the face of death must not be confused with fear in the face of one's demise. This anxiety is not an accidental or random mood of 'weakness' in some individual; but as a basic state-of-mind of Dasein, it amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being towards its end.

(Heidegger 1927a: 251)

To welcome anxiety as an indicator of our willingness to be braced by the truth of the finality of our destiny represents a revolutionary turn-about for psychotherapy. Psychotherapeutic theory often dismisses anxiety as a sign of pathology. To state quite categorically that it is the sine qua non of authentic living means a reversal of therapeutic theory. Indeed, it puts into question the very fact that therapy should be about cure or healing; it shows therapy to be about facing up bravely to the wounds of living.

Indeed in his later work, Heidegger would encourage the therapist to open up the clear space that not only would allow anxiety to emerge, but also would make room for clear thinking in which Being itself would be revealed, so that we could, with our clients, recover truth and the space to region towards Being.

The original Greek root of the word therapy is the verb *therapeuo*, which means 'to serve'. The therapist can thus be seen as the servant of the process of life, which asserts itself through a client's anxious, and often still tentative, confrontation with the facts of life. The therapist, in order to serve life, must help the client to be equal to this challenge, instead of allowing the person to bury the truth.

The therapist in this scheme of things would become the person who embodies the call of conscience, or rather the facilitator of the client's call of conscience, which clearly needs to come from the client's own innermost potentiality-for-being, but which could be coaxed along by a judicious play upon the existentialia. The therapist would welcome a client's anxiety as well as the client's existential guilt, for they are the very source of a person's rediscovery of his or her true possibilities and challenges. The therapist would be the one who would seek to unveil what is there, instead of covering it up with theoretical concepts and ideas about pathology and faulty human

development. The person develops in his or her own time and what is there at any one time is enough to find one's way with in the world. What we need to do is expose our being, instead of running scared and hiding away. *Aletheia*, or truth, literally the unhidden, is about uncovering, revealing, what is there and psychotherapists must be servants of truth, allowing their clients to come home to themselves in a letting be (*Gelassenheit*) of what is.

These themes become intensified in Heidegger's later work, where he puts such concepts as thinking or language under the microscope. For instance, one useful distinction he makes in his *Discourse on Thinking* (1966) is that between calculative and meditative thinking. Both are necessary, but in our culture we have a tendency to confuse thinking with calculative thinking, which is the ordinary rational type of thinking we draw on most of the time.

Calculative thinking computes. It computes ever new, ever more promising and, at the same time, more economical possibilities. Calculative thinking races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is.

(Heidegger 1966: 46)

Mere meditative thinking loses touch, says Heidegger, and it is also important to remember that meditative thinking is not high-brow. It escapes us because it is a craft that we have forgotten about by becoming too expert at calculative thinking, yet it is an essential human ability that we can retrieve. People flee from meditative thinking as they let themselves be absorbed by technology and a fast-moving world. Because of this, we have actually forgotten what thinking is and can be. The main problem in the world is that people still do not know how to think properly. We need to take stock and rediscover the thinking that is thanking, a receiving of all there is in the world. 'Original thanking is the thanks owed for being. That thanks alone gives rise to thinking of the kind we know as retribution and reward in the good and bad sense' (Heidegger 1966: 141).

According to Heidegger, one of the problems is that we have lost track of our roots, our belonging, our homeland. We are all out there, driven out of ourselves through modern commodities such as radio and television into a world that is of our own making. The autochthony of humans – or our ability to be real and at home – is at threat, yet the technology that alienates us makes us feel uneasy and uncomfortable (*Unheimlich*), and as we have seen earlier this provokes anxiety. Anxiety in turn may bring us back to ourselves. Should we therefore try to quieten the anxieties that are evoked in our clients by their experiences of meaninglessness existence? Or should we rather, as Heidegger indicates, let their anxieties flourish, so that they can hear the call of their conscience and seek to come home to themselves?

According to Heidegger we need to use the unique opportunity of a person's being ill at ease in the world to help them come to a new vision. In his later work Heidegger also develops the concept of *Ereignis*, which means literally happening or event, but also means renewal of ownership. While in *Being and Time* it was generally used to indicate something that would simply happen to me, now it becomes clear that the happening is never neutral. Out of it our motivation is generated, for the event of reowning the world, changes the way we look at everything and this renewal colours all further world experience. *Ereignis* is an event that is of monumental importance, as opposed to *Geschehnis*, which is the mere occurrence of a historical event. *Ereignis* is also contrasted with *Begebenheit*, which is a dramatic, but superficial, public event. *Ereignis* is a transformative experience in which the meaning of being is altered. To be open to such events is the new definition of being truly and fully human. This is no longer just a matter for the individual either, for it is about changing the way in which humanity dwells in the world. 'Being as Er-eignis. The Er-eignung makes man the property [Eigentum, literally, 'owndom'] of being . . . Property is belongingness to the ER-eignung and this is being' (Heidegger 1987: 263).

Thus with the new meaning of *Ereignis* we no longer seek to stand out of the world and assert our own authenticity and affirm our being, but rather we seek to belong to Being and let ourselves be in *Gelassenheit*, a state of surrender in which we give up on *self* assertion and become *life* asserting instead, as we let ourselves be owned by being. With the possibility of *Ereignis* the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity becomes redundant, since it is surpassed by an overarching power of insight into the human condition as we let ourselves belong to Being once more. What matters is no longer whether we are true to ourselves and our ownmost-potentiality-for-being, but rather whether we are true to Being itself. We need to become the shepherds of Being and look after it.

In releasement we become what we already are, but not in the way of resolute, voluntaristic being authentic, but rather as recognition of our necessity to be just what we are. We now have to simply make way for what being can bring us. Our being in the world is seen as interplay of the forces of the fourfold (Heidegger 1954, 1957). As various commentators have pointed out, for instance Henry (1969, 1987), Grieder (1988) and Haar (1993), Dasein's task now becomes that of letting *Wesen*, i.e. essence, manifest.

Now World is the interplay of the Fourfold: Earth, Heavens, Divines and Mortals. The ways of disclosure, i.e. the Making-way and Speaking of Essence, are correspondingly interpreted as ways of interplay of the Four.

(Grieder 1988: 80)

We may be in a world, but that world is no more than a fourfold manifestation of Being. Being is now all that matters. Such a shift in ontology was always promised in Heidegger's work, but it is only in his statement of the concepts of *Gelassenheit* and *Ereignis* and their interplay with the fourfold that we can see how human beings are to live in the fullness of Being. Perhaps though such purity of Being is accessible only if one is willing to learn to live as a true philosopher. It means living the life of the ontological rather than of the ontic. Clearly this may be one step too far for some, since most clients in psychotherapy are not after such a sea-change shift in awareness. Such insight and transformation can however be achieved through philosophical meditative thinking and it is a worthy goal that surpasses most other therapeutic projects. Perhaps this is best formulated as teaching people how to be fully present. Indeed, being present, for Heidegger in the Zollikon seminars, is the definition of ethics. 'To be subject to the claim that presence makes is the greatest claim that a human being makes; it is what "ethics" is'. (Heidegger 1987: 273).

The therapist's presence demonstrates to the client how it is possible to be fully present to Being. It may sound simple but it is the hardest thing to realise in practice.

It means to find back our radical freedom that has been lost, both for ourselves and for our clients. If we are prepared to release ourselves towards Being rather than affirm our freedom and own it, we may find that freedom was there all along and that we are unable to lose it, since we are possessed by freedom rather than the other way around. 'Freedom is not a property [*Eigenschaft*: characteristic] of man; man is the property [*Eigentum*: possession] of freedom' (Heidegger 1971: 11/9).

In reorientating ourselves to this radical freedom the experience of what Heidegger calls *Zeitraum*: space/time, becomes available to us and we can play with the elbow room (*Spielraum*, literally playspace) that is now there for us to enjoy. At this moment we will find a home anywhere and everywhere, rather than suffering a continuous sense of homelessness. Once we belong to Being, we are no longer forlorn.

Martin Buber (1878–1965)

Human relations reconsidered

All actual life is encounter.

(Buber 1923: 62)

Introduction

Martin Buber was a Jewish existential philosopher and theologian who was born in Vienna and worked in Germany and Israel for most of his life. He was Professor of the Philosophy of Jewish Religion and Ethics at Frankfurt University, and fled to Palestine in 1938, where he was appointed Professor of Sociology of Religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Buber's philosophy reflects the Jewish movement of Hassidism very strongly and this religion of sanctification of everyday tensions and joys can be seen clearly in all his writings. He is a mystic who seeks union not just in union with the divine but primarily through human relating.

Buber is best known for his introduction of the distinction between two basic forms of human relating: the I-Thou and I-It relationships. However, these notions are often misunderstood. For Buber there is no 'I' in isolation: whenever I say 'I', it is in relation to either an It or a Thou. Therefore I-It and I-Thou are basic concepts, fundamental or basic words, as Buber calls them.

Basic words are spoken with one's being. When one says You, the I of the word pair I-You is said too. The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being. The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being.

(Buber 1923: 54)

We are so intrinsically connected to the world and persons in it that we generate a different sense of self in accordance with the way in which we encounter these things and people. We make ourselves into a different I when we relate to the world as an object than when we relate to the world as a true and whole other. 'There is no I as such but only the I of the basic word I-You

and the I of the basic word I-It. When a man says I, he means one or the other' (Buber 1923: 54).

As soon as I relate to something or somebody, I approach the relationship in one of two ways and in the process I transform myself, or rather, I create myself in one of those two ways as well. The I-It relationship is the sign of natural separation, the I-Thou relationship is that of natural binding. In the same way, the I in an I-It relationship becomes isolated and objective, whereas the I of the I-Thou relationship becomes a person and subjective. I cannot live without the I-It but without the I-Thou I am not fully human.

Complementarity of I-It and I-Thou

Buber recounts how he discovered the difference between I-It and I-Thou relationships when he was 11 years of age and used to spend his summers in the countryside, at his grandparents' estate, where he whiled away many hours in the stables. There was a dapple-grey horse that he had a special relationship with and who responded to his touch in a particularly vibrant manner.

When I stroked the mighty mane, sometimes marvellously smooth-combed, at other times just as astonishingly wild, and felt the life beneath my hand, it was as though the element of vitality itself bordered on my skin, something that was not I, was certainly not akin to me, palpably the other, not just another, really the Other itself; and yet it let me approach, confided itself to me, placed itself elementally in the relation of I and Thou with me.

(Buber 1929: 23)

Buber discovered that the special and magically responsive relationship between himself and the horse was brutally broken the day he began to be self-conscious about his stroking of the horse, treating it as a fun experience, instead of immersing himself in it as he had done previously. 'The game went on as before, but something had changed, it was no longer the same thing' (1929: 23).

The secret of the I-Thou relationship is to give oneself fully over to the experience of the meeting with a preparedness to meet the other. For Buber the I-Thou relationship is ultimately that of our relationship to God, or rather to the eternal Thou, the absolute other. When I approach the other as a Thou, I approach with my whole being and I search for the other's whole being. When I approach the other as an It, I approach with part of myself and I address myself to only an aspect of the other and therefore also to only one aspect of myself. When I am in an I-It mode, I observe and analyse the other or the world and thus myself. When I am in I-Thou mode I encounter the world or the other and with it I open the possibility of encountering myself. I-It relating refers to the past, I-Thou relating to the present.

Buber accepts that both I-It and I-Thou modes of relating are necessary, but he clearly considers I-Thou relating to be superior, although he fully acknowledges that I-Thou relating is feasible only on occasion. ‘And in all the seriousness of truth, listen: without It a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human’ (Buber 1929: 85).

The fact is that we need the world of past events and objects in order to organise and make sense of the world. In I-It relating we can take control of the universe and ourselves, but in I-Thou relating we come back to the event of relating itself and we become whole again and life itself becomes possible again.

Dialogue

In later work Buber developed his ideas in more detail and he particularly expanded his observations on what happens in a true human relationship. He spoke of ‘*das Zwischenmenschlichen*’ or the interhuman space that we co-create in a relationship when true communication takes place. It is a space that we create and share and that forms the in-between where both partners in a dialogue communicate and are changed by the communication. Eventually he began applying his theory to psychotherapy, but he felt that it was the quality of communication that would heal and took the view that therapeutic technique would only create obstacles to true, deep and real communication.

There was an interesting exchange between Carl Rogers and Martin Buber (Rogers 1960; Deurzen and Kenward 2005) that illustrates the originality and far-reaching nature of Buber’s views, which go well beyond the usual humanistic notion that I-Thou relationships are relationships where we are attentive, empathic, congruent and positively regarding of the other. For Buber there can be no real dialogue unless I allow myself to be called out of myself by the other and do not remain reserved, hiding behind the therapist’s cool and collected manner. He undoubtedly influenced Rogers and they agreed wholeheartedly that it is the genuine, honest and real quality of meeting another that makes the difference. It is evident that person-centred therapy aims for a similar kind of therapeutic relationship as a Buberian existential approach and that there is compatibility between existential and person-centred objectives in general.

What we need to do in order to become truly available for real dialogue then is to enter into the relationship in a wholehearted and potently personal manner. Buber tells us how to become available to the other in this way:

He releases in himself a reserve over which only he himself has power. Unreservedly communication streams from him, and the silence bears it to his neighbour – no more knowing is needed. Where unreserve has ruled, even wordlessly, between men, the word of dialogue has happened sacramentally.

(Buber 1929: 3–4)

What happens in the process of releasing one's reserve is that one becomes available for communion instead of just for communication. This is not so much about talking about oneself as about stopping to pretend that one is something specific. We have to open ourselves up to the shared humanity existing between ourselves and the other:

Each must expose himself wholly, in a real way, in his humanly unavoidable partiality and thereby experience himself in a real way as limited by the other, so that the two suffer together the destiny of our conditioned nature and meet one another in it.

(Buber 1929: 5)

This raises interesting questions for psychotherapy, as it suggests the need for a considerable level of mutuality between therapist and client and much greater openness and resonance than is commonly understood to be desirable. There is little doubt that such union is safe only if the therapist is accomplished, experienced and fully aware of the responsibility of such intimacy.

But of course there is equal danger and responsibility in not making oneself fully available in this way. Buber learnt the hard way that it is possible to be unavailable and unquestioned by a relationship while one thinks that one is listening and responding to the best of one's abilities with attention and kindness. His own theories were deeply inspired by his life. He tells us how he once met a stranger who came to ask him for advice in making a significant decision for the future. Buber related to the man fairly casually and discovered much later that the man decided to go to war because of this meeting. The man was killed in the war and Buber knew that he carried some responsibility for this event. He had not heeded the true call on himself during his conversation with this man; he had not made himself available to the force of the quandary that this man was in – he had treated him in an I-It fashion. We need to learn to dare to be receptive to the other. When I am truly receptive it is as if the other 'says something to me – addresses something to me, speaks something that enters my own life' (1929: 5).

It is only if I allow myself to be addressed and become drawn into the in-between that is generated between me and you in a dialogue that something new occurs and that the world comes to life. It is by no means only with other people that I can have this experience: the same occurs too when I allow the world of objects to address me and call me out of myself.

It could begin with something customary, with consideration of some familiar object, but which then became unexpectedly mysterious and uncanny, finally highlighting a way into the lightning pierced darkness of the mystery itself.

(Buber 1929: 13)

Buber did not fit directly into the existential philosophical tradition, but his work on the dialogic relationship is a beacon of light in the exploration of the therapeutic relationship. It has the same intensity and inspirational quality that characterises other existential inquiries and is fundamentally important to the definition of existentially based therapeutic interaction and the quality of presence and dialogue that this demands.

Max Scheler (1874–1928)

The human heart and intersubjectivity

It belongs to the essence of the person to exist and to live solely in the execution of intentional acts.

(Scheler 1973: 387)

Max Scheler was one of the best known German philosophers at the beginning of the twentieth century, but somehow his influence has not yet been felt very strongly in English speaking countries. He was a flamboyant and interesting character whose father was Lutheran, while his mother was orthodox Jewish and who himself converted to Catholicism. He was a phenomenologist who had been taught by Rudolf Eucken and who was also inspired by the work of Henri Bergson in France and by the life philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), which preceded phenomenology as a method for understanding the interconnections between all human sciences. It was Dilthey's insistence on the need to distinguish between natural and human sciences that led to the idea that in the human sciences a different method was required than in the natural sciences. It was Dilthey who first spoke of the need for description in the human sciences. This fuelled Scheler's understanding of human relations, which like Dilthey before him, he found to be inherently connective and meaningful. According to Dilthey we did not need empathy, because all human beings were fundamentally in accord with each other, as we are all essentially intersubjectively connected and have the same understanding of human needs, desires, fears and objectives. Max Ferdinand Scheler agreed with this perspective and based much of his thinking on these ideas.

When he was a teacher at the University of Jena, he became acquainted with Husserl and became increasingly influenced by phenomenology. He borrowed Husserl's idea of the capacity of intuition to directly grasp essences. He also espoused his view that all things are united through human consciousness. But Scheler focused more on human experience per se than Husserl did and later on also on metaphysics. He did not accept the idea of the transcendental ego, nor of Husserl's pure consciousness or Kant's pure reason. Instead he believed that it was the human heart, as the seat of love that

held the key to the mystery of human existence. He was unique in taking the emotional substratum of all human experience seriously and his theories related to religious and ethical matters as well as to personal, social and historical ones. His writing is also quite personal in nature and he described his own ethics as 'personalist'. He argued that in order to do science we need first to be capable of dealing with essences and in order to do this we have to achieve a certain level of personal ascetism, lest our vision be blocked by the wrong kind of motivations and assumptions. Love and reason have to be brought together in order to make sense of the world, for far from these being contradictory principles they belong together. His work on *The Nature of Sympathy* (1926) showed how we can achieve a harmonious way of living with nature and other people if we are willing to see what brings us all together and makes us belong in one framework of reality, to which we all contribute. His book *On the Eternal in Man* (1921) attempted to find the principles that define human beings beyond the symbols used by different cultures and scientific discourse. He argued that what we need to do is to desymbolise the world in order to make it deeply meaningful again. He spoke of a time of de-spiritualisation in which we need to learn to reconnect to our capacity for radical honesty in order to work with what he called 'our living intuition'.

Scheler, when in Munich, also worked with Theodor Lipps, Dietrich von Hildebrand and Alexander Pfänder, all renowned phenomenologists. But he thought phenomenology too scientifically minded and rational. He took the view that Husserl's idea of intuition was too cognitive and that human intuition is primordially based in our felt sense, our feeling and our sense of the spiritual. He was more interested in moral and ethical issues. His book on *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values* (1973) was very well known. In it he argued that we needed to go beyond understanding the human mind in an abstract way and address the whole person instead. It is the individual who has the task of answering the crucial question of how to live and this is a challenge for which we need to prepare ourselves by purifying our intentional acts which relate and connect us to the kind of world we create. He emphasised the importance of human values and argued that values are arranged like colours in a spectrum and that we respond to them intuitively as we do to colour. This is an idea that Jaspers propounded as well.

According to Scheler there were five layers of values, all of which represent different modalities of loving. He called it the *ordro amoris* (the order of love), which is organised as follows:

- 1 *Sensory values*, which appeal to our immediate sensory experiences, drawing us in through appetite or repelling us through disgust, these are the values of like and dislike, that we cannot argue with and that are a visceral, biological experience.
- 2 *Pragmatic values*, which guide our actions, which are the values that indicate to us directly what is advantageous and what is dangerous.

- 3 *Life values*, to direct our daily existence and give us an overall sense of what sort of experiences we want to allow in our lives and which we want to steer clear of.
- 4 *Mental values*, which are mediated by rationality and which consist of aesthetic values (with which we judge beauty), juridical values (with which we judge justice), and values of the cognition of truth (which underpin the sciences).
- 5 *Holy values*, which are about our spiritual awakening and awareness and tell us intuitively what it is that ultimately matters and what is to be considered as good and evil in our lives. Quite often these values are clogged up by deities or idols but we need to re-engage with the absolute time of the cosmos of which we are an intrinsic part, to find our bearings.

All values have antinomies and opposites as well, so that we are both attracted and repelled on all these different levels and moral dimensions as we go about our lives.

Scheler's is a very pragmatic but also intimate and profoundly spiritual philosophy, which is entirely relevant to the training of psychotherapists. He gave descriptions of the different modalities of existence as different ways of being in our body, being ourselves and being in a world, as for instance when we are hungry we think of ourselves as depleted and empty and find ourselves in a world that is devoid of food, while when we are angry we may find ourselves full of energy and at the same time experience everything around us as tinged with controversy, hatred, threat or aggression. 'The being of the person is therefore the "foundation" of all essentially different acts' (Scheler 1973: 382).

Scheler spoke of human experience as being multiple, together and interwoven and showed how our intuition of this complexity is immediate and direct, rather than mediated by imaginary processes like introjection. We know, at any one time, exactly how things stand with us but we let ourselves be alienated from this knowledge by symbols, theories and discourses that confuse the issue. In this sense Scheler spoke of the lived body and its intersubjective connections to others, prefiguring Merleau-Ponty's work in many ways. It is quite likely he influenced Heidegger in his thinking about *Befindlichkeit* as well.

Scheler emphasised the notion that we often deceive ourselves about our own experience and that before we can acquire any true knowledge about our inner values or direct our lives and relationships in accordance, we need to pay attention to our tendencies towards such self-deception, towards resentment and hiding from what is really going on inside. He thought that to learn to become faithful to our pre-rational preferences would generate far greater and more creative energies than trying to adjust to what we believe is rationally required of us.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980)

To be or not to be

Man is condemned to be free.

(Sartre 1946: 43)

Introduction

Imagine a young woman sitting in a French café. Opposite her is the man who has invited her out for a drink and who has been speaking to her in an animated fashion for the last 20 minutes. The young woman is uncertain about her own feelings in relation to this man. She is interested but cautious, mostly flattered to be entertained in this way, but not keen to commit herself. She enjoys every second of the conversation and although she is aware of the desire that she inspires in this man, she pretends to herself that he merely likes and respects her.

As she coyly stares into the distance, one of her hands rests on the table, next to the empty coffee cup, the other in her lap. Suddenly the man's hand swoops down on to hers and she is brought back to reality with a shock. She now has to make a decision and respond.

To leave the hand there is to consent in herself to flirt, to engage herself. To withdraw it is to break the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm. The aim is to postpone the moment of decision as long as possible. We know what happens next; the young woman leaves her hand there, but she does not notice that she is leaving it. She does not notice because it happens by chance that she is at this moment all intellect. She draws her companion up to the most lofty regions of sentimental speculation; she speaks of Life, of her life, she shows herself in her essential aspect – a personality, a consciousness. And during this time the divorce of the body from the soul is accomplished; the hand rests inert between the warm hands of her companion – neither consenting nor resisting – a thing. We shall say that this woman is in bad faith.

(Sartre 1943a: 56)

Bad faith as an important human strategy

The young woman is in bad faith in order to keep herself from having to make a decision. She can manipulate her own focus of consciousness in order to achieve the best conditions for herself at that moment. It requires her to attend to certain aspects of her experience and disregard others. It is not a difficult strategy and comes naturally to most human beings. It is the basic skill of fooling oneself, of rocking oneself to sleep, of contenting oneself with illusions, the basic human accomplishment of self-deception: bad faith (*mauvaise foi*). Modern biologists like Travers (1971) and evolutionary psychologists have begun to look upon the human ability for self-deception as an important evolutionary acquisition, adapting us to the complex requirements of human life and ambiguities.

In the same café we can observe many other people perfecting this skill of self-deception. For instance, the waiter is moving about in a most excellent performance of bad faith as he balances his tray and swishes his tea towel to and fro. He moves around like a humanoid, the ideal impersonation of waiterdom. His actions are like those of a stage actor or a mime artist.

All his behaviour seems to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms; he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at being a waiter in a cafe.

(Sartre 1943a: 59)

Sartre claims that all of us spend most of our time role-playing or dwelling in make-believe, either pretending something is the case when it is not (for example, that we are essentially a waiter) or pretending something is not the case when it actually is (for example, that we are not being wooed). To be in bad faith is to pretend that we are other than we are and to reduce all of our many possibilities to one reality, which we pretend to be all there is to life at the moment. The young woman in the café may be extremely ambivalent – but she holds on to a single strand of her experience by her pretence that nothing of consequence is happening to her. The waiter in the café may be also a painter in his free time or an enthusiastic philatelist or a father – but right at this moment he concentrates on waiterdom and his consciousness is restricted to that single aspect of reality. It is almost impossible for human beings to be open to the enormous complexity of reality. We are condemned to select and betray truth in this way. Even when we are in good faith we are still in bad faith, for when we believe something in good faith, aiming for truth, we fail to remember our ability for being in bad faith and we forcefully ignore that we are capable of lying. This thesis about the ineluctability of

human consciousness as a lack and its ensuing capacity for bad faith is Sartre's main thesis in his most famous book *Being and Nothingness* (1943a).

The bottom line: nothingness

The fundamental assumption that Sartre makes is that human beings are essentially emptiness. They are not a something like a table or a chair. They are not defined once and for all – for they are nothing. If we had an essence and a nature in the way in which tables or chairs do, then we could just be what we are and be true to our essence. However, people do not have such an essence; they exist first, and in the process create themselves and become what they are. We therefore never seem to be totally real – at the core of us there will always be a fundamental nothingness. We are a nothing pretending to be a something. In Sartre's jargon we are beings for themselves trying to be beings in themselves. We are pure consciousness attempting to approximate the solidity of objects. We love to act as if we are set and substantial, as if we have a certain character, a certain essence, and a fixed state of being. We like to believe that we cannot alter our circumstances or our attitude. It is utterly reassuring to spend our lives in bad faith, acting at being something quite definite.

All of this is fabricated and we are in reality capable of being many different things. We could bring important changes about in our lives at any time if we set our minds to it. The human tragedy is that we aspire to being definite and fixed as objects are, while retaining total power and freedom at the same time. Human beings crave to be both in themselves (solid as objects) and for themselves (as self-determining consciousness). In other words, they aim at being substantial subjects.

Interestingly, this idea of the combination of total solidity paired with absolute liberty is a classical definition of God. It is as if Sartre is describing the consequences of Nietzsche's observation that God is dead. If there is no God, people have to surpass themselves in order to become like God themselves. Sartre describes not only how people come to terms with the loss of God, but also how they strive to be like God. Being human now equates with the impossible struggle to become absolute: self-sufficient, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent (we might as well add immortality for good measure!). Sartre poignantly describes the state of play of the hopeless human endeavour to dominate and master the universe and self. Although his ideas are often taken in the direction of a simplistic existential philosophy which leads to humanism and voluntaristic self-assertiveness, Sartre's work actually exposes the illusory nature of such a project as well as searching for a more feasible and realistic way forward.

Our consciousness is the key both to the illusions and errors of our ways and to a more self-reflective alternative. The very fact that we are conscious beings introduces the human paradox: on the one hand we are nothing definite and, because of this, on the other hand we are able to become many

different things. We are transcendent rather than immanent creatures. We are condemned, in fact, to having to invent ourselves and make something of ourselves. For most of us this is such a threat that we use much of our available energy in pretending this is not so. We rush into settling for the first character traits, personality and social roles that are within our reach. Standing in the tension of being nothing and reinventing ourselves day by day is one of the greatest challenges of human existence. We usually fail miserably to be equal to the task and absorb ourselves in self-deception instead. We often succeed quite well at the game of make-believe and imagine ourselves to be substantially defined: we become set in our ways and frozen into our self-created personae.

Creating a self out of nothing

All of our strivings are in vain because, although we can fool ourselves into the belief that we are this simple something, we will keep on being confronted with the fact that we are nothing at all: human living is therefore filled with predictable disappointment and disillusionment. Even when we strive to be the most that we are capable of, imitating God, we still lose ourselves in vain. It is because of this that Sartre concludes that ‘man is a useless passion’ (Sartre 1943a: 615).

Hazel Barnes (1990) has articulated Sartre’s implied theory of self-development extremely well. Below is a summary of her description of the making of the Sartrian self as a gradual and progressive enterprise.

- 1 My consciousness at first is purely non-self-conscious: at this stage I am not aware that I am aware of the world. I merely project myself out into the world, relating to it: I am pure intentionality. I do things and manipulate things and relate to others without reflection and without self-consciousness. During this time my original project is shaped, the fundamental choice of my being is made: I choose myself through attitude and action: I vote for my destiny with my feet and without making rational conscious choices. I become who I am by doing what I do. I am set on my way by simply going in the direction of the obvious.

This basic non-self-conscious consciousness is something quite different to the drives of an unconscious, but is nevertheless a non-rational, non-reflective state of being. It assumes that people, rather than being driven, are actually goal-oriented creatures. I direct myself to the things that I encounter and I form and develop patterns of relating that seem most agreeable or accessible.

- 2 It is only secondarily that I retrieve a sense of ego out of this intentionality: a sense that I actually exist as an entity in my own right. This happens when I begin to notice that I am the one acting in the world. I recognise myself in the same way as I recognise others, as an object of attention

and reflection. When I acknowledge the existence of my objective self as it is shown me by others' response to me my ego is born. The acting of my 'I' has created the 'me'. This 'me' becomes more and more solid as I create more and more ego out of previous experiences. I do a painting and others tell me I am good at it: I retrieve a comforting sense of my artistry. Or, as Sartre describes in his books on Flaubert and Genet, I may distil a negative sense of myself, by for instance grasping that others see me as a thief or someone who is utterly useless. As I process information about my past actions my own being becomes integrated into an image of selfhood. Yet this self is intangible and unfixed and can be altered in relation to further experiences, or even in relation to a change in my own processing of the past.

My self is not a thing, but a creation, which is momentary and fleeting, essentially unstable. When I try to capture its image, it flees from me. Trying to catch the self is like trying to catch one's shadow: I cannot ever grasp myself, for as soon as I do so my self has been altered. I cannot ever both be at one with myself: fully absorbed in some action such as playing tennis and also have full awareness of my own actions and performance. I have to concentrate on one or the other and if I don't I handicap myself. For some of us the gap between our experience of self and our appearance is so huge that we cannot identify with a sense of self at all. According to Sartre such an awareness of the gap between my seeming self and my actual experience is not a sign of schizoid personality but rather an accurate perception of human consciousness.

Normal development however takes me out of the simple experience of myself in the intentionality of the present to the building of an increasingly fixed image of self generated by the totalisation of past experiences. It is as if I am totting up all feedback received to make it into an image of myself. This means that I learn to think of myself by forming external judgements on myself and by describing myself in terms that sum me up and define me as the person I imagine I seem to others. Eventually I capture myself in this descriptive net and I become reduced to my image.

- 3 This newly created self image, this ego, can itself become an object of scrutiny and reflection, opening the way to transformation for the future. Indeed in taking consciousness of myself I begin to notice my relative ability to reshape myself. I become aware that my intentionality can redirect itself to new things and events. I grasp the fact that I can reshape the givens of the past and that I am obliged to create a self in the future. I can grasp the self as value, as a potentiality, as something yet to be defined, yet to be perfected, yet to be made real. Although the truth is that I can never fulfil myself, because I am by essence a nothing, I like to imagine myself full at some future point. The self reinvents itself as a totality and a definite something. It desires the fullness of self and creates

this in imagination. It also knows from experience that it can do a credible impression of substantiality and that past events can strengthen the illusion of self. My future actions can now be shaped in such a way as to create the self that I seek to establish. Many people simply repeat the same sort of actions and merely engrave a repetition of the same character until they truly believe in the value of their single substantial selfhood. They will be unaware of the complex self-deception they are involved in and it will take quite a lot of self-reflection to realise the original freedom that is still available.

- 4 Finally I am at liberty to achieve a total understanding of the complexity of my own selfhood by facing the process described in the first three stages. If I am willing to grasp the paradox of self I can only do so by realising the sense of embodied self that is me. I am not just a body or a combination of body and soul. I am rather this process of embodied consciousness which reflects on itself. There is no dualism: I am body consciousness, it is through my body that my consciousness exists. My body is my consciousness. My consciousness is my body. The body is my point of reference, in being alive through my body I attempt to incarnate my consciousness. I am forever trying to express and experience the totality of possible consciousness through my physical being. My final truth is to be fully embodied consciousness. For many of us this remains an elusive goal. It is also true to say that it is only in Sartre's later work, particularly in his books on Flaubert and Genet (Sartre 1952, 1971) that he himself begins to see the complexity of the human incarnated self, rather than stay encapsulated in the more partial and rather dualistic view of *Being and Nothingness* (adapted from Barnes 1990).

Choices and decisions

Sartre is well known, of course, for expressing his ideas more concretely in his novels and plays than in his philosophical writing. His *Nausea* (1938) is a good illustration of someone's struggle with the creation and destruction of a sense of self and the concurrent observation of the world of things and the world of other people as both separate and insistently impinging on personal reality. Sartre's conclusions about where this self-awareness and awareness of the human condition leads are somewhat jaundiced and negative. The struggle of human beings living in angst, despair, uncertainty, and with constant challenges to their illusion of substantiality is the inevitable outcome of existential questioning and consciousness-raising. Though his views were popular in continental Europe in the years after the Second World War when many were acutely aware of the fragility of human living, existentialism was quickly overtaken by a more optimistic and positivistic outlook. These days, what passes for existentialism is often the Californian version of the much starker continental variety. This new variety of existential or experiential thinking

emphasises choice and freedom and the human potential, but does not pay quite so much attention to the nothingness which is at the origin of such choice and freedom, or the poignancy of nausea and anguish that comes when we face up to that dark human truth of uncertainty, and lack of substantiality.

As Sartre said in his little book *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946) there is in fact only one choice that we do not have and that is not to choose – in that not choosing in itself represents a choice. Not having the choice to not choose condemns us to freedom and responsibility and is by no means a recipe for fun and euphoria, but rather for a life lived in awareness and sober reflection. Many of us find this too hard a challenge and prefer to believe in determinism or fatalism. Sartre gives many powerful examples of this tendency to evade one's personal responsibility. People, he says, like to turn to signs or advice to guide them in the decisions they have to take. They like to think that there are definite answers and directions. Little do they realise that they often fool themselves even in this process, for they turn for advice to the very people who are likely to say the things that they want to hear. If I go to a priest to ask whether I should or should not commit adultery, I have in effect already voted with my feet, for I can predict what the priest will tell me, but I am not taking responsibility for making up my own mind. Even if I turn to an apparently impartial external sign to guide me, I can still manipulate the interpretation of the sign to suit me. The same event of losing one's job can be interpreted as the long awaited opportunity to start a new career or as the proof that one is never going to amount to anything. Nearly winning in the lottery can be seen as a sign that one is close to winning next time or as an indication of one's eternal bad luck. Everything is open to interpretation but people often don't give themselves credit for doing the interpreting, preferring to pretend that the decision is out of their hands.

We are our own future and we choose what we become in action, even though much of the time we do not accept this responsibility and pretend it is not so. Our actions speak louder than our words. We are what we do and what we do is what creates our self and our life for the future. Much of what we do that seems negative can be viewed from a different angle as soon as we accept this basic principle. The coward who refuses to walk any further up the mountain is not just someone who lacks courage. He is also a man who is choosing the act of giving up. Heroism and cowardice are two sides of the same coin and both involve active choices, even though those active choices may be non-self-reflective.

Reflective and non-reflective consciousness

It is important to note this distinction between unreflective consciousness which corresponds to the self as agent, reflective consciousness which corresponds to the self as object, and self-reflective consciousness which corresponds to the self as project. This takes Sartre away from the psychoanalytic

distinction between conscious and unconscious in the same way in which it takes him away from a simplistic pursuit of establishing a solid self, as we might find in the humanistic tradition.

Sartre refuses the notion that anything to do with consciousness can ever be unconscious. He does accept that there is an entire range of things and events that we simply do not have consciousness of because they are, for the moment, outside of the scope of our experience, elsewhere in the world. Consciousness itself, according to him, is a complex notion and has many different levels of operation. Some aspects of experience, while conscious, are unreflected and in most cases non-self-reflective and it is all too easy to confuse non-reflective or non-self-reflective consciousness with unconsciousness. In his little book *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (1939), Sartre gives a useful example of these distinctions between different levels of consciousness. When I write something on a sheet of paper, he says, it is possible for me to be so absorbed in this conscious act of communicating a particular message that I may not be reflectively aware of my act of writing, as I am focusing on what I want to write instead. My intention is in the objective rather than in the action, but I can refocus my attention at any time by an act of reflection. I can shift my attention away from the message that I am writing and instead concentrate on the way in which my hand glides over my work and draws each letter, or even on the way in which the ink glistens on the paper.

It would in fact be possible to make further distinctions and note the myriad of possibilities of focus of my attention even in such a simple action as writing a message: in everyday activities our consciousness is only used to a very small degree. We selectively relate to the world and leave most of the possible experiences out: we proceed by connecting only with what seems necessary and useful. We create pathways of relating to the world and ignore the landscape that we travel through, concentrating on the road itself, or even on the destination that we are headed for. Sartre speaks of our 'hodological space' in this context (*hodos* meaning path in Greek), referring to the pathways that we create and adhere to.

In addition to our restrictive use of available experience, we are rarely reflectively conscious of our immediate surroundings. How often do we not suddenly realise that we have been walking or driving along while our mind has been occupied elsewhere? It is all too easy to drown out our self-awareness by focusing our attention on the activity or concern of the moment. We can absorb our consciousness in many different ways, but we always have the possibility of retrieving our attention and focus it anew – we can become attentive to the context and horizon of our experience as well as to the many aspects of it that we have so far ignored. In addition we can become self-reflective about what we are doing and gain a whole new dimension of consciousness.

Sartre's quarrel with the psychoanalytic unconscious is far more significant than it is usually made out to be. He does not refute the idea of

unconsciousness, or rather unawareness, but only the notion of the Unconscious as a place where mysterious things happen and are kept out of consciousness. (For a more complete discussion of consciousness, see Chapter 32.) Sartre believed in the mystery in broad daylight of our complex consciousness which has much greater and diverse possibilities than this dualistic conscious–unconscious division leaves room for. By shifting our focus to the great mystery of the unconscious, psychology has stopped paying attention to the fascinating layered levels of consciousness that we are all playing on all the time. Fortunately with the advances of psychophysiology and brain research this position is being corrected. It is now abundantly evident that consciousness is a much more complex feature of human existence than was ever suspected.

The importance of context and the existence of the others

For Sartre one of the important influences on the way in which we operate our consciousness and especially the conscious choices that we make, is the context in which we live and act. People are always in a situation and respond to that situation to the best of their abilities, given the way they see themselves. In Sartre's later work this emphasis on the social and cultural context took on increasing importance. In his *Critique of a Dialectical Reason* (1960a), Sartre shifted his emphasis, which previously was on personal experience, to focus instead on the person in relation to a given world. His short book on racism, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1948), gives an inkling of the implications of such a theory for practical living. Rather than seeking to change the individual by altering the self and its objectives, this has to be done in relation to the political, cultural and social world in which we exist. The goal is no longer just to change the organisation of the self but to change the organisation of the world around the self at the same time. The two are so completely related and intertwined that one cannot change oneself and take cognisance of one's possibilities without also taking account of and having an impact on the limitations and possibilities in the world around one.

Sartre notes how the power dynamics of our relationships to others in the world particularly plays a major role in our individual lives. His view in *Being and Nothingness* (1943a) is that we encounter others primarily as rival consciousnesses, as rival sources of freedom and power. We need others in order to receive acknowledgement of our own freedom and mastery and we are at the mercy of the other at the same time. Of course the quid pro quo is that the other needs us and fears us for the same reasons. This leads to a predictable interplay of dominance and submission, in which we either try to overpower the other (the sadistic strategy) or give ourselves up to the other's mastery over us (the masochistic strategy). We gain a sense of selfhood both from a confirmation of our existence by the other pandering to us and by us pandering

to the other. In both ways we confirm our sense of being needed, of being powerful and of being substantial. Failing these strategies we have the third option of withdrawing from human relationships altogether and avoid the threat of the other's look which may annihilate us.

Sartre has made a lot of this idea of the 'look'. He recounts the experience of a person looking through a keyhole at another, relishing in the sense of holding the other, who does not know himself to be thus observed, at his mercy. The observer hears a footstep behind him and notices to his dismay that he himself has been observed by a third party, spying through the keyhole. The sudden sense of being found out gives rise to the sensation of shame, which is the experience of humiliation, in being reduced from being the observing and powerful person to being the observed one at the mercy of the other's negative judgement. Withdrawal from relationships may be tempting but it can be only a temporary solution for we are essentially beings in relation. We are nothing if not in relation. To abstract ourselves from our context is like signing our death warrant. In withdrawing from the world we become unreal. Of course the strategy of withdrawal from human relationships is one often taken by our clients and it is the therapeutic relationship that needs to enable them to rediscover the interplay of dominance/submission with the other that can lead to satisfactory human relationships rather than forming a threat to one's personal survival.

While this view of human relationships may seem a little one-sided and bleak, in Sartre's later work the emphasis is increasingly on the realisation that we need to work with a person's situation and relations more than with the individual in isolation, for there is no such thing as an isolated individual.

Man is defined first of all as a being 'in a situation': that means that he forms a synthetic whole with his situation – biological, economic, political, cultural, etc. He cannot be distinguished from his situation, for it forms him and decides his possibilities.

(Sartre 1948: 60)

This makes it more clear than ever that Sartre believes that people do not have an essence, but rather an existence. Like Heidegger before him, he said that existence precedes essence. We act first and create ourselves in the process. In order to understand people you have to understand how they exist. You need to take awareness of the general factors of existence that we all share and then you need to note the particular factors that define a particular individual context. It is within this frame that one can begin to understand the person.

What men have in common is not a 'nature' but a condition, that is, an ensemble of limits and restrictions: the inevitability of death, the

necessity of working for a living, of living in a world already inhabited by other men.

(Sartre 1948: 60)

Fear of the human condition

Sartre argues that it is our fear of recognising this human condition that makes us inclined to reject others and our need for them, for they remind us of our vulnerability. The people who are most afraid and insecure are those who attempt to create the illusion of solidity in themselves, ignoring the fact of their human condition. The easiest way to do so is to deny the similarities between people and emphasise the differences. In wanting to be special and privileged we end up denigrating others and establishing artificial boundaries between ourselves and others. Racism, anti-Semitism or other forms of nefarious discrimination are the logical consequence of our fear of the human condition.

It is not that we are afraid of Jews when we are anti-Semites, or of people of a different colour when we are racists, or of women when we are chauvinists, or of men when we are feminists, but rather that we are afraid of ourselves and, as Sartre says (1948: 53), of our own consciousness, our liberty, our instincts, our responsibilities, solitariness, change, society and of the world.

It is very tempting to opt for such emotional and global relating to the world, not having to account for reality and the wider reaches of truth. One could call such totalisation of groups of others as 'bad' as a kind of global bad faith, which allows one to pretend that the world is just so and that one has the right to fight the other and claim one's dues. It is obviously so tempting to do this that Sartre himself can be said to have fallen into the trap of dismissing the anti-Semite in the same way in which he reproaches the anti-Semite for dismissing the Jew. It is not so easy to be confident enough to face the contradictory realities of different groups of people without making dismissive judgements. It is hard to grope for truth, to accept that one's 'reasoning is no more than tentative, that other considerations may supervene to cast doubt on it' (1948: 18).

There are people who are attracted by the durability of a stone. They wish to be massive and impenetrable; they wish not to change. Where indeed would change take them? We have here a basic fear of oneself and of truth.

(Sartre 1948: 19)

Sartre admits that it is rare to find people who have enough courage to face the human condition and their own part in it. Authentic being demands of us that we face the situations we are in. We have freedom only within the limits of a situation.

Authenticity consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate. There is no doubt that authenticity demands much courage and more than courage. Thus it is not surprising that one finds it so rarely.

(Sartre 1948: 90)

One of the most difficult factors is that people need to learn to confront the facts of socio-cultural reality in which they are caught before they can understand themselves. In his later work Sartre refers to this as the practico-inert – the actuality of the current political context that one is inserted in. One important aspect of this is the reality of scarcity of resources, which sets people into a relationship of competition with each other. Another aspect of this facticity – in other words, of the ‘given’ – is that of our need to overcome the limitations imposed upon us. It is through the discovery of our lack that we also discover our freedom. Need is what defines our right to satisfaction and with it the possibility to take free action in order to achieve that.

Living a satisfactory life

Although this emphasis on freedom and action was already present in *Being and Nothingness* (1943a), in Sartre’s later work it is not seen as something that depends on will and the isolated individual, but rather on the communal interest. The highest value is that of generosity, for in emptying myself instead of trying for illusory fulfilment I can keep my freedom open much more effectively. In addition, I can enhance the overall situation for myself and others by keeping the other’s freedom open through my work. I do not work for the common interest because I am obliged to do so, but because it makes sense as it creates the best possible space and atmosphere for my existence. It is only in living the dialectic of the objective and subjective in a self-reflective manner that I can insert myself positively into the practico-inert and have a positive effect on it which then reverberates back on me. This kind of living does not come easily. It is no longer sufficient to be either interested in individual progress or in political action, one has to combine the two.

Clearly existential psychoanalysis – which the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness* believed ought to replace psychoanalysis – needs to be considerably altered and expanded to include such notions of the givens of our socio-cultural context. Betty Cannon (1991) in her book *Sartre and Psychoanalysis* has studied the implications of the whole of Sartre’s oeuvre for psychotherapy and she concludes that one of the tasks of existentialist therapy would be to

take into account the common relationship to the practico-inert of members of a particular generation in elucidating a project which is

nonetheless individual for all its connections with the socio-material world.

(Cannon 1991: 202)

In other words, the challenge is to find out how it is possible for an individual to make a worthwhile life-project out of the givens of a particular practical given situation. The historical, social, material and political factors that determine us are no more than the raw materials and the canvas of our project, which can be made either into a mere reproduction of existing facts and events or into an original work of art.

As Sartre points out, the previous generation passes along the culture, the material means, and even the language which are the tools with which the new generation must work. But the new generation does not simply accept the objectifications provided to it. Regarding the materialised praxis which it has inherited from the previous generation as ‘an inert object which needs to be rearranged’, the new generation goes on to transcend in one way or another the legacy of its fathers.

(Cannon 1991: 199)

Sartre speaks of totalisation to refer to the active manner in which I summarise and process the world for myself. The way in which we totalise our experience and possibilities leads us forward to new actions and understanding. We constantly develop new unifications of all the information and events that are available to us. In this process we do not only alter ourselves, we also alter the world. Our reorganisation of our understanding and interpretation of reality can have far reaching consequences that are always at the same time of an individual and a collective nature. ‘For us truth is something which becomes, it has and will have become. It is a totalization which is forever being totalized’ (Sartre 1960b: 30).

If we do not heed our ability to totalise we may find ourselves totalised instead – that is, summed up and reduced by others or by situations – so that certain facts of our life become mineralised. Mineralisation happens when our totalisations become written in stone. The mineralisation of situations and attitudes about ourselves is what restricts us. We are well beyond the notion of bad faith now, for mineralisation can become a fact of life rather than mere self-deception that can be undone at any moment. If we let our lives be totalised into mineralisation, which we are eventually bound to do the world becomes a *fait accompli*.

At the end of the infinite series of my efforts, the world will have become necessary because of me and I shall have created myself by means of the world, hence I shall have given myself a necessary existence.

(Sartre 1983: 555)

Sartre did not formulate his ethics very clearly during his lifetime and it is only with the posthumous publication of the book *Truth and Existence* (1989) and the publication of his *Notebooks for an Ethics* (1983) that the gaps in Sartre's view of the human condition could be filled. In these books he speaks of the recognition that our facticity affects us greatly but that in spite of the determined aspects of necessity this brings it still leaves us a wide margin of possibility and freedom in which we need to exercise our choice to make the world a better place and assume our human condition responsibly. It is now understood that if we are to try and merely make it a better place for ourselves we will inevitably fail. Sartre's ethical philosophy is definitely one of community. The early individualistic philosophy becomes now connected up with the later Marxist philosophy of the Critique. We need to find our way out of the anonymous seriality in which we find ourselves in an alienated anonymous world where we do not take responsibility for our own actions. Only then can we follow the principle of reciprocity instead. We are committed to our own projects and these have a meaning, but that meaning has an impact on the world we create. 'This project has a meaning, it is not the simple negativity of flight; by it man aims at the production of himself in the world as a certain objective totality' (Sartre 1960b:147).

And so I make something of myself and in that same process create something for the other as well. So, the ethical Sartre says, I need to be aware of how I give of myself to the other and how I impact on their world. There is a slight sense of Levinasian prioritising of the other here, though for Sartre the other is only equally important to myself, never more so. 'I create myself. In sacrifice I follow and I prefer the other. I prefer what I do not prefer. But I am the gift to the other' (Sartre 1983: 148).

It does become important to check our actions in light of community and in light of the concrete situations we contribute to. For, indeed, what stands out in this later work, ethics is always situational and has to be rethought and checked all the time. There is no possibility of creating an ethical system of rules that can simply be applied. Ethics and our code of conduct have to remain existential, defined in action and in context.

There is no abstract ethics. There is only an ethics in a situation and therefore it is concrete. An abstract ethics is that of the good conscience. It assumes that one can be ethical in a fundamentally unethical situation.
(Sartre 1983:17)

So the objective is to live and work collaboratively: we remain alone and responsible yet are always with each other and accountable for our impact on the world. We become aware of the importance of shared knowledge and totalisation that gets us closer to truth each time and we learn to value experience and difficulties as challenges that allow us to come up with more truth. Sartre describes this very well in his *Saint Genet* and *Idiot of the Family* books

(Sartre 1952, 1971). He shows how both Flaubert and Jean Genet learnt to grasp how other people had initially totalised them and how they found a way, through reflection and different interactions with others, to transcend problems that initially hampered and defined them in negative ways. This kind of transformative dialectic becomes central not only to life but also to therapy when practised in a Sartrean way. So it is that we come to consider difficulties and errors as no more than the necessary touchstones of our lives, without which no human evolution and no transcendence is possible. As Sartre says in *Truth and Existence*: 'Error is necessary to truth, because it makes truth possible' (1989: 26).

And so human existence becomes redefined as a joint search for truth in which we need each other to find out about reality and to correct our own understanding continuously. Living is like a constant project of co-therapy where we throw more and more light in the darkness that we encounter. We stand together in facing realities we may not have brought about by our own actions and somehow have to understand, tolerate, and find a way to make it work. Sartre speaks of the Night of Being (1989: 20) which we have to confront in search of truth, but he also speaks of the provisional nature of all truth. And most of all he speaks of our desire to avoid truth. 'The fear of truth is fear of freedom. Knowledge commits me as accomplice of the surging up of Being in the world and places me before new responsibilities' (1989: 34).

It is this emphasis on the social and political dimension of our personal existence in the world that must be Sartre's most precious contribution to psychotherapy. It has far-reaching implications which few therapists take into account.

Being is terrifying, it is characterised by its absolute mystery and impenetrability. I have to take responsibility for things I have not initiated or wanted.

(Sartre 1989: 34)

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961)

Embodied living

My body is a chiasm: it doubles up as inside hollow, invisible, and outside, extension, visible. It is ambiguity – flesh.

(Merleau-Ponty 1968: 266)

Introduction

Merleau-Ponty in many ways lived in the shadow of Jean-Paul Sartre, who was his friend and colleague. Merleau-Ponty based much of his thinking on Husserl's later work, which he studied in the Husserl archives in Louvain. The objective of philosophy according to this interpretation is not to find truth, and certainly not absolute truth, but rather to enter into a kind of dialogue with the world that makes sense.

Though Merleau-Ponty is most quoted for his emphasis on embodied existence, as described in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), he wrote a number of other important books, notably *Sense and Non-Sense* (1964) and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), both published after his death. Merleau-Ponty puts the focus on the lived world (Husserl's *Lebenswelt*) and he shows how we are first and foremost part of a world and in a situation. This situation is also primarily a physical one as we exist in the world in an embodied manner. Phenomenology, according to Merleau-Ponty, is about disclosing the world as it is experienced by us. This is a creative effort rather than a scientific one:

The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being.

(Merleau-Ponty 1945: xx)

Interrelatedness

Merleau-Ponty describes the world in its transparency and people in their essential connectedness to that world. He brings out the sense that our experience in relation to the world is dialectical rather than linear or dualistic. This means that we respond to the world and in turn make it respond to us – in a natural process of interrelatedness. There is no linear causality and the world is no longer divided between subject and object as it is for Sartre. Merleau-Ponty sees human interrelatedness with the world as essential rather than as secondary. Our embodied consciousness is the in-between, it is neither entirely in me, nor in my mind, nor is it out there in the world of objects. Consciousness is a phenomenon of bringing the world to light. It hovers in between things and me. Things are never set in one way, they are never confined to a single precise location nor can they only be interpreted in one single way. Human perception is full of tricks and contradictions and Merleau-Ponty shows with the help of the phenomenon of optical illusion how we often fool ourselves about truth. The lived world of humans is an ambiguous world. An example of this is the way in which my hand can both touch and be touched, my eyes can both see and be seen. I am both the author and the receiver of my experience. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is often referred to as a 'philosophy of ambiguity' (Kearney 1986). Much of our experience is mediated by the body, though the cultural world is also part of the way in which we make sense of our existence.

Our body is our general medium for having a world. Sometimes it is restricted to the actions necessary for the conservation of life, and accordingly it posits around us a biological world; at other times, elaborating upon these primary actions and moving from their literal to a figurative meaning, it manifests through them a core of new significance: this is true of motor habits such as dancing. Sometimes, finally, the meaning aimed at cannot be achieved by the body's natural means; it must then build itself an instrument, and it projects thereby around itself a cultural world. (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 146)

Centrality of the body

Merleau-Ponty describes the functioning of the body in relation to the world in great detail arguing that our body and the world are associated and intrinsically bound together:

Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system.

(Merleau-Ponty 1945: 203)

But this recognition of the system of our body–world relation leads to the implication that truth is essentially created by this system in order to make sense of each and every situation in which we find ourselves. Truth is thus situational and open to alteration. According to the circumstances, what is true in one situation need not be true in another. Sometimes truth gets defined by us as if it were set and definite and, again following Husserl's work, Merleau-Ponty refers to this process as sedimentation: the acting as if truth is stagnant and knowable. Sedimented truth is the quasi truth that has become deposited as if it were solid. If I believe myself to be weak because, for instance, I had some evidence of my own weakness in childhood, this may become a sedimented outlook: where I persist in believing in my intrinsic weakness – regardless of the fact that I have gained tremendous strength in adulthood and later life. Sedimented attitudes need to be noted and challenged in psychotherapy. The idea of sedimentation is very close to Sartre's notion of mineralisation, which follows when totalisation, in other words the way in which we summarise the world, becomes cast in stone. Merleau-Ponty emphasises the importance of the opposite of sedimentation, namely projection, which is the redefinition and redesign of truth in terms of future use and experience of the world.

Merleau-Ponty's challenge is to live deeply in the real world: the one that we cannot know unless we are prepared to immerse ourselves in it and experience it fully and anew every day. If we do this we can rediscover the aesthetic which combines perception and imagination in a complete experience which predates our knowledge of it. If we want to make sense of such experiences, this should not be done through analysing them, but rather by grasping them as part of the aesthetic experience. We must not imagine that we can retrace the facts or the objective ideas that are supposed to prefigure our experience. According to Merleau-Ponty such facts are of our own creation and are part of the experience of living itself. He shows how our sensory experience is our way of relating to the world in a thinking manner, for according to him sensory experience is:

a thought subordinated to a certain field and this is what I call a sense. When I say that I have senses and that they give me access to the world, I am not the victim of some muddle, I do not confuse causal thinking and reflection, I merely express this truth which forces itself upon reflection taken as a whole that I am able, being connatural with the world, to discover a sense in certain aspects of being.

(Merleau-Ponty 1945: 217)

We embody the world and, through our senses, make it come to life in the same way in which we also are brought to life ourselves by being in the world and by embodying it. There are many different levels of embodiment and different forms of complexity of being in the world. The embodiment of the

world becomes even more complex when we interpose language and start to express our understanding of the world beyond our bodily experience.

Language as an intermediary

Merleau-Ponty tells the story of the little boy who puts on his grandmother's reading glasses in order to look at the book she is reading to him and who expects to find himself literally inside the story he just heard. The boy is outraged to only find black and white shapes on the page and it is a bitter disappointment to him that the universe of the story has no tangible reality and ramifications in the book itself. He discovers that the embodiment of the story has to be done through the mediation of letters and words and through the process of reading and imagination. It is such a process that allows us to create meaning. When we live our actual experience, we are so absorbed in it that we cannot make sense of it.

The criminal fails to see his crime and the traitor his betrayal for what they are, not because they exist deeply embedded within him as unconscious representations or tendencies, but because there are so many relatively closed worlds, so many situations and we cannot grasp them all at once. It is all too easy to let ourselves only be immersed in our embodied situation and not remember previous ones. If we are in a situation, we are surrounded and cannot be transparent to ourselves, so that our contact with ourselves is necessarily achieved only in the sphere of ambiguity.

(Merleau-Ponty 1945: 381)

We stand in our own way, casting shadows with our own presence and make both the objects that we look at and the eyes with which we are looking at them invisible while we see the things that we see. The nature of consciousness itself is to be opaque and to only reveal certain aspects of what is there. Yet it is possible to transport oneself directly to what is there, in the movement of the sensory awareness. The reflective process is not the only way of making ourselves aware or conscious of something: 'Seeing is this sort of thought that has no need to think to touch essence' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 247).

It is precisely because our awareness of the essence of the colour that we look at is so total and so complete that we cannot and do not have to articulate the colour to ourselves as red. If we do articulate it in this way we distance ourselves to some extent from the essence of the colour. What confuses us about our own senses is that they are all operating at the same time and that they are also intertwined. The body itself is what gives us meaning, but it does so in ways that we cannot always grasp. Even science, which is supposed to eliminate the confusion of the senses, can never provide us with

anything more than a provisional approximation of the truth. We constantly receive meanings that have been constituted previously and we adapt these to the way in which we create meaning for ourselves. Again this is an ambiguous process. I go out from myself towards the other, to discover the other's meanings, and at the same time I export my own meanings towards the other. Even my simple perceptions are a project of being-in-the-world: I see what is meaningful; I give meaning to what I see, though the things that I see structure my meanings at the same time.

Things are structures – frameworks – the stars of our life: they gravitate around us. Yet there is a secret bond between us and them – through perception we enter into the essence of the flesh.

(Merleau-Ponty 1968: 220)

So we retrieve and receive meanings, but also transform and create them. In the same way, we retrieve meanings when we speak the words that we have heard from others, but we also create meanings and always reinterpret the same words in a slightly different way. We are agents of change without being aware of the transformations that we effect in the world. It is our duty to find pathways between ourselves and others and in the process make sense of the transformations that we bring about. We are, in a way, the place where transcendence manifests: through our ability to misunderstand and misinterpret we always transform the world so that through us dialectics happen. We are intertwined with the world and with others. We are both product of others and the world and producers of a new world. In us, what seemed necessary and determined, becomes free. Psychotherapy must be the moment where a person is helped to become aware of this intertwining and dialectical relationship with the world.

Freedom and action

Unlike Sartre, who saw freedom as the basis of human action, Merleau-Ponty believes that our freedom is gained only from the way in which we act. In my actions I show and create my significance and that of others and the world as well. I give myself up in exchange as I act. Actions are commitments and I can only create freedom out of such commitments, in the same way in which I can only create reflection out of perception.

Ambiguity is everywhere. Things are never either/or as they seemed for Kierkegaard or Sartre. We are balancing on the interface between two opposites and we cannot have or be one thing without the other. It is in me and through me that creation finds its expression. It is in the tension of opposites that I have to make a life for myself. Situations make demands on us for modes of solution and resolution. What is sedimented can be dissolved again and transformed into something else. What is mineralised can be exploded.

Life is a constant task of uncompromising ambiguity and it makes tremendous demands on us. It remains an unfinished task and it is up to us to find the way forward, even when the road ahead seems to be barred. Truth is not a fait accompli or a fixed position but an ongoing project. It is up to us to make sense of what is apparently senseless and to order what sometimes seems chaotic.

This also means that it is my perception of the world that creates truth. Time is therefore at my disposal and I can make of my life what I want it to be, representing to myself whatever it is I wish to retain from the past in its full reality now, for instance.

Time is normally conceptualised as a piece of wood that is burning up: the past is that ash that no heat will ever bring back to life; it is something about which nothing can be changed. But if I think of a dead friend, he must be. If he is present to me, why should I hold back from saying that he exists?

(Merleau-Ponty 1992: 105)

One can easily see how this worldview forms a powerful backdrop for a new invigorating attitude on the part of the psychotherapist whose task it becomes to inspire the client with such an exploratory transformative view of life. Merleau-Ponty's vision of humanity is an essentially optimistic one and resembles in some ways Camus' conclusion at the end of his *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942a) that it is the perception of meaning and fullness in one's situation and surroundings that constitute the art of living, no matter how tough or how pointless the circumstances may seem. But while Camus' Sisyphus is essentially repeating the same routines, for Merleau-Ponty the world is in constant evolution and renovation and it is the human being who is primarily responsible for this state of play.

Paul Tillich (1886–1965)

A new spirituality

The affirmation of one's essential being in spite of desires and anxieties creates joy.

(Tillich 1952: 25)

Introduction

Tillich is another important, but often unacknowledged, influence on existential psychotherapy. He was a theologian rather than a philosopher, but his religious thinking was highly unorthodox and entirely compatible with that of other existential explorations. Although a Lutheran himself, his wife was Jewish and they fled from Germany to the United States in the 1930s. Tillich had a considerable impact on many psychotherapists in the United States. Rollo May considered Tillich to be his spiritual mentor and wrote a very personal book about Tillich called *Paulus: Tillich as Spiritual Teacher* (May 1973). Tillich is well known for a best-selling book called *The Courage to Be* (1952), though his seminal three-volume work *Systematic Theology* (1951–1963) is far more significant.

Tillich, like all other existential writers, was concerned about the human situation, but he specifically considered that religious questions inevitably arose from this situation. For Tillich, a human being is primarily that creature which asks the ontological question and it is through human awareness that answers about being can be found (Tillich 1951–1963). Because of this emphasis on the human condition as the way towards spirituality, the joint concepts of anxiety, courage and faith figure strongly in his writing.

The courage to be

His book on the courage to be sums up his arguments nicely. In it, he considers the way in which courage is intrinsically related to anxiety, not just by overcoming it, but by being generated by it. 'Anxiety is the state in which a being is aware of its possible non-being' (Tillich 1951: 44). As the courage

to be is the participation in the self-affirmation of being itself, the two are parallel processes that are generated out of each other. In many ways anxiety and courage are the two sides of the same coin of life. Tillich speaks of life and death as inevitably linked in this way. He calls life the form and death the contents, the one containing the other. It is not just that life cannot be had without death, and that there would be no death if there had not first been life, but death is the very essence of life. It is in final analysis what makes life meaningful. It is rather like the Buddhist metaphor of the bowl which would be nothing if it did not contain an empty space which gives it the quality of being a container that can receive the rice. So, as we make our lives as containing much of substance and many events, at the core of all this containing is the emptiness inside which is death waiting, but which is also the inner emptiness that we feel as soon as we suffer any loss.

Tillich, in a scholarly fashion considers the views of many classical philosophers before advancing his own summary. He bases his thinking on Socrates and the Stoics, on Thomas Aquinas and Spinoza. He draws on Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and many others, and connects all of their thoughts to his own experience of human living. Tillich distinguishes anxiety from fear by identifying and defining anxiety as the fear of fear, without having the concrete object that fear does. He shows how courage arises when anxiety is faced, rather than succumbed to. Facing anxiety is what is asked of us and as soon as we do so we are courageous. If we falter and try to escape from what we fear, instead of finding courage we fall into despair. Courage is generated like a kind of moral strength as soon as we stand up to our anxiety without flinching. It becomes stronger as our resolve to be equal to our anxiety increases. Tillich analyses what he calls the three great anxieties of modern humans: anxiety of death, of meaninglessness, and of guilt or self-condemnation. These are the three threats that human beings have to learn to contend with, at the ontic, the moral and the spiritual levels, as illustrated in Figure 10.1.

Tillich sees all three as expressions of the fear of non-being. In the first place, I need to face the concrete reality of my impending death, which threatens my ontic sense of self-affirmation. It is fate that will bring this threat to reality and it threatens the foundation of the fact that I am. In the second place, I have to face the possibility of condemnation, which I encounter as the experience of guilt in myself and which threatens my moral

Threat	Relative	Absolute	Avoidance
Ontic	Fate	Death	Immortality
Moral	Guilt	Self-condemnation	Disobedience or rigour
Spiritual	Emptiness	Meaninglessness	Fanaticism

Figure 10.1 Tillich's three levels of anxiety.

self-affirmation, destroying the sense that I exist as a good person. In the third and last place, I have to face the possibility of meaninglessness, which I experience as the emptiness of my life, which threatens my spiritual self-affirmation and questions the fact that I exist as a person.

Tillich also recognises that we find ways to avoid these threats rather than to withstand them. So, in avoiding the threat to my ontic sense of self I invent the idea of immortality of the soul, making myself inured against the threat to my existence which I may otherwise struggle with all my life. In avoiding my moral sense of self I can go either of two ways. In the first place I can become disobedient to moral demands, which is what Tillich calls anomy (going against the laws), which makes me feel that it does not matter, so that I can swipe guilt away from myself. In the second place I may respond on the contrary with moral rigour, avoiding any controversy or possible guilt by pre-empting it with my holier than thou conduct and behaviour. Tillich calls this legalism. In terms of my fear of emptiness and meaninglessness I can deal with it by fanaticism, creating a religiosity that safeguards my soul and gives me all the enthusiasm and blind certainty in the world, hermetically sealing me from any possible doubt.

It is worth noting that those who have been inspired by this tripartite distribution of threats (which much resemble Jaspers' 'limit situations'), such as May and Yalom (1985), have added a fourth form of anxiety – that of freedom, which is experienced through the pressure of responsibility, and which is a threat to the existence of a self. This dimension was highlighted by Sartre, an author not yet widely known when Tillich and Jaspers were writing.

It is important to note that the idea of ultimate concern as discussed by Tillich is somewhat different in that it is not a one-sided fear of non-being, as it represents a longing for the ultimate at the same time. Although we experience anxiety at the thought of the possibility of our loss of life, we also yearn for it. The ultimate concern is something that we strive for and reach out for, because it points us towards the ultimate and allows us to participate in it. Concrete objects, persons or situations can come to symbolise the ultimate for us in this manner and take on an aspect of holiness that attracts us at the same time as it scares us. It is the symbol of our ultimate concern that we love to hate.

The role of faith

Tillich considered that the only way to overcome these threats to our existence that make us anxious is to face their inevitability. It is in accepting the fact that we ultimately have to refer to events and realities beyond ourselves that we can confront anxiety. This acceptance and active extension towards the ultimate is a form of faith. Faith is our participation in God, who is defined as the infinite power to resist the threat of non-being. Faith is what

allows us to organise human activity and experience. In faith we surrender to what is inevitable: we put ourselves at the disposition of what is greater than ourselves. In faith we surrender to an absolute authority and give up our fear at the same time as we discover that there is no need to fear that which is absolute and certain. When we submit human will and effort to the transcendent power we release ourselves from suffering and anxiety. In the encounter with what is holy we dissolve anxiety into awe and mystery. Our challenge, therefore, is to find that which can function in relation to our ultimate concern and bring us in touch with faith. The ultimate concern, through anxiety teaches us courage and surrender. Once we have stretched ourselves out in this manner our life becomes organised around these basic principles.

It is important to realise that the ultimate that Tillich speaks of is not a personal God. Tillich did not espouse any particular religious doctrine and was considered an atheist by many. The principle he speaks of is the ultimate principle of being: that which is beyond us, is greater than us and organises us. Tillich's view of this principle is remarkably similar to that of Heidegger's notion of the 'region', or 'regioning towards' (Heidegger 1954, 1966). In both cases this ultimate principle can be reached only through a total openness to what is, especially that which we have difficulty in facing: the whole of anxiety-provoking reality. The concrete ultimate concern that an individual has at any one time functions as a kind of intermediate reality on the path towards this ultimate of intimates. It is through our small everyday concerns and anxieties that we stretch out towards the fullness of human and existential concern that points us towards faith in the ultimate. Tillich's 'ultimate' is much like Jaspers' 'comprehensive'. His encouragement to stretch out towards the ultimate concern and discover faith is also like Kierkegaard's leap of faith.

Anxiety, guilt and love of life

Tillich made a clear distinction between neurotic and existential anxiety and he was interested only in the existential version which points in the direction of the ultimate concern. Tillich claims that neurotic anxiety is nothing but a cover for existential anxiety. I may be neurotically anxious about a specific experience in the future, but this neurotic anxiety connects me deeply with a more fundamental anxiety of my own insufficiency and possible failure. This failure itself, when faced as a possibility, opens up the horizon of the possibility of my downgoing and death. In this broadening of my own context, I merge with the beyond and can discover the sense of my own aliveness and wholeness where anxiety about my own demise becomes irrelevant, and I discover a sudden courage in facing up to whatever lies ahead.

In the same way, a distinction can be made between existential and neurotic guilt, and similarly it is only existential guilt that points us towards the

ultimate concern. Equally, neurotic guilt is nothing but a red herring which hides a more deeply seated existential guilt about my in-built shortcomings which remind me of my mortality and possible non-being.

On the basis of his theological work, Tillich also published a number of small texts that dealt with specific human issues and which were meant as popular introductions to his thinking. In each of these he shows how often taken-for-granted concepts can be reconsidered and looked at from an ontological perspective.

In his short book on *Love, Power and Justice* (1954), Tillich formulates new definitions of these concepts and shows how they become confused and misunderstood. Love, for example, he argues, is generally looked at only as an emotion, when in fact it is an ontological position, an attitude towards the world. To see power and love as opposing concepts is a mistake. Both are ways of approaching the other in an attempt to overcome separateness. There is such a thing as powerless love, which is a passive swooning, but much of love is a powerful and active striving to overcome difference. Power can be loveless and abusive, but it can also often be full of love, seeking forceful union rather than destruction. Tillich points out the profound ambiguity of the experience of fulfilled love. It is at the same time 'extreme happiness and the end of happiness. The separation is overcome. But without separation there is no love and no life' (1954: 25).

It follows that acceptance of separateness – and, at the same time, our constant striving to overcome it, only to realise that we will forever fail – is the secret of life lived to the full. Courage is to affirm the ultimate prevalence of being over non-being, asserting the presence of the infinite in everything finite. Life requires us to open up towards our potential for non-being, and life will be the more powerful as it includes more non-being in its self-affirmation without being destroyed by it. 'The neurotic can include only a little non-being, the average man a limited amount, the creative man a large amount, God – symbolically speaking – an infinite amount' (Tillich 1954: 40).

For Tillich, therefore, true power comes from standing up in spite of our knowledge that we will fall down again. His philosophy contains much reference to this sense of living in spite of death, guilt and anxiety, while it also implies that these conditions are the *sine qua non* of life: 'Power is the possibility of self-affirmation, in spite of internal and external negation' (1954: 40).

But there are two ways in which we need to affirm this power. On the one hand we need to have the courage to participate in life, and with others. On the other hand we need to have the courage to individualise and affirm our own identity. There will always be a certain tension between those two poles of participation and individualisation. This is one of the tensions of life that we need to learn to live with. There is a definite sense of human martyrdom in all this, and Tillich describes Christ as the symbol of this courage and human

affirmation in spite of suffering and crucifixion. One could say it is only because a human suffers with dignity and courage that human life has meaning at all. It also follows that those who suffer most courageously reach out for the ultimate most effectively and achieve the greatest intensity and depth of life. It is a concept well worth thinking about when we try to cure our clients of their suffering.

Other philosophical contributions

Most people would die sooner than think – in fact they do so.

(Russell 1925: 166)

Introduction

There are numerous other philosophers who have helped sharpen the critical edge of existential thinking and who make stimulating reading for existential therapists. What follows is a small selection of those ideas that are most well known and relevant. Of course it is not possible to do justice to the whole array of phenomenological, existentialist, post-modern, structuralist, post-structuralist and deconstructionist thinking. There are some other authors I have chosen to leave out, such as Habermas, Adorno, Gadamer, Marcuse, Althusser, Deleuze, Guattari, Barthes, Lyotard and Baudrillard, though each has made an important contribution to existential literature and deserves to be read by existential therapists (see Loewenthal and Snell 2003). The list is long and this particular selection is by no means authoritative or final. It will undoubtedly change in the coming years and with future editions of this text.

In writing some of the sections below, I have felt greatly supported by some excellent handbooks of continental philosophy. In particular I am indebted to Richard Kearney's admirable books *Modern Movements in European Philosophy* (1986), *The Continental Philosophy Reader* (1996) and *Continental Philosophy in the 20th Century* (1994), as well as to Dermot Moran's outstanding *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2000) and his *Phenomenology Reader* (2002). All of these books I recommend highly for those who want to study these philosophers in greater depth. I have also built on work I completed earlier with my colleague Raymond Kenward, co-authoring the *Dictionary of Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling* (Deurzen and Kenward 2005), for this has provided me with a good basis from which to structure these brief overviews and define important terms.

ALBERT CAMUS (1913–1960)

The French novelist and philosopher Camus is known for his famous books, *The Outsider* (1942b), *The Plague* (1947) and *The Fall* (1956). He worked with Sartre and Beauvoir until he fell out with them over politics. Like Sartre he also wrote plays. His philosophical work is highly relevant to existential therapy because of its poignancy and particularly for its focus on absurdity and the meaning of life, especially in his essays *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942a) and *The Rebel* (1951). Algerian born of very poor and uneducated parents, his work is focused on his personal experience of alienation and conflict with the establishment. In 1957 Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Three years later he was killed in a car crash, in which the driver, his publisher and friend Michel Gallimard, was also killed. He had nearly completed a book on death.

Camus did not like the term *existentialism*, something he had in common with Heidegger and many other existential authors, who do not accept theism of the particular Sartrean existential outlook that was popular in the 1950s and 1960s. Camus aimed beyond existentialism towards the description of the absurdity of human existence and he tried to describe the position that such a sense of futility places human beings in. He also emphasised the importance of tragedy and fate as aspects of the human condition. He argued that it is only our engagement and willingness to find dignity in our destiny that can save us. In the *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942a) he famously affirmed that there is only one serious philosophical question, which is whether life is worth living or whether one would be better off committing suicide. His own answer was that suicide is the ultimate form of self-defeat, since it involves us in surrendering to the absurd. It would be better to make something of the emptiness of human existence and create something meaningful in its place.

Camus speaks of the ancient Greek hero, Sisyphus, who had been condemned by the Gods to push a boulder up a hill for eternity, since the boulder, as soon as it reached the top of the slope, would immediately slide down to the bottom again. Camus carefully studied what one was to make of this futility, symbolic of the potential futility of life itself.

The genius of Camus is to recognise that Sisyphus' response to his plight is heroic in that he affirms his life and holds his head high in his everyday drudgery in spite of his hopeless destiny. He finds meaning in his daily occupation, which he knows will be undone again the next day. His wretched condition does not get the better of him. He accepts that there can be no sunshine without shadow and that we have to know the night as well as the day and accept that difficulty is unavoidable if we are to accomplish anything. 'The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn' (Camus 1942a: 109).

Camus' philosophy is therefore an optimistic one in spite of his realism. He

imagines that the struggle that human beings engage in is enough to fill their heart. We can take pride in our courage and determination in dealing with adversity. We can endlessly test ourselves and improve our capacity for dealing with difficulty and hardship. We can thrive rather than go under when fate tests us and everything seems lost or impossible. Sisyphus is happy because his rock is enough for him. On it he discovers a myriad of beauty and in the personal accomplishment of his continued struggle he finds a satisfaction that even the divine punishment cannot deprive him of. In other words he is free of the wrath of the Gods, because he finds a way of affirming his own life, regardless of circumstances and come what may. It is a message of hope for the desperate and an important message to bear in mind when working with those who are despondent. Camus implies that we can discover such strength only if we are tested by life. Difficulties are the sine qua non of our awakening and so they are desirable rather than to be avoided. His view is almost Nietzschean or Dionysian in its sharp aspiration to bearing one's fate with courage and determination.

GABRIEL MARCEL (1889–1973)

Gabriel Marcel comes to the human condition from a very different angle. He is an often underestimated contributor to the French existential movement. He was also a playwright and a philosopher. His best known publications are *Being and Having* (1935), *The Philosophy of Existence* (also translated as *The Philosophy of Existentialism*) (1949) *The Mystery of Being* (1950–1951) and *Creative Fidelity* (1964).

Marcel's father was a former Catholic and an educated man; his mother, who was Jewish, died when Gabriel was 4. He was brought up by his aunt, who, like his father, was agnostic; his childhood was miserable. He converted to Catholicism and his writing was rewarded with numerous prizes. He too rejected the title of existentialist and thought of himself as a neo-Socratic philosopher instead.

For Marcel being has to be understood through the experience of human relationships. He distinguished between primary and secondary reflection. Primary reflection serves to learn about the objects in the world and it proceeds through rationality, verification and proof. Marcel considers that though necessary, it is an approach that abstracts and alienates us from the world. It is also an approach that is not relevant to human beings in relation to each other. He took the view that the dehumanisation that it led to was a danger to humankind.

Secondary reflection is a different matter altogether. It is a spiritual activity and is based in faith. It is about tuning into the mystery of existence and requires us to relate with love. In this it is similar to Heidegger's meditative thinking or Buber's I-Thou. Marcel's writing is highly evocative and spiritual

in nature. It calls the reader to experience the presence of something beyond the everyday that will disclose a new way of being.

EMMANUEL LEVINAS (1905–1995)

Levinas' work was also concerned with love and especially with the way in which we are with the other. Levinas was born in Lithuania but was naturalised as a French citizen in 1930. Of Jewish origin, he lost most of his family in the holocaust in the pogroms. He studied under Husserl at the University of Freiburg and met Heidegger as well. He did much to introduce phenomenology to France. Works include *On Evasion* (1935), *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being* (1974). His writing is poetic and mystical and requires the reader to think anew about things normally taken for granted.

Levinas considers Being to be a gift from a God who has left us to take responsibility for the other and make the most of this gift. The best or only way to do this is to take our responsibility to the other seriously: it is what Levinas refers to as radical alterity. The Other is seen as having priority over the self. We can become ethical only if we realise the way in which the other is revealed to us and comes before us. The face of the other makes an ethical demand on us and we may ignore this, oppose it or give into it. In this way we define what we become. The other always represents the infinite and without opening ourselves to this, we make very little of our lives. It is thus that Heidegger's emphasis on our concern with our own death is replaced with a concern for the other's death. The face of the other is a summons to me to validate the existence of another human being. But through the other it is transcendence that shines through our encounters and it is to infinity that we are called. Levinas' philosophy is therefore a profoundly ethical philosophy. But his ethics is one that is integral to the subject, rather than external to us. It is not based in rules, but rather in fellow feeling. We integrate an ethical dimension into our own experience and generate, what Levinas calls, an ethics of responsibility. He used to like to say that philosophy should not be about the love of wisdom but rather about the wisdom of love. The question I need to ask myself is not how to find a place in the sun of my own, but rather how my existence deprives the other of their space. In following this line of thinking I may begin to be aware that to be is always to usurp another's space and that I have to justify my existence through the way in which I am here. For Levinas it is in culture that we generate the safeguards for looking out for the other. In dialogue we encounter the other on the heights of culture and it is here that we come to the epiphany of the other. As a psychotherapist these ideas have implications both for the way in which we might prioritise the presence of the client over our own and for the way in which we may enable the client to put her own existence into similar context with that of others. A

Copernican shift of attention may result that will have positive implications for the way in which individuals perceive themselves and the people around them. In the therapeutic dialogue we come to collect the rights of other human beings and to remind them of these rights of the other as well.

PAUL RICOEUR (1913–2005)

Ricoeur is another French philosopher who, like Sartre and Levinas, brought phenomenology to France. He was a prisoner of war during the Second World War and searched for a phenomenology that would not look just for an intuition of essences, but that could interpret the symbols thus obtained. Ricoeur wanted to show that phenomenology was pragmatic as well as scientific and philosophical. He wanted to use it to understand human lives. Within everyday reality, Ricoeur proposed a process of self-reflective hermeneutics, i.e. a method of interpretation of the way in which we are embedded in the world of ideas. For Ricoeur the decisive factor that connects us to the rest of the social world is our language. We are all placed in the context of the language that we speak and the stories that we tell. Being human is being interpreted: we do not just invent meanings for ourselves out of the blue, we are part of a symbolic context which is multiple, complex and enigmatic. Ricoeur reminds us that the symbol invites thought and that thought is itself always articulated in the realm of symbols. He moves away from Husserl's idealistic phenomenology of the transcendental ego and replaces it with something much more concrete. According to Ricoeur, we cannot suspend our presuppositions and there cannot be a special place of pure intuition.

Ricoeur suggests that it is more worthwhile to grasp the limits of our knowledge and to come to understand the finitude of it in relation to our being in the world.

We cannot just describe meaning as it happens; we have to look at how it conceals itself as well. We have to examine the way in which our meanings insert themselves into the sedimentations of other pre-existing meanings: we are bound to the tradition of recollection. We take on board what others tell us. We find a new way to interpret previous truths. Instead of having to count with only our own assumptions, we have to struggle much more with existing truths and currents of beliefs that are external to us, but of which we are also a part. Ricoeur accepts that Husserl himself came to criticise his early idealism, which led to solipsism, and that he came to a theory of the intersubjective life world in his later work (Husserl 1965). The idea of helping people to articulate the meanings they are inserted in, in order to discover the meaning they can retrieve out of these for themselves, is of course directly relevant to the practice of psychotherapy.

Ricoeur was inspired by the concrete existentialism of Marcel and Jaspers, who struggled with the opposition between freedom and finitude. Marcel's

idea of incarnate existence – the notion that we embody our lives by assuming what we are – and Jaspers’ idea of limit situations – the notion that we can assume our life only to the extent that we accept its limits – were powerful concepts for Ricoeur. He wrote an important book about Marcel and Jaspers (Ricoeur 1948), then in *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1966) he tried to accommodate all of these ideas into an existential phenomenology that took into account man’s limiting experience of necessity, facticity and alienation. Ricoeur showed that people are confronted with the realities of some things that just are or will be whether we like it or not. In terms of psychotherapy, this coming to terms with the facts of life is a powerful first step.

Ricoeur was influenced both by Freud’s psychoanalysis and Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism. Their work showed that any one interpretation of a situation is never sufficient in itself and needs to be supplemented by other interpretations that reveal new aspects of the situation (Ricoeur 1970, 1974). Structuralism also showed that language was a deep structure of meaning that all of us are inserted into, and that we are influenced and guided by. Ricoeur referred to this process of gaining access to the unconscious system of psychoanalysis, structuralism and phenomenology, as the semiological challenge.

Ricoeur’s hermeneutics is based on the model of a text which has to be interpreted. This concept of the text is considered in the broadest sense. A text can be anything, even a socio-cultural situation. The phenomenon of polysemy – multiple meaning – is a fundamental feature of all language: all the words that we use are essentially equivocal and mean something slightly different to everyone who speaks them. As soon as we put meaning to something, we are interpreting and changing the sense of our words in a small way. We do this most powerfully by using allegory, symbol, metaphor, myth and analogy.

Ricoeur refers us back to the work of Schleiermacher and Dilthey in the nineteenth century. They argued in favour of the need for a different method of interpretation for the social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) than for the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*). But Ricoeur does not agree with these authors that all forms of objective knowledge are necessarily a negation of self-understanding. For Dilthey, subjectivity is all and everything begins with self-consciousness. For Ricoeur, history precedes me and my reflection upon it and all I can do is to insert myself inside of it. I belong to history before I belong to myself. History in many ways dominates and directs me.

Ricoeur agrees with Heidegger that humankind’s final project is a being-towards death and encounter with nothingness, which provokes the question of being. However, before that there is the space between birth and death, where human understanding is compelled to cross a range of fields and where meaning is dispersed, hidden, withheld or deferred. There may be a universal

field of being which holds the plurality of meanings, but this is not obvious in the immediate present. At present there is a conflict of interpretations. The equivocal nature of language makes this inevitable. We need the deciphering function of the interpreter to understand double and multiple meanings. We need to find the hidden meanings in the apparent meaning.

For instance, Nietzsche looks for hidden meanings in terms of will to power, Freud looks for them in terms of unconscious desires, theologians see them as signs of divine transcendence, and Marxists construe them as an expression of class domination. The architecture of multiple meaning shows itself while concealing other meanings. Interpretations may sometimes add extra layers of explanation which hide rather than reveal what we were looking for. If I see you struggling with your relationship to your mother and I tell you that you are struggling with the Oedipus complex, I have not enabled you to understand your dilemma; I have merely given you a different symbol for it. It may be that the symbol I have given for it adds a dimension of complication for you in sorting out your difficulties rather than enabling you to get greater clarity. There are methodological limits in each form of interpretation. We have to work out what the limitations of each are, so that we can get the benefit of each system of interpretation, but also remain aware of where it becomes counterproductive.

Ricoeur speaks of texts that need to be read and interpreted. People and their lives can be read as texts. Ricoeur agrees with the structuralists that a text goes well beyond the original intention of the author. What the text says to its current readers is as important as what the author originally meant to say. Similarly the client's life-story is open to multiple interpretations. Therapists may sometimes find a new angle that was not visible before in the client's own experience and this may enable the client to retrieve new meaning from their experience and get new insights.

Fortunately Ricoeur distinguishes sharply between the actual situational world (*Umwelt*) and the symbolic world (*Welt*) of interpretation. We cannot do what the structuralists do: make the text say anything we like. The basic intention of the sign is to say something about something – the text cannot be cultivated as an end in itself. We probe it to find hidden worlds. There is always more to what seems to present itself to us initially: there are wheels within wheels and Russian dolls within Russian dolls. The hermeneutics of suspicion unravels what was taken for granted and makes possible a new critique of culture. We need to remove the masks that hide meanings: we need a strategy of unmasking. Following Ricoeur such unmasking would be done in multiple directions: rather than always referring to a particular hidden layer of meaning (the intra-psychic for instance), we should be open to a variety of possible interpretations (the social, cultural and political included).

Only after this unmasking can we move to a hermeneutics of affirmation, because we no longer have the illusion that there can be a universal ontology

once and for all. By moving away from single track interpretations, we move away from a belief in an ontology where there is a single truth. Such ontology can only be a project, never a *fait accompli*. Ricoeur does acknowledge our dependence on a meaning that exists beyond the self and which we cannot know. The affirmation of the sacred, however, can never be verified (Ricoeur 1974). All that I can do is to continue to interpret the text and enlarge the available interpretations. Thus, we reinstate a complementary dialectic of self and other. I no longer consider myself to know what you are talking about, nor do I consider you to have the absolute truth on anything either, including on yourself. Instead, I accept that it is in a constant exchange between us that I can come to understand a little bit more about the meanings you are struggling with and investigate them together with you.

The only way to achieve some form of knowledge is to come to it gradually through dialogue. This involves me in exploring both the archaeology, or the landscapes of the past, and the teleology, or the landscapes of the future, as you imagine them. In terms of temporality as well, there is a continuous altering of meaning. As a psychotherapist I need to take this constant transformation into account, both for myself and my understanding of the world of my client, and in terms of keeping in mind my client's own struggles with changing meaning. Learning to capitalise on these shifts of meaning, instead of being victimised by them, must be one of the secrets of effective psychotherapy.

JACQUES DERRIDA (1930–2004)

The idea of different faces of meaning becomes even more potent in the work of Derrida. Derrida is known as the father of deconstruction, the main exponent of the 'textual revolution'. He is best known for his books *Of Grammatology* (1967a), *Writing and Difference* (1967b) and *Dissemination* (1972). Derrida's philosophy was particularly focused on aesthetics and he therefore had a great impact on literature and art studies and through this on many other facets of modern culture. His initial statement is that Western thought is logocentric: it outlaws any meaning that does not conform to a rationalistic logic of identity and non-contradiction. This means that we can accept only those things that seem in line with themselves and each other, and that we do not leave any room for the things that are complex, paradoxical and unusual.

According to Derrida we should replace our usual modes of thinking with that of the free play of language as an endless 'différance' of meaning. The word 'différance', with an *a*, is used by Derrida to indicate that things are different from each other as well as separate and severed from each other and continuously postponed or deferred. Meaning is inevitably altered constantly. Nothing means the same from one second to the next. Things never attain a

solid or reliable single meaning. This is not dissimilar to Heidegger's remark that we are always no longer and not yet. Meaning is in process.

According to Derrida, instead of expecting things to fall into place, we need to disrupt all univocal classifications and question all fixed identities which are symptomatic of logo-centricity. Deconstruction is precisely about this continuous sabotage of the established order, showing that nothing is holy, or wholly meaningful.

Derrida was greatly influenced by Heidegger's later work in which he used the word 'deconstruction' in relation to Greek metaphysics. He was also inspired by Husserl, who taught him a rigorous technique of unravelling and formulating questions. But Husserl was, according to Derrida, caught up in a phenomenology of presence. Husserl believed in the mystique of absolute truth and the possibility of certainty. Derrida, therefore, used Husserl's own methodology to question Husserl's ideas.

Derrida's conclusion is that we have to accept the impossibility of discovering a radical beginning. Husserl himself admitted in his later work that philosophy as a rigorous science was over, that the dream of phenomenology was over. Husserl admitted that the transcendental subject's world of immediate experience is in fact grounded in the historicity of a cultural life-world rather than grounding it. We do not intuit timeless essences. If we intuit essences at all, they are historical and contextual ones.

Heidegger had, of course, already tried to overcome the onto-theological basis of Western metaphysics, throwing out the notion of a supreme Being which infuses everything else with absolute presence. However, in spite of Heidegger's reevaluation and questioning of God-centred metaphysics, he still held on to a semblance of unifying being, in the shape of Being, with a capital *B*, itself. Heidegger's Being was not a divine nor a personal presence, but it is nevertheless an overarching principle of presence, from which all being-in-the-world derives its power and intensity. Derrida takes an important step further in the direction of atheism with his questioning of logo-centricity.

The history of metaphysics in the West is a narrative of the determinations of being as presence in all the senses of the word. People throughout the ages have attempted to capture the absolute and have done this in different ways at different times and in different cultures. In every culture and at any time we can hear people speak of such concepts as essence, existence, substance, subject, truth, transcendence, consciousness, conscience, god, humankind and so on and so forth. According to Derrida all of these ideas are abstractions and inventions of the human mind. None of these things actually exist: they do not have real and full presence as is suggested by the use of these terms.

Derrida claims that ideas such as these are like the emperor's new clothes: they are only metaphorically present to preserve the pretence of self-possession, power and authority. In reality there is nothing there at all and humanity is still as exposed as before, although it may imagine it has found

itself a new dignity by speaking in these lofty terms. Derrida is determined to question our conceited self-deception and hypocrisy.

He admonishes us to dare to think about the absence of any essence. He dares us to grasp that there is no centre to our universe, no guiding principle to infuse us with existence. If we can accept that the transcendental is actually absent, we extend the domain of potential meaning *ad infinitum*, because any construction of meaning becomes possible. The interplay of signification becomes multiple and infinite, for anything goes. Derrida shows us how to get rid of Merleau-Ponty's presentational intentions of perception and Sartre's representational intentions of imagination: he decentres all notions of presence, including those of the existentialists.

Derrida argues that things themselves cannot be experienced immediately; they are always mediated by language. Derrida's work is complicated by his contention that we need to distinguish sharply between the written word and the spoken word. According to him our Western culture gives priority to speech (*phone*) over writing (*gramme*). Plato believed in truth being expressed in a silent dialogue of the soul with itself through an immediate presence of the speaker to himself. This is illusory, according to Derrida, for there can be no real, but only imaginary presence. In the same way, the belief in the phono-centric ideal of self-immediacy in a dialogue between two speakers who are present to each other in a shared time and place, assuming that they can say exactly what they mean, is an illusion. For Plato, such dialogue was the ideal and he was highly suspicious of the act of writing, which according to him alienated the text from the speaker and thereafter could be taken to mean anything. Plato called writing a *pharmakon* – a drug, both cure and poison. It places meaning outside and exposes error.

For Derrida, Plato's assumptions of essences stand in the way of his appreciation that writing reveals the contradiction of being as non-presence. Writing shows that words do not ever actually mean just one thing and thereby it shows up the illusion of the presence of the thing that one writes about. We cannot use language to grasp anything once and for all, for there is nothing there to grasp. When we write, this illusion becomes more obvious as different readers will interpret a text quite differently. Writing is the production of difference. It is the difference of difference. Clearly, doing psychotherapy becomes extremely problematic from a deconstructionist perspective: the meeting of the two people in the consulting room can never be taken entirely seriously and their dialogue has to be constantly questioned. Perhaps a level of writing between client and psychotherapist would show up the play of differences more effectively. Derrida, like Lacan, was profoundly inspired by De Saussure's work, especially his *Course in General Linguistics* (1959), where a sign is said to not signify anything by itself, but only by marking a divergence or difference of meaning between itself and other signs.

Archi-writing is a term Derrida conjured up to indicate the functioning of

difference within speech, a sort of writing before writing. The science of this archi-writing is called grammatology, which dispenses with objectivity and favours a deconstructive reading of texts. It dismantles metaphysical idealism and realisms. It shows that all reference to reality is predetermined by meaning, and meaning by archi-writing. Grammatology assumes the guise of unrelenting scepticism intent on revealing that both reality and consciousness are constructs of a play of multiple significations which undermine the illusion of a posterior objective reference or a prior subjective intention. Truth is an illusion that has forgotten that it is an illusion, an army of faded metaphors.

According to Derrida, the Western metaphysics of presence manifests in four ways, all of which are normally embodied by psychotherapy.

- 1 It believes in the primacy of reason and perception and adheres to a notion of truth: the realist notion of truth as the identity of mind and reality or the idealist notion of truth as the cogito (consciousness immediately present to itself).
- 2 There is a preference for certain things over others, such as that of the immortal soul over the temporal body, the idea of transcendental forms as eternal and immutable realities, the notion of God as a timeless present.
- 3 Logo-centrism manifests as phallo-centric. The phallus is the symbol of sovereign self-sufficiency and self-possession. To be female is to be haunted by absence and being condemned, therefore, to the vagaries of instability, desire and procreation.
- 4 The idea that being can be pure self-presence, as opposed to the absence of non-being (the supreme being as *ens causa sui*).

Derrida sets himself the task of deconstructing all these illusions of metaphysics. In order to do so, books are no longer considered as books but rather as texts. Books have authors and authority, texts are merely the place for a free play of signifiers and are open to an infinite number of readings and rereadings. One can no longer connect a text to a fixed reference (transcendental signified) or a fixed specific intention (transcendental signifier). The deconstructed text is without origin or end. In this way Derrida means to liberate Western metaphysics from its domination by presence, which has led to a preference for the one over the many, identity over difference, spirit over matter, eternity over time, immediacy over deferment, the same over the other, and speech over writing.

We need to detect the covert operations of *différance* of difference and deferment. Even Derrida's own terms need to be placed under erasure, lest a new dogmatism takes over from the old. We need to learn to have at least 'two thinks at a time', as James Joyce once suggested, and see that *pharmakon* is

drug as well as cure and poison. Things are no longer either/or, as in the old system. Logic is thrown out of the window: no more principle of identity ($A=A$), principle of non-contradiction (A cannot be non- A) or fallacy of the excluded middle (truth is either A or non- A). Things can now be both/and, or rather neither/nor. Concepts such as these can be usefully taken into psychotherapy, when clients are helped to expand their acceptance of their own contradictions and paradoxes. The question is, whether it is useful for them to be encouraged to question the truth they believe in or search for in quite such a cynical deconstructive way.

Deconstruction is a way to bring into play a new emancipation of meaning in otherness rather than sameness. Derrida calls this alterity. This is a different alterity than that of Levinas. There can no longer be any absolute knowledge. Derrida does not do away with the subject, but opens up the subject to the desire for what is other than self. The deconstructed subject is a ludic affirmation of self-differentiation. To deconstruct a text is to disclose how it functions as desire, as a search for presence and fulfilment which is interminably deferred. Self-identity is undermined by alterity, rather than expanded by it as Levinas argued. In psychotherapy, clients are no longer encouraged to establish a strong self, therefore, but to question such identities through a constant contrasting of their own meanings with those of others.

The death of the author and the object described does not mean that the text cannot mean anything. On the contrary, it gives birth to meaning as such. Heidegger's later work, which crossed out 'Being' whenever written, showed his insight into the need to approach presence by eliminating it. Heidegger, in this context, referred to the hermeneutic circle: the question of being which is always approached from the previously set assumption that there is such a thing as being. Language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique. There will be no unique name, nor even the name of being. Derrida goes a lot further than this and claims that everything needs to be questioned, its meaning suspended and erased. One can see how useful such discipline might be for the training of psychotherapists, teaching them to question the value of their own interpretations. But such questioning should be applied to insecure clients with extreme caution and moderation, or not at all.

MICHEL FOUCAULT (1926–1984)

Michel Foucault was another French philosopher who, as part of the post-existentialist structuralist movement, provided important new elements for our thinking about life in the context of modern and, indeed, post-modern society. The books of most interest to psychotherapists are *The Order of Things* (1966) and his classic book on psychopathology and the history of mental illness, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961). His histories of medicine and sexuality have much to

contribute as well (Foucault 1963, 1975, 1978). Especially his work on sexuality helped to revolutionise our way of thinking about areas of human experience, such as homosexuality, that were once forbidden and pathologised but are now generally accepted. Two other contributions of Foucault are relevant to psychotherapists. The one is his book on the case of a convicted murderer, Pierre Rivière, in which he leaves the murderer to speak very much for himself, demonstrating how his discourse and that of those judging him shows up the complex power relations between them (Foucault 1973). The other is his evaluation of Binswanger's work on dreams, which is perhaps his most phenomenological and psychological writing (Foucault 1954).

Foucault sought to investigate the history of human institutions in a way analogous to the manner in which an archaeologist unearths the remains of buildings. He concluded that one could recognise eras of thinking and behaving that had their own specific character and culture. These periods, which he called 'epistemes', are whole systems of signification from which individuals draw their interpretation of reality (Foucault 1972).

According to Foucault, this epistemological backdrop is by far the most important influence on any intellectuals designing new theories, even though most of the time they are not aware of it. For psychotherapists, it would likewise be the case that their interpretations of their clients' predicaments would largely be made within the confines of their own understanding of their epoch and its mores. The question we need to unveil is: 'What is it that makes us see other people's behaviour in a particular way?' In other words, it is worth investigating what it is in our own particular cultural climate that makes us arrive at particular ideas and interpretations? This requires us to accept and face that our nature and actions are conditioned by the time and culture that we live in.

Foucault argued that one could recognise particular eras and their pre-occupations. During the Renaissance, things were considered to be exactly the same as the words that were used to express them. The world was ruled by the word of God, which was believed to be literally present in the Bible. Everything was set in a certain way and ordained to be so by God. This was the era, or episteme of resemblance, where things and words were in close interrelationship to each other. God was the ultimate authority with whom one needed to find favours.

During the Age of Enlightenment, the episteme shifts to one of representation. Instead of being literally seen as true, words and theories are considered to stand for other things and to be of a symbolic nature. This, of course, is also the age of Descartes' famous introduction of the split between mind and matter: now the world is no longer one, but can be divided between those things that are of the spirit and mind and those things that are material. All of this removes God from people, making the material world that of man and

one that can be investigated, while God is an aloof figure belonging to a different world. This leads to the worship of nature as the ultimate authority which can be controlled and dominated.

The modern age (nineteenth and early twentieth century) which follows this era replaces representation with self-reference. Instead of separating subject and object, mind and matter, and referring everything to a power other than ourselves, we have now learnt to refer everything to ourselves instead. While we believed in God in the age of resemblance, and in nature in the age of representation, in the age of self-reference we believe only in humankind and ourselves. Foucault referred to the modern age as that of anthropologism, but he did not stop his analysis at this point.

Foucault claimed that around the middle of the twentieth century we had gone beyond the modern age into the era of post-modernity, where the humanism of the nineteenth century has faded because of the realisation that we are no longer capable of living up to the image of the heroes of yore. If it was possible to kill God and nature, it is also possible to kill the self and the person. Foucault considered the whole idea of autonomous selfhood to have been an invention of the modern era and a consequence of the death of God in an industrial age. In a post-industrial age, where we have become removed from our own mode of production, and in a post-nuclear age, where we are capable of destruction on a massive scale, the idealisation of the ego cannot hold out any longer. Foucault considered structuralism to be the beginning of the age of the death of humankind. Since then deconstructionism has of course taken these ideas much further and has shown how we can destroy the meanings and illusions we ourselves have created. In the twenty-first century we have become aware of the ecological threats to the future of humankind, taking us beyond the fatalism of post-modernism, which in a sense was another form of self-glorification and still very much part of the self-centred humanism it is supposed to replace. As long as people are obsessed with their own ability to create and destroy they are clearly still anthropocentric. More recently we have started to learn to become more eco-centric and aware of our environment. I have written about this elsewhere and have shown that we have moved on from deconstructionism into an era of virtuality (Deurzen 2009).

Foucault himself observed that knowledge does not advance in a linear way but that there are various lines of development all at the same time, like waves in an ocean, which interact with each other to create new streams of knowledge and ideas all the time. It has therefore become just as important to think about the way in which our processes of information function as it was important in the last century to think about our modes of production. This relates to modes of power too, for the manipulation of information is synonymous with the manipulation of power. We need to become critically aware of the way in which power is exercised, used and abused.

This is precisely what Foucault does in studying the history of mental illness through the ages. He shows the evolution from the burning at the stake

of bad (evil) people in the Middle Ages to the incarceration of mad (dangerous) people in the nineteenth century, on to the hospitalisation of ill (suffering) people in the twentieth century. We might add a further evolution in this sequence, which began with community mental health care, leading to some improvements but also to a problem with homelessness of many mentally ill people. Much will need to happen to continue this evolutionary process and create a society in which the complexity of mental illness is fully understood and integrated. Such progress may not be best helped by stepped care and evidence based interventions, which assume that mental illness can be managed or cured and that normalisation is the answer. Existential thinking offers an alternative by reminding us that we can never eliminate unhappiness once and for all and that the human condition is implacable, diverse and open to change and transformation.

Female and feminist contributions

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.

(Beauvoir 1972: 295)

Introduction

Very few women have contributed to the history of philosophy, though there have been notable exceptions throughout the ages. Diotima, for instance, was a well-known female philosopher in Plato's time and Hildegard of Bingen was a woman philosopher in the middle ages. In the past century there have also been a number of contributions to existential thinking that have come from women. Much of the time their contribution is a specifically feminist one, i.e. it focuses on the different role women are assigned in society or on the special role that women can play in facing the human condition. These are important strands of thought to include into one's understanding of the human condition and contributors such as Helena Deutsch, Karen Horney, Juliet Mitchell, Kate Millett, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Germaine Greer, Nancy Chodorow and Luce Irigaray have initiated a stream of feminist literature to correct the distortions and male bias in psychoanalysis and psychology. They have offered an alternative, female way of understanding and construing the human psyche that has led to a rich and varied stream of feminine perspectives, which have ultimately led to a feminine social science, a feminist epistemology and research movement and to several waves of feminist thinking, that have among other things given birth to the interesting movement of feminist ethics (Held 1993, 2007; Tong 1993). This elaborates the difference between a feminine and a feminist ethics and shows how female morality puts greater emphasis on values such as personal relationships, connectivity, communication, care and choice. This is a discourse that weaves into that of the Gay and Lesbian movement, which has many interconnections with existential thinking.

Fewer women philosophers have sought to contribute to mainstream philosophy and transcend the antithetical position of feminism. Women

often raise suspicion about mainstream discourse as dominated by male perspectives and methods. Some of the female authors who have sketched out their existential position without taking an explicitly feminist stance are Iris Murdoch (1997), Mary Midgeley (1983, 1994), Mary Warnock (1970), Betty Cannon (1991) and Martha Nussbaum (1994). They are all well worth reading. In addition to these there are some female authors who have had a particular impact and who deserve a special mention.

EDITH STEIN (1891–1942)

Edith Stein was one of the most notable women philosophers who gathered around the phenomenological movement. She was one of the first women to thrive in a German philosophy department and was invited by Husserl himself to come and work with him in Freiburg, where he made her his personal assistant. She edited many of his manuscripts and translated Thomas Aquinas' book on Truth. In spite of her conversion to Catholicism, as a Jew by origin she was stopped from teaching in the 1930s and moved to a convent in the Netherlands, from where she was later deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Nazis when the Dutch Catholic church made a statement against Nazism. She was gassed in the concentration camp after apparently caring for those around her, in line with her admiration for the conduct of St. Theresa of Avila, who was her role model. She was herself canonised by Pope John Paul II. Her book on *Finite and Eternal Being* was published posthumously in 2004. In this she criticises Heidegger's work and shows how our understanding of our own death is not a primary but a secondary experience, since the deaths of significant others affect and concern us more than our own death. Her altruistic perspective is very similar to that of Levinas. She also made some interesting contributions on empathy (Stein 1964), making a distinction between primordial and non-primordial experiences which allow us to make connections with others, though we constitute ourselves in primordial and the other in non-primordial ways. She speaks highly of the way in which we can educate our senses to experience the world in a more open, clearer and purer way and how we have the ability to change and enhance our worldview and life experience in doing so.

HANNAH ARENDT (1906–1975)

Hannah Arendt was also Jewish and similarly had to leave Germany when threatened by the Nazi regime. She was more fortunate than Edith Stein and found refuge first in Paris, then in the United States, though she remained a stateless person. She was a student of Heidegger and had a passionate affair

with him in the 1930s, which led to an interesting correspondence between them. She was a journalist in the United States and as such reported on matters of Jewish interest, including the famous Eichmann trial, which led to the publication of her best known book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Arendt 1964), in which she argued that the reason the holocaust could happen was because evil was normalised and had ceased to astonish or shock people. It was in a particular context that people would commit mistakes that might eventually lead to evil. It was undoubtedly in the same vein that she forgave Heidegger for having betrayed, sacked or failed to support several of his colleagues as head of the University of Freiburg, when he was a member of the Nazi party. She tried to persuade Jaspers, who with his wife suffered greatly during the war, to forgive Heidegger for his Nazi sympathies, but never succeeded in doing so. She wrote a number of volumes on the life of the mind, but continued to emphasise the political dimension of human relations, arguing that the best way of preventing totalitarianism is to establish well-organised, democratic, participatory societies with well-regulated systems of politics.

Reflection on the collective life was to her the highest achievement of humankind and she advocated that more emphasis should be put on this, rather than on the economic realities and dictates that she was afraid were ruining our capacity for impartial observations about the future. Arendt elaborated these ideas strongly in her magnum opus *The Human Condition* (1958), in which she warned against adventurism and the creation of people who were morally superficial because they were drawn into selfish advantage in a commercially dominated and economical gain motivated society. She made a clear distinction between the private and the public domain and argued that these are very different spheres to which different rules should apply. She felt that the concept of the 'social' that dominates political discourse carried the risk of eliminating the importance of the private sphere. She perceived totalitarianism as a threat not only in its Nazi right-wing version that history had shown to be so dangerous and corrupt, but also in the American society that she was living in.

Arendt argued that human action is never as important as human thinking and especially human communication, in working out the pragmatically best way to manage a society. She pleads for a society based on discourse and thought, for it is speech and words that create a human universe. Human beings are unreliable and may change or become treacherous, but their words can be argued with and overcome by rationality and a narrative in which each person can and has to explain him or herself. As God has absconded and we are having to find our own redemption, Arendt claims that we redeem ourselves only by acts of forgiveness and also by making promises on the future, renewing our past and creating a better future, releasing ourselves and each other from oppression. It was without a doubt her intention to release Heidegger from the rejection and isolation he had created for himself as well.

At the same time she was critical of both Husserl's and Heidegger's discourses for being too abstract. In Husserl's case she objected to him trying to artificially overcome the difference between self and other and in Heidegger's case she was critical of his emphasis on ontology. She built much of her own thinking on the work of her tutor Jaspers, especially on his idea that we have to invent ourselves in the midst of an existential situation which cannot be systematised or predicted, but which has to be encountered in a live and creative way. She also reinforced his notion that it is the existential experience that brings us to thought and reflection and that we cannot do without this challenge, but have to meet it by our continuous commitment to discourse, communication and understanding.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR (1908–1986)

Overcoming oppression was also at the foreground of Simone de Beauvoir's work. She was in a very special position, not only in that she managed to generate a feminist discourse at a time when this was still mostly taboo, but also in that she developed her own philosophy and made an important contribution to existential ethics. In addition to this, her lifelong, controversial, unconventional and open relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre made her a very special and noteworthy personality during her lifetime. It is not difficult to show how she influenced Sartre's work and had a decisive impact on Sartre's later work particularly, making him much more inclined towards values around social interaction and cooperation than he had been in his early work. De Beauvoir became a phenomenologist at the same time as Sartre, was involved in the same publication 'les Temps Modernes' and had many of the same friends, including Camus and Merleau-Ponty. De Beauvoir's writing is less technical than that of other phenomenologists. She does not seek to make a philosophical contribution to phenomenology, but rather to highlight the experiences of human existence (and of women) in light of philosophical and ethical reflection.

Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex* (1949) considers the subjugation of women and the subordinate position they find themselves in, in relation to men. Her analysis of the female as the other to man is poignant and has been widely accepted and built upon. Her famous contention that biology is destiny is a classic. She says:

man is not a natural species: he is a historical idea. Woman is not a completed reality, but rather a becoming, and it is in her becoming that she should be compared with man; that is to say, her possibilities should be defined.

(Beauvoir 1949: 66)

It is thus a reminder of the human capacity for change and for dynamic and dialectical evolution which is defined by our own efforts. Destiny therefore has to be shaped by each woman, as it has to be shaped by each man and one is not born a woman but becomes one in action (1949: 249). Some feminists have objected to her views because they seem to ask that women become more like men in assertiveness and independence. Certainly she sees these qualities of rationality and autonomy as a way to freedom, whereas she discusses the feminine desire to please others in much more negative terms. For de Beauvoir, indeed, women need to become Being-for-itself rather than the 'other' as object to male sexual desire or as a mother. In many ways it is the female capacity for being both subject and other that is confusing.

Woman is opaque in her very being; she stands before man not as a subject but as an object paradoxically imbued with subjectivity; she takes herself simultaneously as self and as other, a contradiction that entails baffling consequences.

(Beauvoir 1949: 727)

It is therefore crucial for a woman to become subject, capable of determining her own identity and her own destiny. This is done in action and not in contemplation. Her novels illustrate this struggle towards a subjective, fully lived existence extremely well, including the conflicts and struggles that this inevitably involves. This is particularly true in *She Came to Stay* (1948a) which is shot through with philosophical observations and which deals with the issue of desire and being with others in a dramatic and poignant manner. The novel is full of the personal ambiguity that ensues from the kind of triangular relationship she and Sartre often entered into, claiming their affairs to be contingent and their own relationship to be a necessary love. In the novel, interestingly, this ambiguity is forcefully ended by murder.

Her autobiographical work, in her trilogy about her early life, shows similar themes and speaks of many problems, overcome with determination. But it is in her book about her mother's life, *A Very Easy Death* (1966), and later on in her book about Sartre's death, *Adieux* (1984), that she applies her phenomenological descriptions to the existential issue par excellence, i.e. death. She deals with death in a cool and collected manner, showing it to be an important task of human existence. In her book *Coming of Age* (1972) she tackled that same issue of how we are to live our old age and our death with dignity, rather than in the socially destructive manner of becoming the other. If we allow ourselves to lose our project in old age, we will lose ourselves. As both she and Sartre showed: it is possible to assume one's old age and pursue one's projects until the end.

It was her first philosophical essay though that made it clear what her position was. Her essay 'Pyrrhus et Cinéas' (1944) was published in English as part of her translated papers only in 2004. It sketches her view on the human

predicament and the best way to tackle the challenge of the human project. It details specific existential dilemmas, in relation to violence, relationships and political action and shows how each of these can be tackled directly and philosophically. She asks pertinent questions, such as how we are able to live out our finite existence with passion and within ethical boundaries and how we can be with another person without getting dominated. She tackles the idea of vanity of one's goals and projects and implicitly challenges the Sartrean view that we must affirm ourselves in action and follow our own choices by ourselves. 'A man alone in the world would be paralyzed by . . . the vanity of all of his goals. But man is not alone in the world' (Beauvoir 1944: 42).

Being with others is more important for Beauvoir than it is for Sartre, but she also develops her own concept of freedom, defining it not as freedom to do anything one likes but rather as transcendence: it is through my subjective freedom that I can overcome any difficulties in relationship or in the political arena. It is my freedom that also saves me from the intricacies of intimacy because it is within my power to overcome the problems that intimacy poses. Escape from intimacy is not the objective, for as soon as I am free I discover I need the other. I cannot ever be pure project without inserting myself into the social context. Freedom is nothing but contingency: in order to affirm it I have to dare engage in the relationship with the other that allows me to create and develop a different way of life. This is the project that allows us to continuously transcend ourselves. But she also recognises that we need certain material conditions in which to carry out this project and that we need access to safety and comfort: conditions of survival are essential if we are to thrive. She refers to the occasional and justified need to have recourse to violence (Beauvoir 1944: 77) if these conditions are not met. And so to pursue our projects with others is the objective, persuading them to participate with us in our projects, or forcing them to do so if we cannot persuade them. Though these others are essentially free they are open to persuasion and it is preferable to persuade them to participate rather than let them thwart our project. Essentially we have to learn to constantly tread a fine line between justice and violence. It is not a worldview that is utopian in any way. She is aware of the responsibility I always hold for the other and she speaks of us being the face of the other's misery as we create the facticity that forms the context within which the other needs to formulate a response to their situation. Her position is halfway between Sartre and Levinas in this sense and she seeks a form of action that takes both self and other into account. Her realism is mitigated only by her view that transcendence of problems and difficulties is forever possible and always desirable. But it is nevertheless problematic to find a way to transcend my lonely freedom towards the other, who I need.

In her articles in *Les temps modernes*, Beauvoir evolved a cutting edge, especially in her essays around popular wisdom (1945, in Beauvoir 2004),

where she argued that human beings tend to evade their responsibility and their freedom because they are so afraid of them. But she also made a strongly existentialist claim for a review of popular opinion:

The ethics of self-interest and naturalistic sadness are welcomed with such favour because the despair they express has a soft and comfortable character. It supposes a determinism that relieves man of the burden of his freedom.

(Beauvoir 2004: 213)

She rejects such a weak approach to life and stakes a claim for a more robust philosophy of living which avoids the disillusionments and sulking that follow from adoring the idols of contemporary society. She pleads for a philosophy that boldly refuses 'the consolations of lies and resignation' (2004: 216) because it has confidence in human beings. She says: 'Every living step is a philosophical choice and the ambition of a philosophy worthy of the name is to be a way of life that brings justification with itself' (2004: 218).

In a later ethical contribution she elaborates these principles further and comes to a more affirmative formulation of her own philosophy. In her book *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948b) in some ways she provided the ethics that Sartre had promised in *Being and Nothingness*, but never published till after his death and even then in notebook form. She argues here that consciousness itself is essentially ambiguous and that therefore all human ethics need to follow that ambiguity too if they are not to become set in stone. We cannot make the world become what we would like it to be and so we have to work with imperfection and change rather than try to impose our will on the world or on other people. If we recognise our limitations and remain open to the future, we can however find a way to be in tune with the world and with others, constantly adjusting for the contradictions that we will uncover, whether we like it or not. She argues that freedom is paramount and that evil is that which denies freedom, both my own freedom and that of others. There can be no freedom in a real way for myself unless the other is also free. She claims that it is because we are anxious about our freedom and afraid to fail in our projects that we shirk our responsibilities and purloin our freedom, in this way following an evil trail. She speaks up in favour of passion, particularly the passion of generosity that allows us to join with others and redeem ourselves as free human beings with a project that does not set us apart from others. She rejects the idea of God, but she also dismisses the idea of Humanism: Humanity is an idea that should not stand in the way of our actual current and real relationships, for these are what matter. It is thus passion and commitment that makes free and that makes for an ethical life. Such ethical life has to encompass the contradictions between self and other and the contradictions of the human condition. It is the spontaneous freedom of our intentionality that helps us find the way

through our lives. If we encounter the need for violence, then we must not hesitate: for the world makes demands on us and we cannot shirk our responsibility even then.

RECENT FEMINIST CONTRIBUTORS: LUCE IRIGARAY, HÉLÈNE CIXOUS, JULIA KRISTEVA

Numerous female philosophers followed in Beauvoir's footsteps. It was particularly the controversial writing of **Luce Irigaray** (1932–) that drew attention to the ways in which psychology is biased towards the male, phallogocentric version of reality (Irigaray 1974, 1984). As a phenomenologist she has demonstrated that there is no gender neutral view of human nature and that most psychologists have wrongly assumed the male as standard. As a Lacanian psychoanalyst but also as a feminist who was much influenced by Derrida and post-structuralist and deconstructionist thinking, she challenged the way in which the psychoanalytic concepts were based on a male model of human development and experience. She showed how such thinking can be broken down and then reconstructed in its feminine version. Her descriptions of female embodiment are poetic and evocative, as she sensuously puts into words how women experience their sexuality and their body. Her emphasis on enjoyment and pleasure (*jouissance*) has raised many eyebrows, but has reframed the way in which therapists might consider the female experience of pleasure as multiple, inward and secretive, by contrast with that of men which is simple, outward and relatively public. She was born in Belgium, trained in Louvain, then moved to Paris to do her doctorate and burst onto the scene in 1974 when her controversial book *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) was published. In this book she uses mimicry to parody the usual assumptions about female pleasure, but she also argues strongly that women have, as mothers and homemakers, provided men with a freedom to reflect that women have deprived themselves of in the process. She uses Beauvoir's idea of women as the other and argues that femininity is the other of philosophy: an other that needs to be explored urgently. She influenced two other feminist writers: **Hélène Cixous** (1937–) and **Julia Kristeva** (1941–), who have also become well known in their own right.

Cixous was born in Algeria and works on the cusp between philosophy and poetry. She uses Derrida's notions of difference and multiplicity, identity and univocity to make her point about the need to include the feminine in our future view of the world. She equates the male with death in its single-minded and narcissistic reality. The female brings complexity and multiplicity and is intrinsically bound with life itself.

Kristeva was born in Bulgaria, and initially worked on linguistics in Paris in the 1960s. She too draws on poetry and especially on the mobile and fluid process of bodily based vocal rhythms to generate new symbolic meanings.

She shows how the semiotic aspects of language have been suppressed, in their pre-verbal bodily evocative use and have been largely replaced by symbolic forms of language that are highly rule bound and socially significant but that alienate us from a profound flexibility and depth of experience. While this depth is often associated with the feminine it is not exclusively of it and needs to be brought back to the fore for the benefit of an alienated society.

Part II

Existential dimensions

A map of the world

Worldviews, paradoxes and dialectics

A Copernican revolution

It seems a pity that psychology should have destroyed all our knowledge of human nature.

(Chesterton 1934)

Introduction

We can draw one important lesson from these philosophers' observations of the human condition. If we want to fully understand human existence we should not limit ourselves to the study of psychology. The unexplored continent that we need to get familiar with is not primarily that of the human psyche, but that of life and human living. It may not always be obvious how the theoretical considerations of these philosophers are directly relevant to the practice of psychotherapy, but their thoughts are clearly related to the preoccupations that most of our clients present to us.

Unfortunately, psychotherapy often does not address those existential concerns. Psychotherapeutic culture tends to focus on the internal world of the psyche and its cognitive and emotional processes. Little attention is paid to the world in which the person lives, and so people's problems are generally interpreted as personal or, at the most, as family problems. All this presupposes that people are treated as separate units that can be examined and analysed, diagnosed and classified, like mechanical objects. The realities of people as organisms that exist only in relation to a context and an environment are thus overlooked. Drawing upon the notion of intentionality we conclude that looking at people as objects does not make any sense. People are defined by their relation, to a physical world, to other people, to themselves and to a network of meaning. If we are ever to truly understand ourselves we need to examine human living, as expressed in our relationships to the world on all these different dimensions.

As human beings we are complex bio-socio-psycho-spiritual organisms, joined to the world around us in everything we are and do. We do not ever really stand in isolation. In order to survive we need to be constantly

connected, filled and fuelled. We are in constant process of exchange with our environment in order to remain alive. We renew and sustain ourselves through contact with the atmosphere surrounding us. We breathe in and out, drawing life from the air and expelling waste products back into it. We take physical sustenance and we feed off the earth and excrete our waste back into it. On an interactional level, we need contact and exchange with other creatures and with the systems that have been created for our more efficient survival.

The centrality of relationship

A person cannot be an island – and even an island would still have seas lapping at its strands and birds and sea creatures visiting from other parts. We are never but an aspect, an element, a part of a wider context and a thread of a greater network that transcends us. We are one of the channels through which life flows. We are a vessel through which life manifests. As such we are always in relation, always in context, always connected to what is around us, always defined by what we associate with. Relationship is essential to our very survival and inspires everything we are and do.

Winnicott (1952) used to say that there was no such thing as a baby, in that the baby cannot exist without the mother. Rollo May similarly saw each individual as the centre of a web of relations. He claimed that we always go out from our centre in order to live in the world (May et al. 1958). We have to learn how to recentre our selves all the time. Life in this sense is a constant process of assimilation and accommodation, as Piaget (1954) described. Phenomenology describes this fundamental relatedness as a consequence of our intentionality.

Living is thus about taking in and giving out, not about being one single thing. The secret of good living is to dare to venture and have the ability to restore a satisfactory balance, no matter how shaken and decentred we become. It is about breathing in and out with the ebb and flow of the life which courses through us.

The quality of our engagement with the world is paramount. We need to pay careful attention not to what we are, but to how we are and to how we reshape and form ourselves by connecting and disconnecting with our milieu. What are the elements that appeal and attract us? How do we join with our surroundings, with the atmospheres and givens around us? What are the things that have the power to move us and unbalance us and pull us towards new associations and connections? How, in other words, are we inserted into the context of the world and what are the dynamic laws that draw us through our lives, one way or the other?

Clearly, as post-Darwinian science has shown, we are first of all biological creatures, subjected to the physical pressures of natural selection, survival and procreation. But the biological dimension is only one of our connecting

points. Our social interactional patterns are just as important as are the decisions we make for ourselves and the purposes we pursue.

Between freedom and determinism

Overall we seem confident in the rational order of the human universe that we have created, as we try to retain the illusion that we can be the masters of our destiny. Psychotherapy and counselling promote a belief in personal choice. Yet there are many signs on the wall that our trust in our autonomy may be misplaced and our anthropocentric thinking needs to be challenged. The technocratic era and its psychological corollary of deliberate cognitive and emotional control is misfiring. With an overpopulated, polluted planet, we need to take a close look at the processes in which we take part and to which we owe our living. The ecological concerns for the planet are just as important as our concern for our individual or family survival. In the same way in which technocrats need to take heed of the ecosystem into which their efforts are inserted, in psychology and psychotherapy we need to heed the ontological context of human existence. Adhering to simplistic, single-level explanations will simply not do. We need to note that when someone comes to a decision, say, to devote themselves to a new career, this is not simply the result of a wilful self making a deliberate, conscious choice to assert itself in this particular way. Neither is it sufficient to frame the decision as the outcome of an unconscious push of certain drives and determining factors from childhood that bring about the new commitment. Every move we make, everything we decide, is the outcome of a multitude of influences, which include elements of past, present and future expectations. There are determining factors of class and country and culture and intelligence. There are hormonal factors and genetic factors and personality factors. There are situational, contextual and interpersonal elements that also affect every move we make. None of these factors alone determine what will happen, or at least rarely so. Each situation is a new combination of elements, like waves in an ocean rolling together and forming new patterns and currents. We, ourselves, are neither at the mercy of these patterns and waves, nor are we able to choose our way across deliberately and single-mindedly. We are rather just capable of learning to weave our way around the waves, throwing ourselves in the surf or ride the crest of the wave, leaving the sea to close up in our wake. The total outcome of our actions is often unpredictable. We can never convincingly retrace our steps and explain what happened, without making new patterns and waves in the process.

The only thing that is relatively certain is that we are not free-standing units and that we are not unchanging in ourselves. In order for us to continue to be alive we have to let ourselves be moved by the energies and patterns of attraction and repulsion in the energy fields within which we are inserted and within which all of our moves take place. We are nothing in our own right: we

come to life only in as far as we allow the play of elements through us. In some ways we are nothing but the sounding board of the forces of creation; yet the sounds we produce in resonance with our surroundings affect those forces in turn, even if only in a modest way.

One of the fundamental premises of an existential approach to psychotherapy is this awareness of people's contextual and relational quality. It accepts the prime importance of our connectivity and constant change. We are always a project and we are always in a situation and a context.

Position of the person

This is a statement of much greater significance than may at first be obvious. It means that people are not just selves that form relationships. Relatedness is rather primary, as Heidegger and Levinas have each argued in a different way. The formation of a self is secondary. The person is not viewed as an essence, but as the medium through which life manifests itself. People are like the cells through which life is propagated. Perhaps they are nothing more or less than the servants of life, doing the job of living for a wider organism. We need to stop thinking of ourselves as the centre of the world. We need a Copernican revolution in the personal realm, accepting our relatedness to wider principles which stand at the centre of the universe around which we do no more than gyrate.

Although we like to think of ourselves as independent and autonomous, we are essentially interdependent and contingent. It is only because I am writing these words, wearing these clothes, listening to this music, pre-occupied with the sounds of my children going to bed, aware of the fullness in my stomach, the greasiness of my hair that needs washing, and the intention of preparing some course work for later this week, that I have a sense of my own existence. Only by virtue of my continued relationship to the food that I eat and the air that I breathe and the liquids I drink and the affection and care I give and receive and the words that I speak and hear and the waste products that I eliminate, am I in continued existence. I am not just my actions, as Sartre argued, I am my connections, be they active or passive.

If I were to isolate myself and keep myself free of any further input I would die within a very short time. I can, of course, control and reduce the constant inflow and outflow of my system, but only within the limits of survival. Philosophies and religions often try to master this. Much of psychotherapy is arguably based on the same principle: providing people with a safe environment, within which they can recalibrate their connections. Before long, in this manner, a different force field is created where the output from the client and the input from the therapist are conducive to a change in attitude and lead to a shift in the basic life position of the client.

Winnicott's statement that there is no such thing as a baby was only a glimpse of the broader truth that there is also no such thing as a mother

(without a baby). We need to expand that insight into the realisation that there is no such thing as a person without a world. The reverse is not true, however: there certainly is such a thing as the world without persons and this should give us ample food for thought. We are utterly dependent upon our environment to sustain us, whereas the environment does not need us to sustain it. In recent decades it has become obvious that the whole of humankind is at the mercy of the health of the planet in the same way in which a babe-in-arms is at the mercy of the health of its mother.

Implications for psychotherapy

Once we recognise the fact of humankind's primary relatedness, intra-psychic theories of personality become secondary. To put psychotherapy on a firmer foundation we need to spell out the fundamental world dimensions that people function on. Rather than basing our work on the intra-psychic or the cognitive we can now focus our observations around theories of human existence instead. Instead of thinking in terms of character types or types of pathology or indeed in terms of structures of the self, we have to learn to relate people's stories to their particular mode of interacting with the world. In order to do so we have to begin by distinguishing and making an inventory of the dimensions of life that we are daily confronted with.

Here we can build directly on the work of the philosophers and anthropologists, though a healthy scepticism is in order since each philosophy on its own is necessarily partial. We can extract from them the common denominators of the ontological givens of human existence and draft a plausible map of our existential dimensions. Such a map needs to be redrawn and revised each time we learn more about human existence.

There are four broad spheres of human existence (Figure 13.1). These four interlock and interweave, mingle and mix, but for clarity's sake we can describe them separately. All known human experience can be mapped on to a world map that contains the dimensions of:

- 1 the physical, natural, material domain or the *Umwelt* (around world)
- 2 the social, public, cultural domain or the *Mitwelt* (with world)
- 3 the personal, private, psychological domain or the *Eigenwelt* (own world)
- 4 the spiritual, interpretive, ideological domain or the *Überwelt* (above world).

We function somewhat differently in relation to our bodily existence, our existence with others, our existence with ourselves, and our existence in relation to a system of meaning. Different people at different times emphasise different aspects of their existence, but none of us can avoid having physical concerns about survival, social concerns about acceptance by others, personal concerns about our identity and spiritual concerns about what life is all

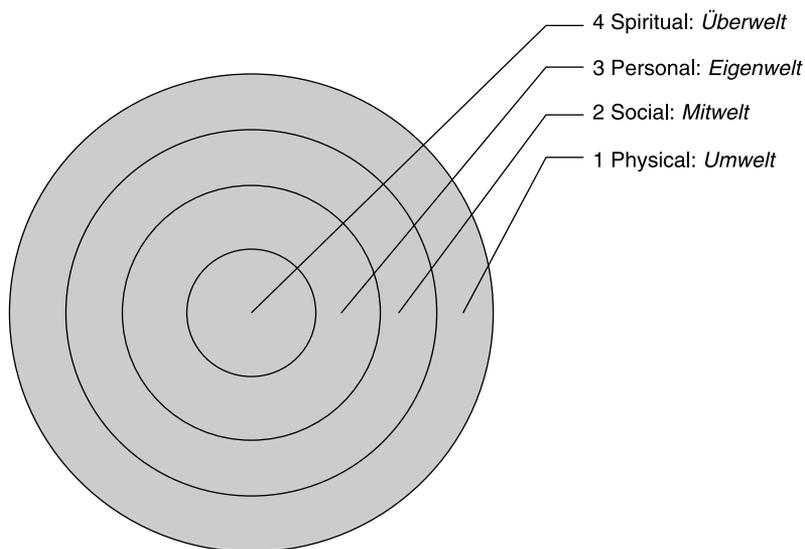


Figure 13.1 Four dimensions of life.

about. These layers of life are built up from the outer layers through to the inner ones (Deurzen and Arnold-Baker 2005). We start by learning to be in the physical world, then get wise to relating with others before we get a sense of self and before, ultimately we build an understanding of the overall meaning and tasks of life.

Human living is represented here as the four rings of a sphere or a planet. Each layer is interrelated with the others and is a necessary facet of the human condition: an ontological given. If we take a slice through the middle of the sphere we can represent the four dimensions as shown in Figure 13.2.

The function of antinomy and paradox

Figure 13.2 illustrates how the physical seems to take up most space in our lives, the social quite a lot, the personal a little less and the spiritual relatively little. Nevertheless all layers are important. The physical is clearly fundamental and is the base on which we build, or the outer layer that protects us, if we look at it in terms of the sphere or circle. The spiritual is most at the core of our experience and when we take a slice it shows up as the top of the pyramid, in some ways radiating meaning to all the rest of our experience.

What is often less obvious, but is well documented by philosophers and indeed by the very structure of human language, is that each of these four dimensions is held taut by its own particular boundaries, arranged in broad opposition to each other, like the poles of the earth. In everyday life, these

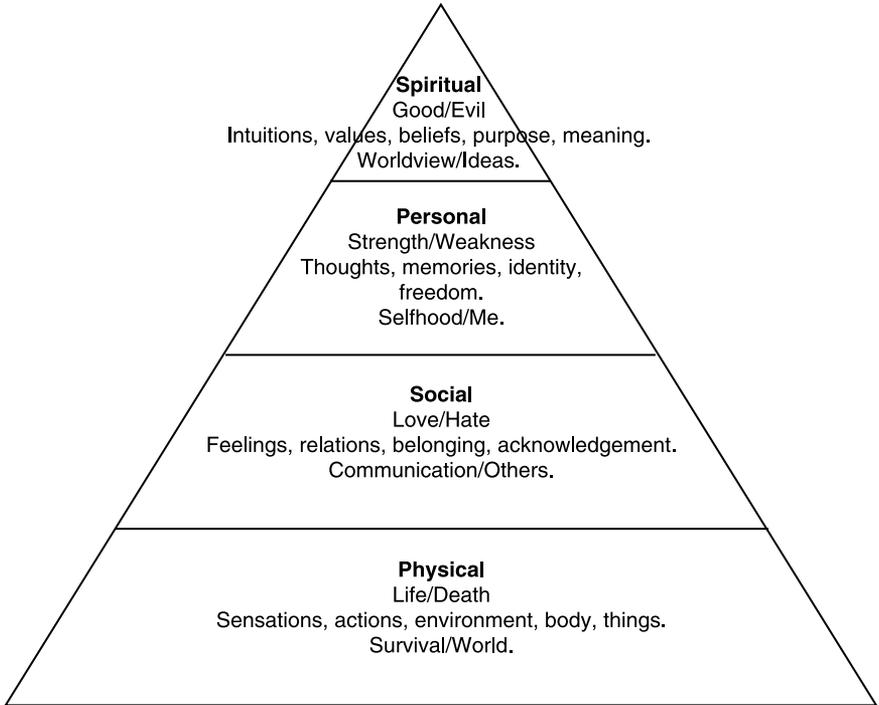


Figure 13.2 Dimensions of existence.

poles manifest themselves to us as paradoxes, dilemmas, contradictions and conflicts. The four dimensions of our existence are each spanned and dominated by polar oppositions. Life can be defined as the activity of movement between these opposites. People find themselves moved and motivated by the forces created in the tension between these extremes. The poles of life are indeed like the positive and negative poles between which an electric current passes. Without the differential there would be no force field at all. Existence is the tension between life and death and the play of forces in between. Without this tension, that involves us in continuous aspirations and desperations, and constant ups and downs, there would be no human existence at all. Life takes place in the force field created by the pluses of our pleasures and the minuses of our displeasures.

As people find themselves located at particular angles in the world and move across the territory of existence, they frequently attempt to remain close to that side of the world with which they are most familiar and which offers, therefore, more security and comfort. Sometimes, people pursue the exclusive benefit of the positive pole of the territory, rather like we do when we long for never-ending springs or summers. At other times they may be

strangely drawn to the negatives, as we would when obsessed with the melancholy of autumn or the bleakness of a bitter winter.

There are clearly forces at work propelling us this way and that, making us prone to reside in a particular position or place at a particular time. These trajectories are responsive to factors of proximity and qualities in our own constitution that are sympathetic or antipathetic with our surroundings. There are, however, also balancing mechanisms built in to life tending to redress the equilibrium and exposing one to the previously neglected side of existence. When the body has engaged in a lot of strenuous effort, it tires and aims for rest. When we have been intensely involved with other people for a significant period of time, we seek peace and quiet. When we have been resolute and self-assertive for long enough, we crave a phase of letting our guard down. When we have been consistently virtuous and good, we are ripe for self-indulgence.

Onto-dynamics

People may operate with the assumption that one particular mode of operating or one particular objective is superior and right, only to discover that what they thought of as exclusively positive itself had a negative side. Similarly what seems like pure negativity may conceal positive elements that may emerge in new circumstances and from different perspectives. A look at human history or cultural diversity gives many illustrations of this principle. Take, for instance, the way in which women's roles have changed over the decades, making certain feminine qualities – such as timidity and modesty – popular at one time and place but considered a drawback at another. Another example is the way in which a certain type of personal sensitivity is quickly equated with paranoid schizophrenia, whereas it may be cultivated as shamanism and religious leadership elsewhere.

The dynamics of our movements and emotions are related to the things, people, qualities and ideas towards which we are pulled or from which we are pushed away. The more something is valued by us, the more other things we are willing to give up for it. Our values are the currency of exchange of one situation for another, in the same way in which money is what measures the exchange of goods and their relative value in relation to each other. Values motivate and guide our actions and attitudes. According to the amount of value we attach to something, we are able and willing to expend more or less energy for it. Values are what determine the dynamics of our existence. They are the key principle of onto-dynamics.

The four existential dimensions

Crudely speaking, we are involved in a four-dimensional force field at all times (as we saw in Figure 13.1). First, we are regulated by physical, biological, natural forces. We are, second, inserted into a social, cultural network. Third,

we are regulated by our own personality, character and mental processes. Finally, we are modulated by our relationship to the overall framework of meaning through which we experience the world and make sense of it on an ideological or spiritual dimension.

Each of these levels of operating is just as important as any of the others. There are connections and overlaps between them and it is merely a matter of clarification to try and distinguish these different forms of world relation in the first place. Each level has its own paradox and tension, its particular human objectives and aspirations, its preferred mode of operating and medium, its ideals and its evils.

Physical dimension (Umwelt)

On the physical dimension, we are bodies interacting with the physical environment. Basic motivating principles are those of survival and reproduction. We interact with the world on this level through our basic sensory and motor systems. Our five senses of smell, hearing, taste, sight and sensation are our main channels of operating. Action is our outlet. Our point of reference is that of the objects in the material world. Our body is the point of contact with this world. In Jungian terms, this level is the natural environment of the sensing type. In terms of Baumeister's levels of meaning (Baumeister 1991), this is the dimension of finding meaning through a sense of efficacy, that is, through the satisfactory interaction between our body and the physical world, when we know that what we do makes a difference and has concrete results.

Social dimension (Mitwelt)

On the social or public dimension, we are selves interacting with the world of other people, engaged in contact, either through cooperation or through control. This level of operating is regulated by our feelings. Our emotions indicate the way in which we are moved on the territory that we share with others. Feelings are, to a large extent, a barometer of how we interrelate with others. Communication is the prime outlet of those feelings. The point of reference on this dimension is the existence of other people in a public world. My ego, or my social self, is the point of contact between my centre and this world of others. Meaning is achieved on this level through striving with others for the establishment of value: love is the prime example of a commonly shared value on this dimension.

Psychological dimension (Eigenwelt)

On the personal or private dimension, we connect through our 'I' or 'self' to the internal world that we construct out of the experiences on the other two

levels. Here we are mainly preoccupied with creating the very centredness that gives us a sense of stability, integration and selfhood. The level is regulated by thinking, in the broadest sense of the term, verbal or nonverbal. With concepts, schema and images, we retrieve certain notions about our self and our personal world. Our outlet is the creation of an inner sense of individuality, which itself creates an increasingly secure point of contact of selfhood. Meaning on this level is created through a sense of self-worth: the knowledge that one is a good and valid person

Spiritual dimension (Überwelt)

On this dimension we connect through what we may think of as our soul to the absolute world of ideas and their concrete significance in our everyday existence. Our preoccupation is with meaning. This level is regulated by what is usually referred to as intuition, which may be a less articulate, but refined, form of information processing. Our outlet is the connection to a wider network, a sense of belonging to the scheme of things. Our point of reference is that of the existence of truth in the world. The point of contact is that of our embodied consciousness: our whole being, on all other dimensions available to us, relating itself to the context that it belongs to. Meaning is found on this level through the discovery of a sense of purpose (see Figure 13.2).

Of course each of these dimensions is habitually interwoven with the others. Many of the things we undertake are interspersed at several levels at once. The dialectical process of constantly overcoming our difficulties and limitations benefits from this complexity: for we may be down in the dumps over a social loss, but if our physical security is still intact we stand a good chance of overcoming the problem. Real hardship usually involves destruction or faltering on all four dimensions at once. It is clear that therapy needs to particularly address the dimension that a person struggles with most, but ultimately it also needs to be able to integrate all the various concerns that a person has into a complete whole.

Interestingly the different approaches to psychotherapy can be seen to favour certain layers of explanation and tend to work most on a certain dimension, although naturally not exclusively so.

- *Umwelt based approaches:* understand physical subtext and embodiment and emphasise the biological aspects of a person's relation to the world around them. Behavioural therapy / Bio-energy / Biodynamic therapy / Classic psychoanalysis.
- *Mitwelt based approaches:* describe and take into account the social, cultural and political context of the client's life. Object Relations Psychoanalytic therapy / Systemic and Family therapy / Transactional Analysis / Group therapy / Cognitive Behavioural Therapy / Adlerian therapy.

- *Eigenwelt based approaches*: read and understand the text of the client's life, find the narrative point of gravity. Emphasis on identity. Gestalt therapy / Self psychology / Ego-psychology / Person-centred therapy / Psychodrama.
- *Überwelt based approaches*: recognise worldview and values and seek to work with the purpose of the person's life. Jungian Psychology / Psycho-synthesis / Core process / Transpersonal therapy / Buddhist therapy.

Existential therapy aims to address all four dimensions of human existence equally and in this sense is an integrative approach. It will generally emphasise the dimension that requires most work at any one time for a particular person. Of course most approaches to therapy aim to understand existential complexity and will similarly seek to adjust to what matters to the client, but it requires a philosophical stance to become aware of the fullness and interwoven as well as paradoxical nature of human existence.

It is indeed this paradoxical nature of life that may be most problematic for people. The contradictions and paradoxes that necessarily exist on each level of our existence are confusing and confounding, but they are also the vital source of our energy. They are like the positive and negative poles that generate the current of life. But in spite of the importance of these paradoxes and tensions, it is these conflicts that people habitually have difficulties with or get confused over and bring to therapy. A bird's eye view over the dimensions of life in terms of their basic paradoxes looks like Figure 13.3.

These tensions are easily overlooked. But they are crucial to good living. We cannot have life without death, nor death without life in the same way in which there is no love without hate or hate without a kernel of love. We have to grasp our freedom in order to establish identity but cannot be fluid in this until we allow for freedom. The conundrum of good and evil is similarly inevitable: until we accept the bad in ourselves we cannot aspire to any sort of virtue. Without the struggle the human being becomes empty

	Desires	Fears
Physical	Life, pleasure	Death, pain
Social	Love, belonging	Hate, isolation
Personal	Identity, integrity	Freedom, disintegration
Spiritual	Good, purpose	Evil, futility

Figure 13.3 Dimensions and tensions of human existence.

and devoid of meaning. The goal is not to eliminate these tensions, nor to have plenty of positives in our lives without facing the negatives (Deurzen 2009). On the contrary we need to help ourselves and our clients to face all levels of existence, both in positive and negative terms. We need to be sensitive to where the client is situated in terms of the positive or negative poles of existence at any one moment. Working with these opposites is about helping them to face the realities of life and to explore these rather than to run away from them in fear or by pretending they can have only the positives without the negatives. The ultimate objective is to generate some intermediate values that enable a person to steer a fairly straight path through life and that give them something to hang on to when faltering and failing. In the Appendix you will find a full diagram of opposites of each dimension and their implications.

It becomes obvious in looking at the variety of experiences at each level that life is complex and that human tasks are multiple and intricate (Figure 13.4). Indeed each dimension of our existence is interwoven with the others and we need to somehow account for this multiplicity.

Figure 13.5 shows how such interweaving happens as we manage our

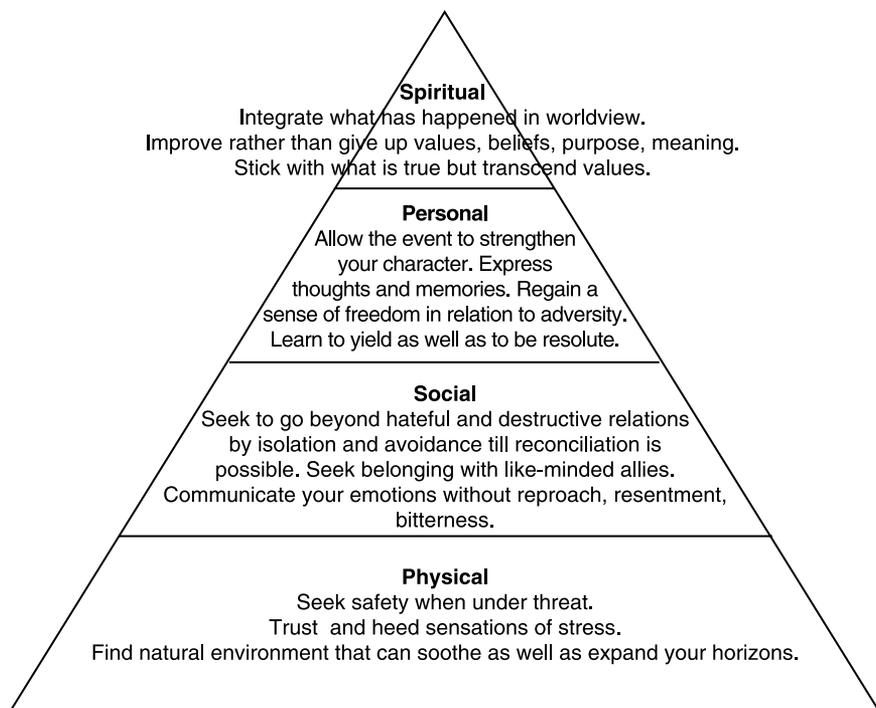


Figure 13.4 Living with conflict and trauma.

	<i>Umwelt</i>	<i>Mitwelt</i>	<i>Eigenwelt</i>	<i>Überwelt</i>
Physical survival	Nature	Objects	Body	Cosmos
Social affiliation	Public domain	Others	Ego	Humanity
Personal identity	Private domain	Personality	Self	Individual
Spiritual meaning	Sacred	Value	Soul	Transcendence

Figure 13.5 Different dimensions of the four spheres of existence.

encounter with different dimensions of life in each of the four spheres of existence as we deal with the fourfold tasks of survival, affiliation, identity and meaning making.

So, on the physical dimension, in order to survive we have to deal with the environment (*Umwelt*) in terms of the demands and gifts of nature, with the *Mitwelt* by dealing with the objects and other bodies around us, in the *Eigenwelt* by dealing with our own body and in the *Überwelt* by dealing with the global order of earth and cosmos.

On the social dimension in order to secure our affiliation to others, we deal with the physical environment of the public domain, on the level of *Mitwelt* we deal with other people, in the *Eigenwelt* we are confronted with the construction of our own ego, and in the *Überwelt* we learn to take humanity into account as a whole.

On the personal dimension our environment is that of the private domain, and we establish our identity in relation to others who we encounter as personalities, while becoming aware of our own selfhood, making it possible to care in *Überwelt* terms for the needs and well-being of the Individual.

On the spiritual level we create meaning by confronting the *Umwelt* of the sacred, and in terms of the *Mitwelt* we generate meaning through the values we discover, leading to a sense of soulful existence and a capacity for transcendence. It is this transcendence that completes our capacity for constant overcoming and transformation, which also ensures that all of this remains dynamic.

As can be seen we can formulate many different goals for our lives, even on the same dimension we can pursue different values at different times. Of course therapists can help people to reformulate their values, find new ways of thinking of the values that one thought important and expand and extend them to include a capacity for facing the negatives they imply as well as pursuing the positives. A flexible attitude is usually most effective as is also

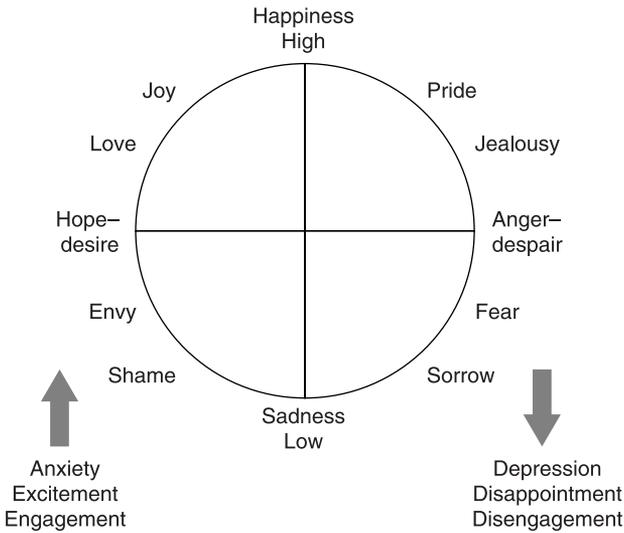


Figure 13.6 Compass of emotions.

attention to the different levels of experience and a healthy dynamic between layers and between the tension of positive and negative. In the next chapters we shall explore each layer of existence separately in order to clarify the functions, demands, possibilities and limitations at each level. We shall see how the compass of our emotions (Figure 13.6) can give us specific guidance on each level.

The physical dimension

Being with nature

Though you drive away Nature with a pitchfork she always returns.

(Horace, *Epistles*, IX: 24)

Introduction

Our most fundamental mode of interaction with the world is that of the relationship between our physical body and the natural environment. This dimension of our existence is classically referred to in the literature as the *Umwelt*, or world around us, a concept introduced by the biologist Von Üexkull to describe the different environmental life worlds of the different species (Spiegelberg 1984). If you look at the room you are sitting in right now, you can imagine how it would be variously experienced by different animals in it. A fly, seeking a window to escape, would be attracted to height and light, a dog, looking for a cosy corner to curl up in, would look for protective angles and reassuring smells, a bird might look for a safe high place to perch, a person with a particular piece of business to conduct would probably focus more on the objects in the room: desk, books, lamp, pen for instance. In effect, the same location would represent entirely different subjective worlds depending on the particular relationship between the creature and the environment.

A good demonstration of this is the way in which we remember childhood locations as large and impressive, when re-confrontation with the same place in later life may show it to have been relatively small. I remember my amazement at the age of 17 when revisiting a playground that I had frequented only until I was 2½ years old. Instead of seeing the large swings and huge sandpits that I expected, instead of rediscovering this gigantic and adventurous world full of danger and promise, I found nothing but a modest neighbourhood patch with small toddler-size swings and diminutive sandpit. It was a sharp and humbling experience of disillusionment and realisation of the relativity of human experience and memory.

The basis of physical existence

Our physical existence is made up of the body's interrelation with its physical environment, which happens in complex biological, chemical, genetic and hormonal ways, as well as through the five senses at our disposal and our motoric ability to take action. We are in existence in the world: primarily in this physical manner, concretely, through the interaction of ourselves as bodies with our material surroundings. The physical dimension is the basis of all life as we know it and its parameters determine our being in the world. Our natural environment has a profound effect on us. Our relationship to the objects and other bodies in the world requires us to become skilled and adapt at handling our own body in space. Ultimately we are exposed to the physical expanse of the entire cosmos and its global environment that we cannot begin to fathom, let alone master.

Our life starts in the most down to earth, practical manner through the sexual act and conception. As a foetus we bathe in amniotic fluid, safely tucked away for our main task in life, which is to evolve and develop until we are mature enough to exit and face the world out there. When a baby is born it is almost exclusively in the physical realm: even its relationship with its mother is primarily about sheer survival and the satisfaction of bodily needs. The neonate aspires to little else at first than to be safe, to be warm enough and to be fed and groomed to stay clean. Although all of this requires the presence of another person, that person functions primarily as the servant of the baby, seeing to it that those needs are filled. The expression of love between parent and baby is part of this totally physical world: the baby thrives on close and warm holding, cuddling and hugging, on being fed when it is hungry, cooled when it is hot and cleaned when it is dirty. Good caretaking at this stage is the epitome of love.

The more complex social dimension of the relationship emerges only very gradually and is secondary for a long time to the pure physical exchange of care and cuddles. New mothers are often surprised to discover not only how sensuous, but also how physically demanding and exhausting an experience caring for a baby is. It is essentially of the senses and involves opening up to the delight of smelling the baby's soft and fragrant head, inhaling its inimitable aroma and caressing its ever-so-preciously silky skin, curling one's hand around its tiny padded feet and cradling this warm animal to one's own body as if it were a new well-fitting part of oneself. A new mother, in Western culture, is all too often alienated from the physicality that is required of her in this situation. She will tend to substitute thinking care and psychological know-how for the basic physical love and shared sensuality that babies crave. She will often become anxious and as a result fuss and plan and try to fit the baby into pre-set notions of ideal parenthood. The more she can give up her usual rational and civilised mode of operating in order to merge with the animal level that is required of her by her baby, the better a mother she will be

and the more enjoyment she will get out of her intimate relationship with her baby. In some ways parenthood at its early stages is about becoming like a baby again oneself, although with the benefit of independent access to the resources required for survival. The baby's existence illustrates the fundamental connection to the earth on which human beings remain dependent for the whole of their lives.

At the end of life we frequently get thrown back to existing purely on this physical plane. If the end is reached through natural causes, we may have the experience of becoming almost like a baby again. It is as if we come back full circle to our beginnings. We find ourselves dependent upon others to see to our basic survival needs. We gradually lose our own grip on the world and are reduced once more to a purely physical mode of operating, where our only aspiration is to survive in relative comfort, until death takes care of us.

The horizon of life

Birth and death are the horizons of our sheer earthly existence: the parameters against which our living is enacted. From dust to dust, we wax and wane, and in between we ennoble ourselves through manifold tasks, exploits and adventures that catapult us into more and more complex levels of existing. The basic challenge of our physical survival always remains our fundamental concern, however, and never ceases to make its demands and threats.

Life is lived in the span of time between coming into the world, maintaining ourselves in it temporarily and going out of it again. In its shortest expression, life is nothing but the event of being created and slowly destroyed again. But human life is about standing in that tension as long and as well as possible, allowing new life to be created through us in the process. Life thrives when birth and death are kept safely apart and the span in between is used proficiently and to the full. It is therefore not at all surprising, and hardly a reason for scorn and contempt, that people tend to want to keep birth and death far from their everyday preoccupations. It is only to be expected as both remind us of our humble and fragile nature. When the mystery of birth or death does touch us, we are inevitably altered in this process.

Resources: wealth

To make the most of the short time of life allotted to us, we need to gain access to adequate physical resources, first through our parents, then through our own efforts, then through those caring for us when we can no longer do so ourselves. It is quite natural then, that people make the acquisition and securing or hoarding of physical resources (wealth) their first objective in life. In our society, money is the medium for the exchange of material resources, and the acquisition of money has logically become an important objective. Those who slight the pursuit of material possessions often do so from the comfort

of a secure income. Anyone who has ever been penniless knows that it is hugely important to be able to generate economic self-sufficiency and see to our own needs (and those of our dependants).

Of course the acquisition of wealth can start to play a quite different role in a person's life: aspects of social dominance or personal achievement may well become grafted on to the original physical need aspect. As soon as people get successful at accumulating material possessions, the principle of inertia may make them persist in wanting to accumulate ever more. In doing so, the original objective of wealth as securing our physical safety may be forgotten.

Resources: health

Physical existence is essentially about survival and reproduction. These are not possible without health and physical fitness, allowing us to function fully on the physical plane. In natural conditions a general state of fitness is the sine qua non of survival. The weak and ill, without the protection of human society would simply die. Looking at the animal kingdom beyond the human enclave, it is quite obvious that life means fitness and fitness means survival and reproductive success. Nowadays, for the human animal, this is far from self-evident. By providing ourselves with more and more sophisticated technology, we have made it possible for life to go on, in spite of illness and unfitness. The same technology has also removed us several steps from the natural world and the physical exertion otherwise required to survive in it.

Being a body

Our relation to the physical world is through our body. The sort of body we have is instrumental in determining how we are in contact with the world. Each of our bodies has a limited range and potential.

It is quite obvious that people are people, and not birds. People, unlike birds, cannot fly. Nor can they swim under water for long periods of time, like fish. They cannot multiply through autogenesis like amoeba and they cannot change their colour like chameleons. Yet we can overcome human limitations because we are able to imitate and approximate the abilities of other animals remarkably well. We can fly in aeroplanes and we can swim under water with snorkelling equipment, we can multiply our own genes in laboratories and we can, through clothing, make-up and surgery, change our appearance in miraculous ways.

Our technological achievements are truly wondrous and have confirmed our illusions of grandeur. The problem is that by concentrating so much on achieving the things that are difficult for us to do and that are non-essential, we may have lost touch a bit with the things that would have come naturally and that are essential. We are like children who get enchanted with the many instrumental voices of an electronic keyboard and who therefore dispense

with learning the essentials of basic piano playing. Although we are often fascinated by the manifold possibilities of humanity, we may be out of touch with the essential nature at our disposal.

Relationship to the earth

Ecological concerns about our own planet have been around since the mid twentieth century, but have only recently come into full view. Understanding and respect for the earth's laws is crucial for our long-term survival. If we simply exploit natural resources, ignoring the consequences, taking as much from the earth as we can, we get into trouble. By ignoring physical laws we upset the natural balance. Though the universe itself may not be harmed by this and even the earth may re-establish different life forms human beings are gambling away their chances of future survival by ignoring their place within the wider natural context. As a race, we are behaving like cancer cells, multiplying and taking over and destroying the very organism we are dependent on for our survival.

It is time we learn to live in harmony with the planet and the seasons of earthly life.

Possibilities and limitations of our own body

In the same way in which we do violence to the earth, we often do violence to our own bodies. We treat them like commodities and try to make them conform to outside demands. People can acquire new bodily parts, they can gain and lose weight and they can build their bodies up through vigorous and well-planned exercises. None of this in any way changes the fact that we are still what we are and that there is a genetic blueprint in our system that makes us ourselves and no other.

Many of us are so preoccupied with attempting to approximate somebody else's blueprint that we fail to be true to our own and, tragically, fail to learn the art of playing our own instrument. Some people are like violins and others like drums, some are like flutes and others like pianos. Some of us come into our own playing solo and others do much better being part of the orchestra. But in order to make music, we need harmony. Harmony can be achieved only if everyone is committed to making music on their particular instrument in the best possible way. Of course individuals prefer certain instruments over others and every instrument has its own particular qualities that the others cannot reproduce. No single instrument is intrinsically superior to any other. Human beings, as instruments, all make different music and have different levels of competence and experience. The art is to discover what talents one has been given and to make the most of what one is and can be, rather than try to be what one is not. The best we can do is to make sure the instrument is tuned properly and use it as much and as best we can.

Learning about physical autonomy

While some developmental theories focus on interactional elements, most recognise that the early tasks of babies and children are to integrate themselves successfully as independent bodies into a physical world.

Babies learn to sit independently, crawl independently, walk independently, eat independently, dress independently, and find their way around the world on their own, equipped with all this know-how for their physical survival. Some people continue to rely on others for some of these basic survival functions and such dependency is often the root of later existential problems.

Making the most of talents and limitations

In getting to know our physical peculiarities, we may baulk at our own deficiencies. Some of us find it hard to accept what we are and to come to terms with our positive and negative aspects. Yet it is only in making the most of strength and weakness that we learn to take pride and pleasure in our physical existence. Then we discover that acquiring new skills, new dexterity, new aptitudes, new crafts, new sports and bodily flexibility, is one of the best ways to experience a sense of vitality and elation.

Attending to physical needs

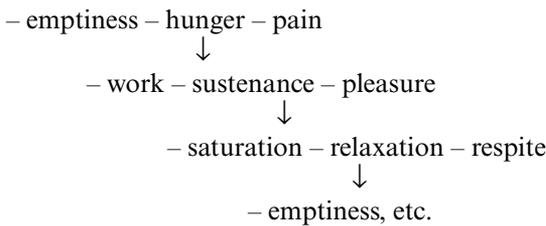
As physical creatures – as animals – it is our nature to be empty vessels that need to be filled. We are hungry and need nurturance to survive. We will usually take the easiest path to fill that need, though some labour is usually involved. One of the basic premises of life is that we have to earn our keep and work for our living and our survival. Life, in its most primitive expression, is based on the cycle of filling an empty stomach and quenching our thirst, in order to get the energy to keep the system running, while emptying out the waste products, before filling up again. In the same way we need to take in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide in order to keep the machine running. In exerting ourselves to see to our needs, we dispense the very energy that causes us to need nurturance in the first place. It is an ever ongoing cycle of life, which we cannot choose to ignore or take lightly.

Freud and Marx were, each in their own way, quite preoccupied with these fundamental human needs and their satisfaction. They both recognised that the effort of work and replenishment gives joy, but that this gratification had to be postponed in order to assure greater future gratification. Once upon a time, humans probably enjoyed themselves in the process of gathering food and eating it at the same time (as animals still do, enjoying the grazing or the hunt). Their food gathering work was associated directly with pleasure. Pain was associated only with the state of hunger and deprivation of food. Pain

was the equivalent of emptiness and a direct stimulus to get up and replenish. Pleasure was the direct equivalent of fullness and would lead directly to relaxation upon saturation.

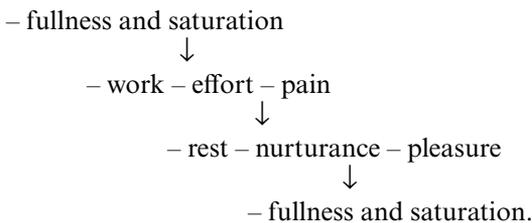
When we learnt to postpone gratification and began to dissociate the work of gathering resources from their consumption, we began to dissociate the pleasure of survival from the work it involves. Gradually the effort of work has become associated with pain and deprivation instead. That is more than alienation; it is a complete reversal of the natural process which makes living a joy. Many people find it hard to motivate themselves to get up in the morning and do the work, as it is so far removed from the pleasure of filling and contenting ourselves. Work seems about expanding our efforts and depleting ourselves without obvious gratification at the end. The pay cheque seems unreal to many and never seems enough. It is often difficult to remember that every minute of work represents a bit of nurturance and gratification. The magic cycle of filling and emptying has become broken and the pleasure is all associated with leisure and consumption.

The natural cycle:



contained a natural trigger mechanism, where work was desired and pleasurable, leading to saturation and relaxation which eventually brought emptiness and pain. This has become replaced with:

The unnatural cycle:



In this new cycle there is no in-built trigger mechanism between the phases of fullness and saturation on the one hand and work effort and pain on the other hand. It would be logical to assume that under these circumstances a physical confusion would ensue, where we would try to avoid the effort and pain of

work and maximise the phase of rest and nurturance – out of touch with the essential cyclical nature of our existence.

The closest we get to remember the original satisfaction of the challenge of the survival cycle may be when we get restless at the weekend or on holiday, discovering an appetite for adventure and the desire to return to some effort. Unfortunately, few of us are blessed with jobs that remind us of the pleasure of literally making a living for ourselves. Broadly speaking, the lust for labour is lost. For some of us the trips to supermarkets and shopping centres have taken the place of the logical association between effort and pleasure. Children's taste for fun-parks and endless snacking on the way may well be another example of this original joy of the effort of survival. One of the greatest pleasures for my own children when they were little was to go to a 'pick your own' fruit farm and gather masses of cherries, plums or strawberries (while of course stuffing themselves in the process). Our hunting and gathering instincts these days are probably best expressed in leisure pursuits, such as fishing, gardening and rambling, or various sports such as golf, running, swimming and riding.

Estrangement from the physical world

While we relish the thought of outsmarting nature and obtaining our livelihood with the least possible work and effort, often we gain relatively little by these shortcuts. All we do is to displace the effort. Many of us spend great energy on administrative or technical duties that are the foundation for the creation of a social system that can sustain the technology that saves us time and effort. The effort is made in a different way: the pleasure we get out of it is often not that of a sense of sustenance, but that of a sense of our own cleverness and competence. The motivation to work has been moved to a different level from that of physical survival. Working, for many people, is about maintaining themselves in the social world or as an individual. Building a career is more about working for a particular good or goal than about survival. It is easy for us to lose sight of our productivity. Rather than simply working to replenish ourselves, and satisfy our needs, our work is detached from the satisfaction of our needs and sometimes even appears to oppose it.

But it is not just our work and survival from which we are estranged; it is also the process of decline and eventual death. We turn to medicine to guarantee the longest possible survival and aim for longevity. But ultimately this prolongation of life may lead to much unnecessary suffering in the final years of the natural cycle. Medicine serves a useful purpose when it enhances and protects life, but when it becomes obsessive about masking and denying death it actually deprives us of an important aspect of living.

Death is the essential reminder of life. Only when we face up to it squarely can we take our time on this earth seriously and make the most of it. Only to

the extent that we are aware of our fragility and mortality, are we capable of savouring the life that we have.

Ultimate challenge of the physical dimension

In last analysis the challenge of our physical existence is to gather as much life as we can and express it vibrantly during the short span of time allotted to us on this earth. In order to do so, we need to be willing to accept the limitations of our physical existence and be prepared for the pain, the cravings, the deprivation, and the ultimate death that will be an unavoidable aspect of our life. Helping our clients to accept the paradoxes of their physical immersion in the world requires us to believe in a natural balancing mechanism, which allows pain to be eventually turned to pleasure, but which accepts that life ultimately and inexorably leads to death.

Physical compass of sensations

At the physical level we are guided by our senses. They relate to the objective of satisfaction, fullness and the flourishing of life that we are after and to the threat of emptiness, deprivation and ultimately death, which we try to avoid. Each of these sensations experienced through our five senses of touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste, leads to an immediate sense of rightness or wrongness, of like or dislike, relish or disgust, a feeling of 'yum' or 'yuk'. When we get what we want we feel complete and when we are deprived we feel depleted. But of course each of these sensations can also have positive connotations. If

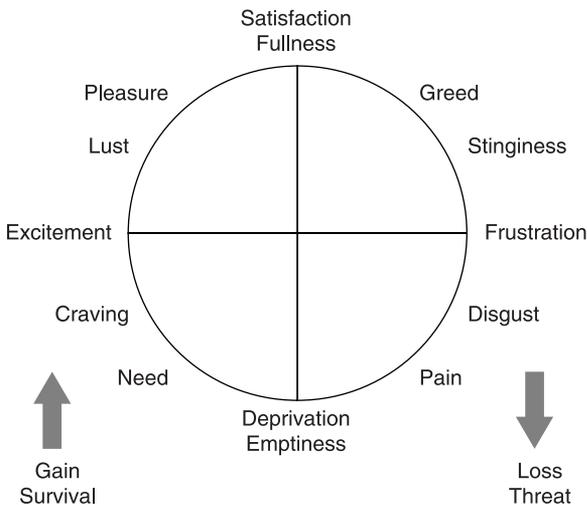


Figure 14.1 Compass of physical sensation.

we throw up in disgust, we may feel physical relief and emptiness may be a good thing to us. When we have pain, the release of this pain, in elimination, sleep or death may be a good thing. Desire can feel painful, if we know we cannot achieve what we crave. We will endlessly go from satisfaction to dissatisfaction and back again. But we can learn to work with our sensations and enjoy them for what they help us achieve and avoid (Figure 14.1). The objective is not to diminish or exaggerate our sensory experiences, but to live them fully and deeply for all they are worth.

The social dimension

Being with others

We are woven into a strong net and garment of duties and *cannot* disengage ourselves.

(Nietzsche 1886: 172)

Introduction

All of us have to come to terms with the fact that we are not just physical entities that exist cheerfully and egocentrically in a world of plenty. We cannot live for very long without realising, somewhat to our dismay, that we are thrown together with all these other creatures, who are just like us, but who at the same time may seem alien to us. As children, we need adults to look after us and keep us safe. Because we are so dependent on grown-ups, we take them for granted. They seem like a race of giants: some of them friendly and benevolent and others vicious and malevolent, most of them of a somewhat unpredictable mixture. Our map of the world of other people is drawn up from the sort of relationships we establish with the adults in our lives over the years. Obviously our relationships to our parents or guardians are crucial in this early exploration of human relations. This becomes our blueprint. Whether we feel protected and cared for, or coerced, ignored or ill treated, has a decisive impact on the way in which we relate to others. It is, however, quite possible for early relations to parents to be supplemented or even supplanted by our early relations to other relatives or significant adults, and indeed siblings or other children in our lives. Thus our map of the world of others gets amended, extended and updated continuously.

Good and bad others

We all discover that the world of others is diverse and varied. Among the people that we encounter during our lifetime will be samples of many different features of humanity. Our own capacity for diversity will be largely related to the variety of humankind to which we are exposed. Reading books

and watching films, as well as having a rich imagination and ability to identify and empathise with others, may well be an important way to broaden our relational ability. To have some reliable grown-ups nearby at the early stages is crucial to our acquiring the courage to meet and be at ease with others.

Initially, children learn to discriminate others in very crude terms. Others are either ‘goodies’ or ‘baddies’, kind or wicked, benevolent or malevolent, trustworthy or untrustworthy, givers or takers. Initially we tend to like those who are like us and dislike those who are different. But gradually we come to see the advantages and virtues of complementarity. Although our categories for deciding for or against another person become more sophisticated as we learn about the complexities of human behaviour, we continue to make instant judgements about others. We are naturally geared to discriminate sharply: it is our animal instinct to make snap judgements about the other’s status and their potential threat to us. Our continuous struggle for survival requires us to distinguish between those who will protect and benefit us and those who might attack, exploit or undermine us. At first we are disposed to believe that good and bad are inherent characteristics in certain people and that once you know that people are good you can trust them forever, whereas when you know that people are bad you should mistrust them once and for all. Eventually we come to realise that the world is not divided between good and evil in this manner and that all of us are good in some situations and bad in others. Kleinian psychoanalysts put great emphasis on this state of affairs (Klein 1937). The discovery of the mixed character of most people complicates matters considerably and requires us to get to know other people in much more depth and see both good and bad aspects in them. This enables us to relate more effectively to others, by appealing to the aspects in them that we like and can connect with, while rejecting the aspects of them that bother us and upset us. In this way we become able to draw on the best aspects of ourselves and others and gain a sense of mastery over human relationships. But it may still be a very selective way of going about our social experiences.

Relating to a whole range of others

It is essential that we come to experience the world of others as a relatively safe place, where we will neither be crushed by others, nor crush them ourselves. Initially our strategies of relating may be simplistic and consist either of finding ways to please others and vie for their favours or of threatening others into submission. It appears that children are born with a personal inclination for dominance or submission, which evolves and develops as time goes by. Eventually with maturity, we may become much more flexible. Some people learn to tune their actions to the exploitation of other people’s psychology. Others become past masters at placating others, ensuring that they are not attacked. On a primitive level both these ways of handling relationships are part of the acquisition of social skills rather than about relating to others.

We simply learn ‘diplomacy’ or ‘tact’: this is about acceptance of the public world and learning to handle its complex power dynamics and lines of authority.

We learn to relate to our elders as well as to the entire hierarchy of peers – the siblings and other children around us. This is quite a different matter, since it requires us to learn about competition and holding our own. We learn to divide all peers into categories by generation and their position relative to ourselves. We relate to others differently, according to whether they are younger, older or exactly the same age as ourselves. In later life this distinction often remains, though it may not apply directly to a person’s real age, but rather to their age and position as we perceive it. For instance, when adults have children of their own, they find themselves inserted into the new class of parents. The pecking order in that new class is established by the age of the children rather than by that of the parents themselves. So it is quite conceivable for a 30-year-old mother of three children, aged 11, 9 and 7, to dominate a 40-year-old mother who has a new baby. The more experienced mother is perceived by the less experienced mother as something of an older sibling, despite the fact that in real terms she is more like a younger sibling. We relate to people as elders, peers or descendants, depending on where we place them in relation to ourselves. Each of these categories can be further divided into subcategories, thus covering the whole spectrum of affiliation, as shown in Figure 15.1.

To encounter examples of all of these takes a lifetime, because we cannot have the experience of younger siblings, children or grandchildren until we have lived quite a while. Yet we learn much of this by extrapolation, by reading widely, watching theatre plays or cinema and by meeting many different people.

The more experience we have at each level of relating, the more expertise we gain and the better we get at completing our total picture of human relations and at being more conversant with an appropriate way of playing each particular part in human relations and understanding its implications. Embarking on a new level of interaction puts previous experience, both on the same and other levels, into a wider perspective. The more diversity of interaction there is, the more likely we are to achieve a flexible and balanced ability to relate. We take care of our ego as we take care of our bodies: a mixed diet is most likely to provide us with what we need. This not only applies to expertise in relating to different age groups, but also applies to relating to people of different gender, culture, nationality or class. The narrower a person’s circle of acquaintance, the harder it is for them to acquire an open attitude to others. In interacting often and with people of many different backgrounds and standing, we learn to feel, show and command respect and we become increasingly capable of openness and acceptance and of establishing parity between others and ourselves.

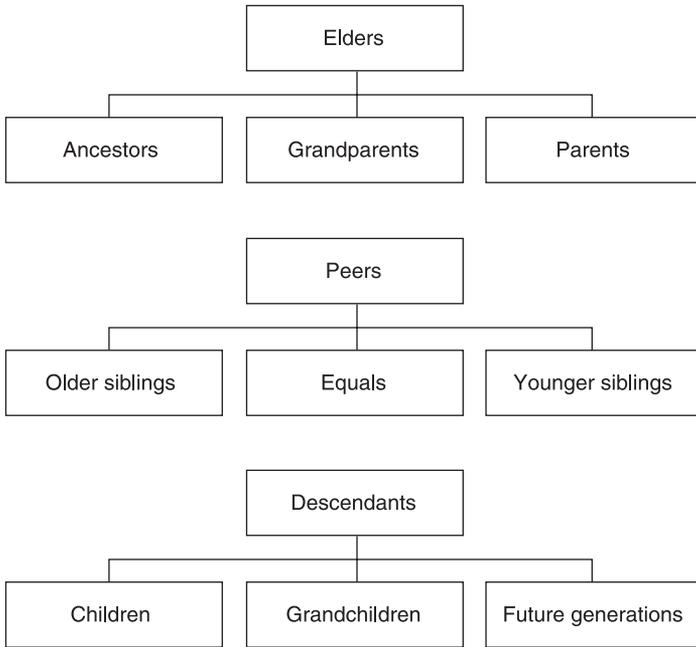


Figure 15.1 Human relationships to elders, peers and descendants.

Links with the past

Nowadays, few Western children get to know much about their ancestors. We have lost touch with the importance of this dimension, though in the East ancestor worship is still a very important part of religious practice. In the West the study of history and stories about national figures such as Robin Hood, William Tell or Joan of Arc, as well as some remaining rituals (such as religious festivities or Remembrance Day) provide some connection to our forebears. The stories about one's individual family's heritage and the characters of great-grandparents are all too often absent from a child's growing experience. But as roots grow shorter, our vision tends to follow suit. Interestingly, people's experience tends to be supplemented by television, soap operas supplying us with the extended family we are missing. Having a sense of affiliation and a wide variety of role models to identify with, or differentiate ourselves from, is important in building a strong and vital ego.

The nuclear family can provide a secure base from which to venture into the world of other people, providing that its relationships are sound and open to the external world, especially through the intermediary of a wider family, neighbours and friends network. Families that are too turned in on themselves tend to make it harder for children to find confidence in the outside

world. Some families even prohibit or poison such contact by criticising outsiders on every occasion. If a child is to be given a clear path into the world of others it is crucial that they get a sense of belonging within a broader community as well as having a safe haven in their own home. The place one takes up in such a group marks the beginning of a long weaving pattern of relationships. What is learnt becomes the foundation on which later relationships develop.

Patterns of relating

The first step in becoming part of a community comes with the recognition that people are different and play different roles. If we expect everyone to be the same we may not appreciate the variety a society can offer us. Some look for love everywhere and are dismayed when it is not to be found on their terms. Love is a catch-all word for a positive experience of intimate relating, though it may have specific connotations for different people at different times. A positive intimate relationship is only one of the many variations on the theme of relating and a rather one-sided way of looking at the world of others, especially when it becomes synonymous with an unctuousness that is neither realistic nor welcome. Buber and Sartre had much to say on this subject (Buber 1923; Sartre 1943a, 1943b).

People follow many avenues during their life in pursuit of union with others. Sometimes such union is seen as a coming together of equals, sometimes it is seen as absorbing the other into one's own sphere. At other times, it is experienced as a being absorbed by the other. Of course, other options are either to destroy the other, without merging, from afar, or to ignore the other and stay away all together. Some people even become experts at zigzagging around the world of others, avoiding knocking anyone down or being knocked down, evading absorption or being absorbed. Variations upon all of these themes are possible within a single relationship. One can become an expert at these relational tactics, without ever even formulating clearly for oneself what it is one does, or why one does it.

Frequently, when people decide that they have problems in relating, this is the culmination of a long career of attempting to outsmart others, avoiding a true confrontation with the realities and contradictions of human relationships. What may seem a functional strategy may suddenly stand out as a handicap.

Imagine the middle-aged woman who has fairly happily and expertly placated people for a lifetime – appearing as the friendly cooperative companion for as long as anyone can remember – only to come to the end of that particular road one day to find that a new, more competitive, cautious strategy is required if she is to proceed to a new stage of life. She may find, for instance, that her prospects of promotion in her job are nil, unless she learns to assert herself and make demands on others. This person may now be

inclined to suddenly reject the previous lifestyle and deem it to have been a fault and a weakness, a total failure. She may decide that she can never be what she feels she should be and become utterly depressed about herself, or she may begin to aspire to artificially fabricate a total change of character for herself.

In reality this person has merely reached the boundary of the particular mode of functioning that took her around the world of other people. If she moves over that boundary, she will discover a new part of the whole territory of human relationships. The old part of the world of others will still remain accessible if she wants it, and she will be able to retreat safely to it, having already expertly explored most of it. That way of living will always be available and is not to be condemned or dismissed. To think that it was bad or weak and proof of personal fault, is short-sighted. All her early experience may have introduced her to a specific mode of relating which she adopted as her own. Now she is ready to experiment with different ways of being. Her previous expertise can be built on. We can help her add diversity so that she can be more than one thing. But now she becomes an explorer of life, and it is no good pretending that just because she goes on a new journey, she does not like home any more. The converse situation is equally frequently observed: that of a man who has learnt to be strong and demanding in relationships and who has to learn that other way of relating that consists of listening, paying attention and caring for another. Such a man already has acquired firmness and determination, but is still a learner on the score of gentleness and understanding in interaction. Psychotherapists and counsellors need to realise their responsibility in reminding people to secure their home territory before they venture into new realms, otherwise the result could be confusion and bewilderment as people lose their bearings. Change for the sake of change never does any good.

Relation and space

Relating is, to a large extent, about sharing space. It is regulated by the distance and proximity of others and plays itself out as a contest over territory – gained, lost, never had, shared or fought over. But what is easiest to miss, and most productive to realise, is that in the same way in which I am essentially one with the material world, I am also one with the others I encounter.

The way in which we relate to others constitutes one aspect of what we become ourselves. We own our relations to other people and what we do to them we also do to ourselves. Being with others is co-constitutional. This is the guiding principle of the idea of intersubjectivity. The manner in which we live with the paradoxes of proximity and distance, dominance and submission, togetherness and aloneness, belonging and isolation, creates a particular world. It is a lifelong process of apprenticeship if we want to learn to get this

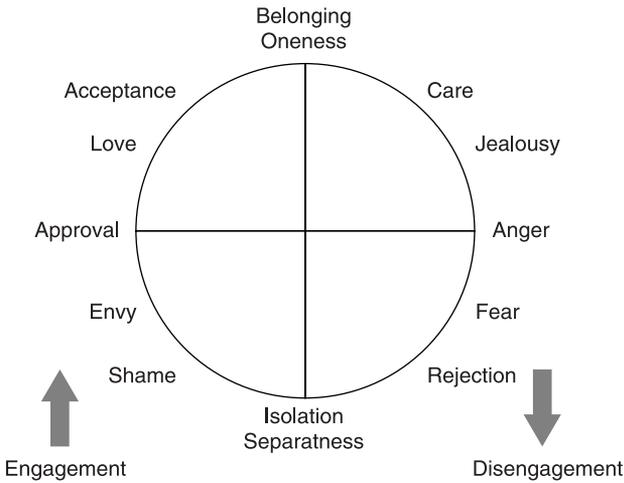


Figure 15.2 Compass of social feeling.

right. We are guided in this process by the compass of our emotions, which are the social feelings we experience in relation to other people.

Compass of social feeling

As with the sensations, feelings also follow a pattern of aspiration to the ideal at the top and desperation about the feared experience of deprivation at the bottom (see Figure 15.2). In social terms (as we saw in Chapter 13), the desire can be for many different things, but it is usually about something like wanting acknowledgement, belonging or love. The various emotions that lead away from the desired state towards deprivation are indicative of whether we feel we can still obtain what we want or whether we fear we are slipping down to slump towards our lowest point. The existential theory of emotion is more fully explained in Chapter 34.

The personal dimension

Being with oneself

Do not disturb yourself. Make yourself all simplicity. Does anyone do wrong? It is to himself that he does the wrong.

(Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, IV: 26)

Introduction

Out of the physical and social competencies we develop, we fashion a sense of self that becomes increasingly more defined. We gradually draw a circle around ourselves to establish privacy and to keep us safe as an entity in our own right. The outer circle of our body (in relation to the physical world), and the inner circle of our ego (in relation to the social world) can be more or less tight. They form protective rings around us that determine how much room is left for an inner space in the middle, in which we claim our selfhood and personal identity. We discover that we are different and come to know ourselves as ourselves and no one else. We come to realise that the centre of our experience is our own and refer to this as our ‘self’.

At first this entity was probably nothing but a vague sense of bodily ‘me’ in interaction with a physical environment, but later a sense of social ego developed, defining more narrow boundaries around us. It is only when our ability to reflect upon our experience increases sufficiently to form mental concepts that we can begin to create the concept of a personal self out of this body and social sense of ‘me’. Initially, such a personal self concept is not well articulated, but it is out of an increasing self-reflection and definition that we begin to create a private space in our inner world, where a more circumscribed notion of self can be cultivated. Children up to the age of 7 or 8 years rarely have more than a vestigial sense of personal self. They tend to experience themselves as in existence in a purely physical and feeling based way for many years before they begin to articulate an inner relationship to themselves. As a rule of thumb it takes us five years of life to establish full physical independence, and another five (5–10) to establish basic social independence. It is probably another five years (from 10 to 15) before a full

sense of individuality and personal independence is in place. Then it will take another five years (15–20) before a system of meaning and a sense of personal ideology and independence of thought is fully developed. It goes without saying that these maturational milestones vary from person to person and that there are enormous overlaps between the different dimensions, so that in many ways they continue to develop alongside each other. Many people never do reach total development until much later in life and all of us keep revising our experience throughout our lives.

The sense of ‘me’

When we achieve the capacity for self-reflection we come to think of ourselves as real persons. We learn to respect and protect this newly developed and still fragile ‘me’ and get disturbed when social appraisals of us clash with our intimate sense of personal wholeness. We can establish a sense of self all the more effectively as the outer boundaries of the physical and social worlds, and their corresponding body-image and ego, are firmly in place and robustly anchored in the world, allowing the self to flourish in safety. Where the physical and the social aspects of existence are unsafe, a prematurely defined self may develop, with boundaries so tightly drawn around it that it cannot benefit from the flow between itself, the body and its physical dimensions, and the ego and its social dimension. These may even be rejected as false and they may therefore never satisfactorily develop to provide safety for the inner self, nor provide it with further building blocks for its definition and expansion.

The tightening of the inner self, and its consequent rigidification, leads to a decreased contact with the outer circles of the body, and the ego as well – they have become rejected as outside of the magic circle. An intimate secret self is created, instead of an open, organic, responsive self. Such an intimate but narcissistic, enclosed world of self will eventually falter and become depleted, as it lacks the constant exchange with an outer system of protection and contact with the material and social dimensions of life.

Of course, the reverse may also happen, in that the bodily, pre-reflective self and the social ego may become such strong circles that they do not let through enough interior experience for the inner self to develop at all. There are many people with good body selves, or strong egos or social selves, who have little discourse with themselves and hardly any self-reflectiveness. Their entire self-image may be based on their relation to the material or the public world. Such people may be well adjusted to the major requirements of survival and intercourse with others, but they may seem like empty shells, giving the impression of little depth. They will typically aim for pleasure and satisfaction rather than make room for adversity and difficulties as well. In extreme cases, such people may develop psychopathic tendencies if the body is foremost, or sociopathic tendencies if the ego is foremost.

If all goes well, however, we create a realm of warm security for inner

dialogue deep inside of the external circles of bodily self and social self. In the realm of the personal self, we relate to ourselves and to those that we allow into this most inner circle. For some of us, the enchanted space will be open to certain loved and trusted objects or animals. For most of us, it will include at least a partner, or other significant alter-ego. Most people with children include them automatically in their intimate self. For others, the self-world is exclusive and private and does not bear to be open to anyone but oneself. It becomes walled up and suffocating. For some of us openness to self is possible only occasionally, or not at all.

A sense of private self grows slowly over the years through reflection about physical and social experience. We can operate satisfactorily with no more than the bodily self (especially if we are very confident about our body) and subsequent social ego (especially if we have learnt to get lots of social approval). Sensing and feeling can form the basis of our existence without any self-reflection coming into it. Self-reflection and identity are usually slowly established between the ages of 10 and 15.

Unbalance in world relations

Such self-reflection mediates the impact that the physical and social worlds have on us. If it is not established the person may remain impulsive and reactive and lack inner authority.

Otherwise a person who is not happily connected to physical and social worlds may cut off from these, erecting an impenetrable boundary around him or herself, trying to lessen the impact of the world. Such people will become isolated because there is no flow, no outlet and no inlet, so the person's world becomes stale and locked in. This can lead to all sorts of problems, phobias, paranoia and preoccupation with personal safety.

It is difficult for such a person to feel like a person at all, and he or she can become pure reflectiveness and self-consciousness, with a lack of solid input for that reflection or consciousness. Sometimes, all this cerebral activity then connects to the most inward of world relations – that of the spiritual dimension. At this ultimate level of ideology and meaning, when the person is not even fully embodied and socialised yet, the aspirations may become very ethereal and disconnected from material and social reality.

This kind of experience is often termed schizoid. The person is desperately clinging to a personal world and to an imagined system of meaning which are both largely disconnected from other people's reality. Some people would argue that such a condition is based on neuro-physiological deficiencies; others might argue that it is based on destructive family and relational processes. From the phenomenological perspective just discussed, it is clear that

whatever these failures might be caused by, there would have to be a lack of integration with both body and society for this to occur. People who are locked into this kind of schizoid experience go under because they become isolated and disconnected. They may at first come across as attention-seeking, when they are desperately trying to reach out to get help. The picture is that of someone desperately trying to draw attention to their bodily deficiency and their resulting lack of autonomy. This cry for help to the other is a genuine attempt at overcoming a sense of incompleteness and lack of self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, it is often responded to wrongly, with others pandering to the person's deficiency rather than teaching the person how to overcome it. The net result is that people become annoyed and fed up with the insecure person, who then is rejected and deprived of the interaction that was so crucial to their survival. Of course, most people do have some vestigial connections to the body and the ego, and so have some resources with which to inflate the self now and then. The completely deflated, empty self may eventually turn to self-destruction, either actively or passively.

If the person has considerable intellectual resources and aspirations, a whole new world may be created and a temporary mission or abstract project of salvation may allow them to hide in the spiritual dimension for a bit. However, their detachment from the real world and lack of physical, social and personal resources will deflate such projects all too soon. Now they may turn to total withdrawal and self-destruction, or to a frantic state of melancholia and depression, where the world becomes completely closed off, disconnected and meaningless.

Challenges of selfhood

Arguably, most of us have to contend with these dangers at various points in our lives. Some of us overcome the difficulties, others stumble and fall. As we hear or read a person's life story, as it is told at a particular time, we observe that there is some kind of journey over the different territories of existence and usually some moving back and forth between several territories and a constant effort to maintain balance while overcoming the predictable and unpredictable obstacles on the way. The story changes over time, as we progress through the realms of experience and learn to draw out different elements – not only of our present experience, but also of past and future encounters and incidents. The selecting, processing and accumulating of experience, memories, expectations and desires is what collects and recollects into a self. The formation of a self is not a task of teenage years only, even though it is then that we establish a self for the first time. It continues to be a constant challenge and is undertaken at every minute and hour of the day, as indeed is our calibration of our relationship to the physical world and the social world as well. Out of the continuous flux of life, we retain the building materials and sustenance of that precarious amalgam that is our selfhood.

This is temporary and illusory, since it can be altered or destroyed by circumstances. It is easily undermined but also fairly easily repaired. It is flexible and alterable, although one person's building blocks are clearly different from another's for genetic and socio-cultural reasons. Out of the givens in and around us, we create a self. The self once created remains under construction and can be undone and rebuilt as circumstances, and one's perception of who we want to be, change.

When working with adolescent schizophrenics, or depressed adults, no matter how confused the person's world has become, clarity can flow only from reconnection of body with physical world and self with others. Positive self-experience comes only from the realisation that we can be at one with our physical and social worlds and that we are able to overcome current difficulties. We have to systematically resettle the person: first, in order to find safety and flexibility of the bodily self in relation to the environment; second, in reconnecting to others; after this it is much easier to find affirmation and positive self evaluation.

Ultimately we all have to manage the tension between being merged with a world on the one hand and defining our identity on the other hand. Thus we find a way between the world and our personal identity all the time. We acquire flexibility in the process of dealing with difficulties, being overwhelmed by life at times, yet retrieving mastery each time. This process is so much more effective if we pay attention to all the layers of existence and build each new layer carefully on the previous one.

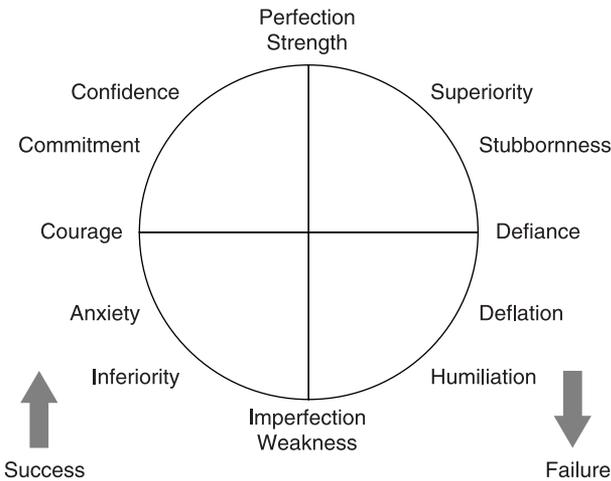


Figure 16.1 Compass of personal thinking.

The compass of thoughts

In our personal world it is our thoughts that guide us. Inner dialogue is a tremendous base for potential strength, for it is always present, reflectively or non reflectively. We form an opinion of our inner strength and weakness, our success or failure, and this determines the extent to which we define our identity as positive or negative. The compass of our thoughts helps us to find direction and flexibility (see Figure 16.1).

The spiritual dimension

Being with meaning

It is the nature of Reason to regard things under this species of eternity.
(Spinoza 1677: II, 44)

Introduction

The spiritual dimension of our world relations can be referred to as that of the *Überwelt*, which means the world above, or rather the world beyond the physical, social and personal dimensions of our experience. This is the meta-world where all the rest of our experience is put into context (Deurzen-Smith 1984, 1988; Deurzen & Arnold-Baker 2005). It is the world of ideas and meaning, the world of worldviews and explanatory systems and the world of ontology as well. But it is also the world of logos: the world of spirit, of faith, belief and meaning. On this dimension of our existence we really come into the true complexity of being human, as we organise and transcend other levels of existence and create a philosophy of life, defining our personal stance and worldview. In many ways we experience this dimension as at the core of ourselves and as the most profound of our experience. The beliefs we hold are implicit in everything we say, do, think and feel. Often we have not even explicitly formulated them. It is an intrinsic aspect of our being in the world, but it is rarely articulated or accounted for and often remains unknown or unsaid. The spiritual dimension of our existence is, to a large extent, informed by the dominant ideology of the society in which we grow up and it is often determined by the religion we ascribe to or the values we adhere to. Many people have agnostic or atheistic views these days in the West, but there are also numerous people who turn to orthodox religions of one kind or another. But it is also possible for people to raise specific ethical or political views to the status of a belief system. Scientists often view science as the ultimate system of reference. Socialists or Marxists experience their political views as a total ideology, which makes sense of their life. Similarly psychotherapeutic or counselling values can serve as an overarching worldview. This makes it all the more important to clearly define and articulate our beliefs.

It is not unusual for spiritual values to become quite rigid and set in stone as it is easy to become complacent and avoid confrontation with different views. It is not uncommon to be so out of touch with our own beliefs that we fail to notice that we follow the newspapers we read or the television programmes we watch (Deurzen 2009). It is important to broaden our minds and encounter a variety of views. We might add new beliefs and values to the old ones, or exchange old credos for new ones. As is often said, it is travel that broadens the mind and travel in one form or another will always shake our safety and our beliefs to some extent. Even exposure to others who have travelled, especially those who have immigrated into our own neighbourhood or have joined our workplace or professional organisation from elsewhere, may affect us deeply and shake or alter our convictions.

Worldviews

People sometimes do not like to speak of spirituality, for they confuse it with religion. Given the current unpopularity of religion, many people distance themselves from anything to do with spirituality. However, this may rest on a misconception. Atheism or agnosticism are every bit as much a system of meaning at the foundation of our existence. People cannot live without beliefs and values. Without them nothing makes any sense. Even language is a system of values and implies certain preferences of opinion, without us ever noticing this. A system of meaning is the *sine qua non* of human living, which is fundamentally about making sense of the world so that we can connect to it properly and feel real or even feel inspired.

Those who declare themselves devoid of ideology often omit to note that such a declaration indicates another ideology. Even nihilism represents a particular, limited and selective perspective on the world, which puts a specific complexion on what we observe and encounter. There are many people these days who have adopted a scientific ideology instead of a religious one. They see the world through the lens of constant, factual experimentation and reject anything else as invalid. This attitude also represents a spiritual outlook of a kind, to the extent that it provides the measure of value and truth for these people and regulates their perception of reality. The notion of the relativity of our experiences of reality and its interpretive quality has been well documented by phenomenologists (Ihde 1986; Spinelli 1989; Moran 2000).

The ideological base of counselling and psychotherapy culture is an interesting example of an ideology that has not been formulated clearly. Learning and practising a particular method is to absorb and dispense a certain view of the world. It may well be that this is one of the main resources and curative factors that psychotherapy offers – to give people a consistent framework of reference and interpretation by which they can make sense of their confusing inner experience in a chaotic world (Halmos 1966; Schafer 1983). Different

therapeutic approaches formulate different life philosophies and no therapeutic approach is value free.

It is because psychotherapy provides an image of the well-functioning, well-adjusted, healthy, happy person together with a method designed to help one to approximate that ideal, that it is closer to religious and ethical practice than to anything else. Many people who are drawn towards an existential approach to psychotherapy, for instance, are in search of a deeply philosophical ideology to underpin their lives. That this existential system is paradoxically about questioning those very beliefs and demands scepticism about values and meanings does not in any way change the fact that doing so ordains a way of life and a view of the world. It brings back a sense of the sacred in one's life, hopefully without falling into dogmatism.

The existential view of the world

The existential view is one that allows us to explore and investigate, and it is therefore eminently attractive to post-scientific humankind in search of new meaning. Psychoanalysis and Marxism were also good candidates to fill the twentieth-century meaning vacuum, the former by focusing the person on the self in order to replete the emptiness, the latter by focusing on society. Existential explorations tend to address the more spiritual dimensions of a person's insecurity, but will also deal with the personal and the social. It provides a focus on life issues, with which many people these days have difficulties. It addresses moral issues head on and it allows people to come to grips with meaning.

This ideology works in therapy because it is the only approach that combines rationality with passion. It appeals to many because it satisfies the longing for something beyond the ordinary and trivial. It also makes room for embodiment, intersubjectivity and selfhood as well as for the spiritual. It provides a freedom of interpretation of life and does not opt for the spiritual over the material world, but allows for them to be equally important. The rationalistic alternatives, such as cognitive-behavioural ideologies are sharper on the objective research element, but they lack the human depth and sensitivity to inner and spiritual motivations. They discount the search for wisdom, formulating life exclusively in terms of facts, knowledge, evidence and best practice. They are not so open to people's experience of the call of the sacred or to their secret longings for something greater.

Psychoanalysis and humanistic psychology do try to address those hidden layers of humanity. There are interesting lessons about humanity to be drawn from their contribution, but they tend to emphasise the intra-psychic and interpersonal elements of existence and do not make room for the exploration of a personal philosophy of life.

The existential approach is not exclusive and is able to integrate some psychoanalytic and cognitive ideas as sources of understanding. It demands

willingness for rationality while making room for doubt. Although existential thinking is often seen as essentially atheistic, it does in fact focus on metaphysical as well as concrete aspects of existence. Most therapeutic ideologies do not leave room for such a meta-level of experience: everything is explained in psychic or materialistic terms instead. The only notable exceptions are transpersonal psychology, Jungian psychology, psychosynthesis and Buddhist therapy. These approaches have much to offer to those who seek to take a spiritual stance, but they do not provide the same capacity for integration and critical appraisal that the existential approach affords.

Twenty-first century challenges

To recognise the great, but ordinary, mysteries of the everyday, while actively demystifying the concrete aspects of life has got to be one of the greatest challenges facing us in the twenty-first century. The consumerist philosophy that is embedded in contemporary culture is clearly coming to the end of its useful life. Many crave a new sense of meaning beyond the enjoyment of endless commodities and the pursuit of health, wealth and self. The pre-occupation with self-improvement, or the desire to grow, or even just 'find oneself', is often a superficial disguise for the desire to find new meaning in life (Baumeister 1991; Deurzen 2009). People can find some meaning in their material achievements and relationships, and even in the search for identity, but deep meaning only comes from an understanding of the connections between all things in this world.

Many do not believe that anything other than their own efforts can redeem them. They have lost confidence in the gods or God, or any other benevolent higher power that could give us laws and protect us. They have lost track of transcendence. Once you accept that the world was generated by a big bang, rather than by a superior being, and you admit that it is fairly likely that humankind evolved through a process of natural selection rather than being created by God, the belief in supreme moral laws or an afterlife becomes more tenuous. Without all the paraphernalia of organised religions, we are more or less bereft of the superior power that used to guarantee our thinking about ourselves and our place in the world and with others. Now everything is down to us; we have to invent ourselves and our morality and purpose. Camus' image of a Sisyphus (Camus 1942a), who rolls a boulder up a hill, only for it to fall down again and having to drag it back up to the top all over again, is a telling metaphor. But as we saw earlier according to Camus, Sisyphus discovered meaning even in that tedium of the ever-returning process of rolling the boulder. This is very similar to Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence, which he came to think of as the most rewarding and complete state of being. For both, the challenge was to come to a new humility, greatly removed from the old grandiose ideas about human superiority and dominance.

The moral strength here is in giving up the notion of being created and saved by God. This requires us to let go of the thought that we are the favourite child or most evolved species and that we have first-born rights. We have to rise to the challenge of being merely part of what is and learn to play this part well. The universe no longer turns around the human, we can no longer be anthropocentric, or self-centred. If we are willing to take this more humble position we find a much better place to be. We no longer have to behave as if we were Atlas, carrying the world on our own shoulders, but instead can rely on the laws of the universe to carry us – no matter what. This Copernican revolution is a necessity for psychotherapy, which has operated from the assumption of the centrality of the person for all too long.

But it is also a task for twenty-first century humanity: to find a new place to dwell in, neither the safe womb of God, nor the presumptuous centre of the universe of technological and psychological man. This means reinventing humanity, neither as blissful self-sufficiency nor as an apprenticeship for the afterlife, but as an everyday struggle and a constant summons to inventiveness and understanding, which may ultimately hold greater meaning than we can now foresee. We can only come to such a position if we accept that we cannot know the whole truth, although we can acquire relative knowledge about the world and ourselves. The task of totalising all the learning and understanding at our disposal at any one point and making the most of it for our own future and the future of others is enough to fill a human life.

Common experiences

Being deflated of our self-important illusions of being the centre of the universe is at first a disconcerting blow. It can be a depressing thought to feel so insignificant. We may try to make up for this disappointment by filling ourselves with material goods and pleasure, holding the nasty side of life at bay momentarily. Eventually we find that such an attitude is empty and bankrupt and only leads to sorrow and deprivation and a sense of eternal discontents. Then we learn about natural cycles and the principle of the ‘good enough’ and the less, which is sometimes more. We may try to make up for our lack of security by chasing power and dominance over others, or otherwise by submitting to them, in search of ultimate approval. There again, we find that both these attitudes backfire and lead to discontents. Then we discover the need to learn to cooperate and relate with others in ways that are mutually satisfying, but which are always about compromise and mutuality. We may turn, in desperation, to a search for a solid sense of personal identity, trying to soothe our tortured mind with a distinct selfhood that will make everything fall into place. But no matter how we try we will always fail to convince ourselves fully of our legitimate status and our solidity, and eventually we are thrown back to having to come to terms with a fluctuating emptiness and fullness that can never be captured, but only tolerated and

tamed. We discover the secret of the 'I' as a channel rather than an entity: the 'I' as a lens that reflects or refracts reality and changes luminosity by the way it behaves.

Then the question arises of what all these tough experiences have in common and how they may all point to the same principles. These principles are not given by a God or prescribed by humans. They simply are the laws and forces that rule our existence, whatever they are. These are the existential laws to which we are subjected whether we like it or not. We can study this existential lawfulness and become conversant with its paradoxical nature. Psychotherapists implicitly study these laws of life through observing their clients' predicaments and the effect of their choices and actions on them. Of course they can do so only if they are willing to also study these in themselves.

Paying systematic attention to the principles and boundaries of life brings us in touch with forces that we cannot control, but that we all have to take into account. When paying attention to the mysterious waves of life that rule our existence, we discover almost immediately that much more about life is unknown than known. We do not have to conjure up notions of a personal unconscious to explain this, for even the unconscious cannot contain the vast unknown that we are confronted with. To let go of the unconscious as the magical answer to our lack of control and knowledge is about accepting human limitations and accepting that more in life is unseen and unknown than seen and known. Where human explanations stop, regularity and lawfulness still go on – and this lawfulness goes well beyond that of our internal mind. There is ample proof there to remain in awe of the universe and rediscover the sense of wonder that prehistoric people must have felt when they looked up at the sky and saw stars and planets and a wondrous ever-changing moon.

The mysterious lawfulness of the universe – material, relational, personal and ontological – is enough to fill the human heart with a sense of marvel, awe and exuberance. Just as food can be taken only by an organism that is open and hungry, so the enormity of the mysteries we live with can only reach and touch us when we open ourselves to our spiritual emptiness. Theologies or other dogmas can often be hindrances and obstacles to such renewed openness. The short-sighted certainty of the scientific attitude can equally be in the way. But the nihilistic attitude of post-modern deconstructionism can represent another threat to such openness, where it has already prejudged that there can be no ultimate truth, making a search for truth insignificant and redundant. Such attitudes are fortresses against the process of life. People who are ensconced in them wither on the vine.

Finding meaningful places to dwell in

Yet it is infinitely human to seek just such places of security against the confusing prospect of constant flux and change to which we otherwise have

to expose ourselves. Writing a book like this one is a way of building just such a fortress: for all the flexibility and open-mindedness of an existential approach, it can be turned into dogma like anything else. If one is lucky enough, such dogma gets challenged before it dies of senility. Many systems, to their great disadvantage and discredit, become so appealing to people that they get defended too effectively and so creak into old age and atrophy through paralysis and incontinence, without anyone noticing that the best thing to do is to let them die in peace.

Life is a hard task master and the deepest lessons we have to learn are inevitably learnt in pain and sorrow. Human pain and suffering is the only pathway through which true insight, experience and growth is acquired. All human endeavours eventually lead to the same mysterious troubles and through these ultimately to the same mysterious, but also miraculous solutions. One can analyse all this in many different ways and it can be pleasant to self-indulgently retrieve the fine detail of these experiences, lingering over the minutest possible variations upon themes and strands of emotions and contradictions underlying one's experience. But in the last analysis our task is to live in this world and to do so with the full use of all of our capacities – there are not so many ways in which that can be done. Basically we have to engage with life, on all its dimensions. Most of our clients struggle with the same paradoxes and dilemmas. A candid appraisal of where we ourselves go wrong is by far the best way in which to stay capable of helping others find their way again. Such willingness to be available to human failing and difficulty is the first step towards spiritual awakening.

Compass of intuitions

As with our sensations, our feelings and our thoughts, so we can also find out where we are in relation to our spiritual world by paying attention to our intuitions (see Figure 17.1). Intuition is that direct grasp of the whole of a situation, by being attentive to all the input we get from our five senses, our feelings and our thoughts and allowing ourselves to draw conclusions with the right brain, without trying to analyse and rationalise with our left brain. In paying attention to this total way of being we become inspired by life again. Our intuitions tell us where we are in relation to the spiritual aspiration for wisdom or transcendence. We may want spiritual bliss, but this can only be achieved if we are prepared to face the deepest challenges. Sometimes we will feel beaten and need to retreat. But the spirit of wisdom may yet be gained as we continue on our way, heeding our existential guilt, which tells us that we can do much more than we have and firing us onwards towards hope. Our intuitions may not be as obvious and as clearly formulated as our sensations or our emotions, nor are they as articulate as our thoughts. But the voice of conscience speaks to us deeply and about the things that really matter when all is said and done. Spiritual awakening makes that inner voice

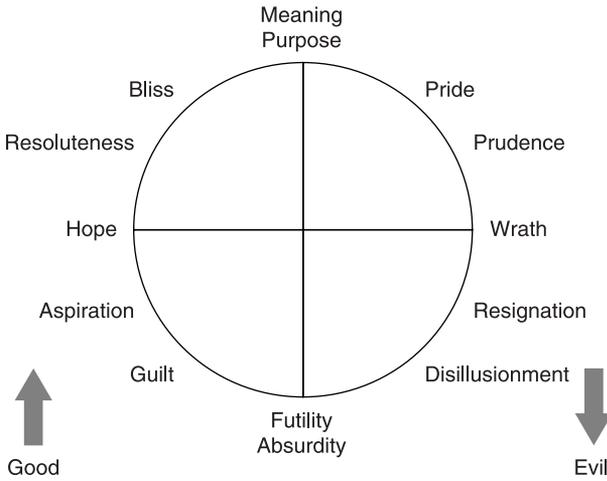


Figure 17.1 Compass of spiritual intuition.

stronger and sharpens the ideals and ideas that guide us on the way of life. Spirituality is infinitely and elementally present in our lives whether we express it in words or not. In therapy it is always an extremely powerful, but often unacknowledged and silent motivator. Linking in with a person's spiritual or ontological concerns is the most energising thing we can do.

Part III

New foundations for psychotherapy

Introduction to new foundations for psychotherapy

She lost her passion and her mission. She was cured. She was in despair. She felt dead. But she carried on normally as a perfect zombie.

(Laing 1982: 168)

Philosophy has played a role in helping people to deal with problems in living since the pre-Socratics (Heaton 1990; Vlastos 1991; Nussbaum 1994; Lahav and Tillmanns 1995). It used to be a common matter for philosophers to emphasise the practical application of their profession to ordinary everyday reality. Philosophy, before it became taken over by the scientific discourse, concerned itself with the understanding of the human predicament for the purpose of more effective and better informed living. Such forms of concrete and applied philosophy have become more rare as specialisms have taken over. Philosophy's commitment to have a broad understanding of life and put this at the service of the public has worn very thin over the centuries. Existential philosophy, in its applied form, marks the revival of this tradition.

For many centuries, of course, guidance in living has mostly been the province of religion. Mental illness was (and in some cultures still is) seen as a form of divine or Satanic possession. It is only in recent centuries that we have begun to consider problems in living to be synonymous with mental illness and that we have relegated its cure to medical science (Foucault 1961; Szasz 1961). This is clearly appropriate in some cases: for instance, when there are specific somatic problems or when the cause of the trouble is demonstrably physical, particularly in the case of neurological disease. When medical science began to address such problems, however, it did also impinge on and eventually annexed the area of psychological, personal and relational difficulties. These often lead to physical consequences and can be confused, therefore, with physical or mental illness (Szasz 1961; Boyle 1990). However, not to recognise that human living engenders problems of its own, which have to be addressed in human terms rather than in purely physical terms, is an arrogant and costly mistake.

The work of a number of practitioners over the past century has been

specifically aimed at redressing the balance – addressing human difficulties as problems in living rather than as medical conditions. Many of these practitioners have been psychiatrists or psychoanalysts who discovered the limitations of their disciplines and who searched for better alternatives. More recently, a frank movement within philosophy itself has arisen, which tries to find concrete applications of the philosophical method. The philosophical practitioners working in this way generally apply a phenomenological description of the situation to be explored and a dialectical method of questioning and investigation of the relevant issues.

The intention is to let philosophical reflection on the human condition throw light on the specific problems in living that arise in individual situations. I shall briefly outline some of the most relevant contributions of the most important of these authors.

Karl Jaspers (1883–1969)

Psychopathology

Psychic life is perpetually engaged in the process of making itself objective.
(Jaspers 1963: 287)

Jaspers has earlier been considered for his contributions to philosophical thinking in this field. As a psychiatrist, he has also made a considerable contribution to the practical application of such thinking. Of course it is his magnum opus, *A General Psychopathology* (Jaspers 1963), that is most relevant here. In it, Jaspers systematically describes all mental and psychological disorders known to psychiatry from a phenomenological perspective, in an attempt to understand rather than merely classify and treat. For the first time, the emphasis is on the subjective experience of patients as he tries to capture the states of consciousness which are often so mysterious that they are ignored.

Jaspers' 1912 article entitled 'The phenomenological approach to psychopathology' (Jaspers 1968) summarises his approach quite well. It is his aim in this article to clarify what psychiatric patients really experience, yet throughout the article Jaspers does not question the notion of pathology itself. He does not bracket his own medical assumptions about patients' experience. Therefore, he never comes to investigate the possibility that patients' experience may be an idiosyncratic form of human awareness that meaningfully expresses a particular point of view, though this may be somewhat at odds with the point of view referred to as 'normal' by psychiatrists.

Jaspers reviews the distinction between objective and subjective symptoms as if such a distinction can be made quite accurately and easily. Objective symptoms, he says, include such things as movements, physiognomy and verbal expression, and are supposedly understood by the psychiatrist's rational thought without any recourse to empathy into the patient's psyche. In going along with this usual distinction between objective and subjective symptoms, Jaspers appears to ignore the phenomenological notion that all experience per definition is a combination of objective and subjective elements and that the person may need to be approached in a holistic way. The body language

he is referring has to be observed and interpreted. It is fitted into a definite and objective categorisation.

Jaspers considers that only the understanding of subjective phenomena has to be arrived at through empathy: 'Subjective symptoms cannot be perceived by the sense-organs, but have to be grasped by transferring oneself, so to say, into the other individual's psyche; that is, by empathy' (Jaspers 1968: 1313).

The German term used here is that of *empfinden* (meaning literally 'feeling into'), which, as Jaspers explains, refers to a process of participation in the other person's experience. This participation is intense and real. It is not just a cognitive phenomenon, but consists of allowing ourselves to be on the other person's wavelength and resonate with their deepest sense of themselves and their difficulties. It is interesting to note that Jaspers reserves this process of empathy for subjective symptoms only. One might well wonder whether so-called 'objective' symptoms might not equally deserve to get the treatment of empathy.

Although Jaspers argues that the objective approach misses the quality and the significance of the experience, he himself takes certain facts about the patient's behaviour for granted. Only the emotions and phenomena presented by the patient and not arrived at by judgement or inference can be approached with empathy. Anything on the level of sensory perception and logical thought is to be taken at face value.

Having noted this lack of thoroughness of bracketing on Jaspers' part, we should credit him with the pioneering insight to at least call the interpretations of subjective phenomena into question. Jaspers calls attention to the need to define the tasks of subjective psychology in a systematic manner. He insists that psychiatrists always do more than study the patient objectively: subjective understanding is always a part of the assessment and the subjective understanding of the patient is always limited by the extent of the physician's personal experience of the phenomena encountered in the other.

A science of understanding is needed, argues Jaspers, for 'understanding needs to be taken to the level of knowledge' (Jaspers 1968: 1315). In view of this controversial standpoint, it is the more disappointing that Jaspers did not extend his wish for a science of understanding to the level of so-called 'objective knowledge' as well. It is as if Jaspers did not really take Husserl's *epoche* seriously and did not carry through the full implications of taking a phenomenological stance in relation to patients' experience.

Interestingly, the same could be said of R. D. Laing, who wrote a damning critique of Jaspers' psychopathology, but who nevertheless fifty years later followed in Jaspers' tracks by also reconsidering psychopathology, particularly schizophrenia, in a more personal manner. But he too retained the basic medical assumption that it was pathology he was observing rather than a form of existence that was adaptive, though clearly unhelpful. Neither

Jaspers nor Laing were able to detach themselves sufficiently from their medical background to consider the human phenomena under observation from a truly prejudice-less perspective, sticking to Husserl's rules of epoche and horizontalisation.

Even so, bearing in mind the revolutionary nature of Jaspers' work, let us consider the method Jaspers proposes for dealing with subjective phenomena. He encourages us to start by representing, defining and classifying psychic phenomena as follows:

- We have to begin by paying attention to what is actually happening in the patient, without making any interpretations or judgements based on previous frames of reference. This is obviously a tall order and must be seen as an ideal position, rather than as a realistic one.
- Next we look at the genesis of the phenomenon, by referring to its context, content and conditions of appearance. This is the phase of complete description.
- Finally, and perhaps most significantly, we need to do the work of the experiencing of the phenomenon for ourselves: we are required to *represent* the psychic events to ourselves. In this phase we clearly engage, personally, with the situation under scrutiny.

This latter point is a contribution of Jaspers' that is often forgotten and neglected in clinical work. It is still revolutionary today. To re-present the experience of the client or patient to oneself fully is to become immersed in their world, to partake in it, rather than to keep 'therapeutic distance'. Generally speaking, even today we are warned against such intimate understanding of our clients' predicaments. Practitioners do everything in their power to keep their clients' world at arm's length. In fact normally remaining at a safe distance from patient or client is considered the sine qua non of helpful therapeutic interventions.

Interestingly for Jaspers, there is a different issue at stake: he does not ask us to identify with the patient's experience, but to immerse ourselves in the specific and isolated phenomenon under scrutiny. He argues that self-immersion is to subjective psychology what observation of sense data is to objective psychology, and that empathy has to follow certain rules and execute certain tasks in the same way in which perception follows certain rules in objective observation. A similar point of view, but with quite a lot of provisos, was put forward by Kohut (1959). Jaspers argues that we have to seek principles of reliability in order to remove ourselves from the otherwise vague and messy process of identification or sympathy.

The principles of reliability that Jaspers pinpoints are:

- Comparison of different phenomena: in other words, we contrast one experience with others and see how it stands out as different.

- The repetition of similar phenomena: in other words, we study the same experience as it presents itself over and over again.
- Systematic verification: in other words, we constantly check whether our observations correspond with reality.

In this way Jaspers uses the phenomenological method to provide the necessary safety in our observations. Verification counteracts our immediate immersion in our client's experience. We will then proceed by exploring the psychic phenomena in question by immersion in the event, exploration of self-accounts and consideration of written self-descriptions. According to Jaspers, the latter are the most reliable and valuable. Writing as therapy was founded by him.

It is Jaspers' aim to put order into the diversity of psychic life in a systematic way. The order to be achieved should be a logical, natural order, which will be phenomenologically satisfying like the classification of the colours of the rainbow. The phenomena we are classifying will be only those that have actually been experienced by people. We are concerned solely with the perceptible and the concrete, not with causes or explanatory models.

What we are looking for, says Jaspers, are the forms of the phenomena rather than the relationships between them. If we search for such a static understanding eventually psychic life will unfold in all its dynamism. General impressions are never enough. We need to be very attentive and cautious and account for every psychic phenomenon that we encounter. If we do so, we will be surprised about the new phenomena we come across and we will extend our knowledge of what the psychiatric patient really experiences.

It sounds as if Jaspers had the very best intentions in applying these phenomenological principles carefully to psychopathological phenomena. But it seems hard to believe that we would be able to approach pathology in such an open manner if we have already established that it is pathology we are dealing with. In order to catalogue psychic experience (and find room for what is considered pathological as well), surely a much more complete availability to the whole range of human experience is needed?

Jaspers proposes to build a systematic psychology on the study of abnormal events. In this he is making the same mistake that many psychologists and psychoanalysts also make: it is that of basing oneself on a number of presuppositions and separating oneself off from the broad perspective that a genuine phenomenological outlook would set out with.

Although there is much we can learn from Jaspers' methodology, we must be cautious not to lose our capacity for epoche by following him into the domain of a medically based observation.

For a truly phenomenological approach we must dare to stand back from the comforting division between pathology and normality. We must accept the principle that objective and subjective observations of our clients cannot be conveniently separated. We need to find a science of subjectivity more

encompassing than the one proposed by Jaspers. Nevertheless Jaspers' guidelines for empathy and for the way in which we might immerse ourselves in the client's world, are still very useful to a phenomenological therapy that seeks to get the client's worldview before going on to expand it and alleviate the tensions within it. Jaspers himself decided to turn away from pathology and psychiatry altogether and this is why he became a philosopher rather than a therapist. In this manner he could give himself over to a true comprehension of the human condition. In existential psychotherapy the challenge is to be both therapist and philosopher and to combine clinical observations and therapeutic endeavour with a complete philosophical grasp of the person's worldview and predicament.

Eugene Minkowski (1885–1972)

The dimension of time

This brings us back to our present problem – namely, where is the discordance between the patient’s psyche and our own?

(Minkowski 1958: 132)

Minkowski, who worked in France as a psychiatrist at the beginning of the twentieth century, was born in Poland. He was one of the first Frenchmen to apply phenomenological ideas to therapeutic practice. He did use some of Husserl’s ideas and acknowledged the influence of Scheler, but not of Heidegger. He applied a phenomenological method of observation and description and established a system of structural analysis of experience. He focused his research on psychopathology (1966) and on schizophrenia in particular (1927) and was much influenced by the work of the philosopher Henri Bergson (1889, 1896, 1901).

He described schizophrenia as characterised by a diminished and vital connection to the world. This lack of vital contact, he argued, was often made up for by an excessive contact with the world of ideas, intellect, words or numbers. Minkowski is best known for his book on time, with the title of *Le Temps Vécu* (1933), meaning lived time. In this he shows how differently time is experienced by different people and at different moments of one’s life. Again he shows that living in time is about vital contact with the world and that we can either narrow down our world by only living in one aspect of time or expand it by claiming the whole of available time.

Minkowski describes how people can feel that time is blocked when the future is dammed off, and has become taboo or inaccessible for some reason. A person may experience time collapsing in on itself, or stagnating, like water in a river. The person may become absorbed by the past in this situation, but if this is blocked off as well, a total sense of obstruction may result. The particular way in which different individuals experience time says much about their way of being in the world and determines their possibilities.

An overall schema distinguishes various aspects of zones of experienced time (see Figure 20.1).

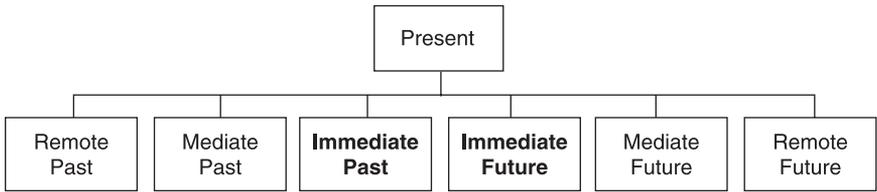


Figure 20.1 Minkowski's schema of experienced time.

The present is the zone of activity. But in some ways it includes all the other zones of time that are also present in one way or another.

- The remote past is the zone of the obsolete and of history, including one's own life myths.
- The mediate past is the zone of the regretted.
- The immediate past is the zone of remorse or of grief at recent loss.
- The immediate future is the zone of expectation, good or bad.
- The mediate future is the zone of wish and hope or of dread and anxiety.
- The remote future is the zone of prayer and ethical action and also of ultimate meaning of life.

It is interesting to note that Minkowski considers a positive relationship with the past to consist of the recognition of what has gone wrong, and a positive preparation for the future to be about an optimistic planning of action. The present becomes the place where we transform the lessons from the past into positive action for the future. Minkowski claims that most distortions of lived time lead to the foreclosure of one of those functions. The depressed person has no future, or merely a bleak one, where nothing new of value can occur. The manic person has a sense of an open future which need not take lessons from the past into account. They are extreme examples of the human tendency to be either retrospectively or prospectively focused. Of course there are many different ways in which we turn to the past or the future, constructively or destructively, and with more or less intensity. Another consideration is how well our personal time is matched with that of the chronological time of the world around us, and indeed with the wider context of historical or even cosmic time.

Minkowski considered many other ways in which general concepts, such as space, could be seen to determine factors in people's life. His attempts to enable people to free themselves from pathological symptoms by gaining insight into the distortions of their temporal and spatial experience shows the way to a more definite form of existential praxis. A case illustration of his work can be found in *Existence* (May et al. 1958). Here he discusses the experience of schizophrenic depression, showing it to be related to a total

blocking of future, which stops the normal ability to overcome obstacles. He also shows how the future is blocked because of the presence of a terrifying and destructive event. He connects this to an awareness of bad action that has been committed and remains in one's conscience, dimming mental life. This relationship between mental illness and moral issues would be an important one to take up again and explore further. Minkowski's contribution shows how important it is to be willing to consider the experience of another both in light of their life story and in contrast and comparison to one's own psychic life. There is no shortcut to understanding mental illness: we have to be willing to represent it clearly to ourselves to grasp it.

Jacques Lacan (1901–1981)

The role of language

Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that . . . they bring to his birth along with the gifts of the stars, if not with the gifts of the fairies, the shape of his destiny.

(Lacan 1977: 68)

In sharp contrast with Minkowski, who valiantly applied existential and phenomenological principles to psychotherapy but received little recognition for it, Lacan was a very influential French psychoanalyst, sometimes credited with the label of existential practitioner – without this necessarily being fully warranted. Lacan draws on Heidegger's work in a minimal fashion, basing himself far more on Freud and the work of linguistics. He remains caught in an ever-narrowing psychoanalytic net of interpretation which in many ways is anything but phenomenological. But he is nevertheless worth considering since he does give an existential slant to his psychoanalytic work. It must be noted that other psychoanalytic authors such as Winnicott, Horney, Kohut, Langs, even Freud and Klein, and certainly Roy Schafer, can be considered as including some existential elements in their theories. Their contributions are not considered here because this book is not about psychoanalysis. Lacan is included because he comes up with some concepts that are clearly Heideggerian and also to some extent Sartrian in nature.

Lacan constructed a new form of psychoanalysis on the basis of the idea that the unconscious is structured like a language and is a system of meaning. This revolutionary notion takes the unconscious into a different realm that is contiguous with existential considerations (see Chapter 32). Lacan rethought Freudian ideas from the angle of structuralism, as he was inspired especially by de Saussure's linguistic structuralism. He argued that the life of the unconscious is structurally framed rather than purely instinctual and that its logic is different to that of rational, conscious logic, but that nevertheless it has a logic all its own. His oeuvre seeks to articulate this alternative order of primary process.

Lacan attacked the humanism of American ego-psychology, especially that

of Hartman, which Lacan claimed aimed to get the individual to adapt to the environment and his social surroundings by strengthening the ego. Lacan considered that American psychoanalysis was forgetting its concern with psychic reality. What mattered here was the symbolic relationship between the individual and his or her projected fears or desires. Anglo-Saxon psychoanalysis was taken over by the cult of normal humans against the non-conformist desires of the unconscious. Psychoanalysis advocated a strong ego, and Lacan saw this as the essence of narcissism, the most basic object of self-love. Instead, Lacan suggested the analyst should dissolve conscious illusions so as to recover the liberating language of the unconscious. There can be no cure and we have to learn to give over to the power of the unconscious, which is described by Lacan as a form of ultimate being. It is easy to see how Lacan was influenced by Heideggerian and Sartrean ideals, insisting that psychoanalysis should liberate people from their social and cultural illusions in order to rediscover their freedom. However, Lacan's idea of freedom is rather different to that of Heidegger or Sartre. It is an intra-psychic freedom and consists in a kind of mad punning of the psyche in relation to its inevitable psychic constraints.

Lacan set up his own school of psychoanalysis after having been turned out of the International Psychoanalytic Association, largely because he began to work with extremely short analytic sessions and disagreed with much of established psychoanalytic dogma. He delivered what is known as his 'Discourse of Rome', accusing analysis of being medicalised. For him it was an art form which needed a more conjectural approach rather than a scientific one. His major work, *Écrits* (Lacan 1977), established his form of psychoanalysis as a separate school.

Lacan frequently uses word-play and conundrums as well as making much of the slips of parapraxis. He claims that all of these open up the realm of the alternative logic of the unconscious which he claims needs to be cultivated. According to him, misunderstanding is an integral part of understanding. The language of unconscious desire speaks in dreams and symptoms and riddles. The trade route of truth no longer passes through thought (Kearney 1986).

Lacan reinterpreted Freud's writing and considered himself to be a true and radical Freudian. However while Freud always attempted to be extremely clear in his writing and precise in his concepts, Lacan cultivated obscurity and mystery. He explained Freud's maxim *Wo Es war soll Ich werden* as meaning that the ego should become like the id rather than that the ego should replace the id. The task of psychoanalysis then becomes to challenge the humanist notion of autonomous and personal identity. It should lead back to the unconscious depth of language and its structural play of plural meanings.

Perhaps the most important contribution that Lacan made to psychoanalysis is to replace the simple opposition between primary and secondary processes with his distinction between the imaginary, the symbolic and the

real. These three dimensions of human reality are to some extent interwoven, but it is clear that the challenge on the whole is to arrive from the imaginary to the symbolic stage. These two stages have a dialectical interaction by virtue of getting continuously challenged by the real. The imaginary is that dimension where we placate and merge with the other, unable to distinguish difference, where we are fused in similarity. The symbolic is where we achieve intersubjectivity, language and heterogeneity. The real is a realm beyond those two. It is the unspeakable, the impossible – that which transcends both of the other two dimensions. It is far more than what psychoanalysis usually understands by reality, for it is in some ways beyond the reality that we can grasp.

The three realms of imaginary, symbolic and real come into play in the formation of the self. This begins to be formed during what Lacan calls the mirror phase, which takes place between the ages of 6 and 18 months when, he claims, the child still experiences the body as fragmented and from this concludes biological insufficiency and lack of cohesion. In order to become complete, the child attaches itself to the reflected image of a total self, as seen in the mirror or in the eyes of others. The ideal unified self or imago is formed. This is an imaginary projection in response to a real lack. The child can conveniently identify with this image of integration and sufficiency, constructing its imago like that of another. It suddenly knows that it is something specific and no longer needs to remain confused or fragmented. There is definitely a resonance of existential nothingness constructing an artificial confidence out of the public world of others, with the formation of what could be thought of as bad faith.

The imago is formed out of the desire to be something and may include something of the desire of the mother as well as of the desire of the child. This original imago constitutes the unconscious world of the imaginary in later life, where the illusions and deceits of the ego grow. One could compare this to Sartre's notion of the original project, which is the kind of mentality or mind set with which we orientate ourselves to the world. We need to remember that whereas Lacan considers such an imago to be constituted once and for all, for Sartre the project is continuously reshaped in relation to new experience. Lacan and Sartre are similar in that they consider this standardisation of self-image to be based on illusion. On the contrary, humanistic psychoanalysis and psychology seek to reinforce this illusion by strengthening the person's ego.

Lacan wants to dismantle the alienation that this process entails. He sees the person as alienated and in need of rediscovering an alternative I. This can be done by helping the analyst and by moving from the imaginary to the symbolic. This progression normally happens for the child around the time of the Oedipal phase, which clearly gives the Oedipal complex a new and more existential connotation as the time when the child discovers his or her position in the world in terms of intersubjectivity. This happens as a result of

the acquisition of language and the growing awareness that things can be different as well as similar. Gaining access to the symbolic order of language means to open the dialectic between subject and other. This is introduced by the child's discovery of the presence of a third person, the father, which demands a severance of the close tie between the mother and the child. Instead of simply being absorbed by the other, the 'I' can now gain access to the symbolic order, which transcends the imaginary and allows for interaction. We can achieve this kind of promotion to the symbolic order only if we face up to the fact that we are condemned to difference, division, alienation and death. These are all things the ego tries to suppress. We could say that Lacan sees the symbolic order as beginning from the moment when we accept our having to be expelled from the imaginary safety of paradise, where there is no disruption or fighting. In acquiring language we achieve this introduction into the symbolic order where our difference from the other becomes articulated. This can happen only when the father enters the relationship, forbidding the possibility of fusion. This is Lacan's reformulation of the Oedipal stage, which is now seen as holding an important existential challenge, instead of being purely about sexuality and the incest taboo. It is not about sexual intercourse, but about intercourse per se. Lacan's view takes one step away from classical psychoanalysis towards an existential perspective by foregrounding relationship.

The discourse between analyst and patient is seen as having to dissolve the imaginary ego in order to let the symbolising subject emerge. This subject realises that the truth of desire resides in the space between self and other and will know that the first object of desire is to be recognised by the other. This is a view that clashes considerably with existential philosophy, which rather looks at human interaction as riddled with paradox and ambiguity between a movement towards the other and simultaneously away from the other. Lacan believes that the relation to the other has got to be regulated in a particular, predictable fashion. This is not a very realistic expectation in existential terms.

It has implications for the therapeutic relationship, in which the analyst is considered to be all-powerful and all-knowing, and in a position to regulate the access to the symbolic order by idiosyncratic play of language – for instance, by manipulating the time of the sessions in relation to what the analyst judges to be necessary. The patient's ego is wilfully frustrated into making the unconscious speak. It is also done by disorienting the client through persistent silence or distance and by encouraging awareness of *Ichspaltung*, the split or fragmented 'I'. This frustrating of the patient is not unlike Kohut's approach, which also posits the importance of gradual frustration, although he claims that this will occur naturally in the therapeutic situation, rather than having to be engineered. It is clearly dissonant with an existential method that aims to respect the client's personal freedom and agency in the face of inevitable challenges and frustrations. Lacan takes the

more authoritarian view of the passive patient who needs to be manoeuvred into mental health by the potent and sometimes even omni-potent analyst.

Lacan remains decisively in the arena of pathology where the aim is primarily that of the relief of symptoms. Symptoms are seen as part of the language of the unconscious. They are metaphors which graphically depict the lack from which the person is suffering. This lack points towards desire. In order to truly understand Lacan's system one needs to study linguistics. The unconscious is structured like a language and every sign in that language is a relation between the signifier (the word or acoustic image) and the signified (the meaning or the concept). Symptoms are the words that express a meaning that has been excluded from consciousness.

Lacan makes much of the Freudian concepts of condensation (*Verdichtung*) and displacement (*Verschiebung*) which he takes to be two essential operating modes of the unconscious. Condensation is equated with metaphor and displacement with metonymy. Metonymy stands for the relation between one signifier and another in a horizontal shift of meaning, as is, for instance, the case when we call a whole meal 'tea' or anything pertaining to royalty as 'the crown'. Metaphor is a vertical shift in signifiers, where a concept greater than the original one subsumes and magnifies it, as for instance in the expression 'time flies', or in saying something like 'she was my sunshine'. The latter is not to be confused with a simile, which is a form of speech that compares or likens one thing to another but does not equate the two (she was like a ray of sunshine, they fought like cat and dog). Through metaphor and metonymy I shift meanings and reconstitute the world in a constant slight of hand. I use one concept to encompass another. Through metonymy I refer to another part of the signifier that is already present. Through metaphor I refer to something that is unconnected and not present, but which I introduce to make sense of what is there in a new way. If the metonymy function is arrested, fetishism is produced – for now the part stands for the whole. If the metaphoric function is disturbed this may lead to the process of foreclosure.

In foreclosure I reject the possibility of a certain idea out of hand, never allowing it into my consciousness or into my unconscious. It is the equivalent of Freud's notion of *Verwerfung* (repudiation) – the rejection of an idea – which is opposed to the notion of *Verdrängung* (repression). For Lacan the idea of foreclosure was an all-important one that illustrated the process of psychosis, which was the outcome of an inability to gain access to the symbolic order. When foreclosure occurs, the foreclosed event cannot return through the intra-psychic mechanism in the way in which the repressed returns, for it is not there at all. It is in the real that the foreclosed will inevitably come back, for it is out there somewhere and cannot be avoided forever. The notion of foreclosure is a useful existential term to indicate a person's unwillingness to face reality. Whether this is linked with a lack of access to the symbolic order is quite a different matter. On the whole, it is my experience that those people who do not see their way to facing what is real, tend to live in

a world of their own, which Lacan would term the imaginary. They do however tend to use metaphor liberally and often quite rebelliously in protest against the ordinary symbolic order of everyday language, laws and rules, which they have often great power over rather than having no access to it.

Lacan continuously assumes a particular world, which demands obedience to a patriarchal order and which will treat anyone not willing to play by those particular rules of the pathological. As we have seen before he was criticised for this by feminist writers such as Luce Irigaray.

Lacan's continuous play on language, together with his insistence on the supremacy of the unconscious and the need for authoritative interpretation on the part of the analyst, make his approach peculiarly unexistential in nature. His chase for meaning is that for the interplay of meanings that exist within the confines of a given world. He plays with the power politics of the established order. What he calls 'truth' is the understanding of the intricate motives and causes of mental events. His search is the opposite of the search for truth of the philosopher, which seeks to establish a wider context of meaning. It is a very different one to that of Heidegger, who seeks to eliminate the kind of curiosity with which the Lacanian analyst labours to establish patterns of discourse that are on the level of prattle rather than on the level of logos. Lacan may be committed to overcoming human alienation, but he does this not by seeking to understand the broader forces that determine human existence, but rather by getting caught in the net of human social interaction that is on the level of being fallen with the other.

The narrow focus of Lacan's system becomes even more obvious when we consider his insistence on the sexual (male, of course) aspect of the overcoming of alienation. When the child gains access to the symbolic order this is done through the presence of the father, who introduces what is referred to as the 'Name of the Father' – the human law of prohibition of fusion with the mother, which also introduces the notion of castration and castration anxiety as the cause of our constant sense of lack. In this way, the father introduces the symbolic impossibility of human fulfilment. 'What analytic experience shows us is that, in any case, it is castration that governs desire, whether in the normal or the abnormal' (Lacan 1977: 826).

Desire, rather than pure libido, is our driving force, according to Lacan. Such desire is not primarily sexual or biological, as it was for Freud, but it is rather relational in nature. This denotes a move in a more existential direction, while at the same time stopping short of defining relationships in the broad terms of intentionality. For Lacan everything is relational in the narrow social sense of the word. In fact, even the social tends to be defined in purely male terms. It is not surprising, therefore, that the signifier that represents our desire and its possible fulfilment is considered to be the phallus: the organ that can articulate the connection between father and mother and that can fill the perceived lack. The transcendental concept of the phallus as a symbol of

desire, castration and fulfilment is central to Lacanian psychoanalysis. It is an anthropomorphic theory par excellence. Its phallogentricity was vigorously attacked by Luce Irigaray (1974).

From an existential point of view, the more disturbing fact remains that of the rootedness of Lacan's work in the social *tout court*. Compare this to Sartre's contention that human lack is essential and ontological, leading to a number of socio-political events that can be analysed in relation to it but not reduced to intra-psycho-pathology. Lacan's version contents itself with a rather more narrow description of human nature.

Lacan however does strike a more existential note than most of his analytical colleagues by showing humans to be haunted by an absence that we can never make present, by an ideal that we can never possess. Our pursuit of the impossible is symbolised by the notion of *petit objet a* (little object a: this should really be translated as little object 'o', as 'a' stands for the French word *autre*, meaning 'other'). We are always after the other who will fulfil our lack, by providing us with the power of the phallus to overcome difference. I have, in good tongue-in-cheek Lacanian punning tradition, referred elsewhere to the great 'O' of oblivion, which must remain our primary object of desire in light of this theory. I have also shown that to pursue one-sided desire in this manner is hardly proof of much wisdom, leaving out the other side of the existential paradox (Deurzen-Smith 1994b; Deurzen 1998).

Lacan claims that Poe's story of 'The Purloined Letter' illustrates the impossibility of ever achieving the fulfilment we are seeking. In this story Edgar Allan Poe describes a compromising secret letter which is addressed to the Queen and has been stolen. The Queen cannot do anything about this for fear of letting the King know that she is worried. The letter is sought in vain, then found on the desk, where it was all along. The letter is never read, in the same way in which our words never fully disclose the meaning that we are after. According to Lacan, we are not the authors of meaning. The subject is spoken rather than speaking. We are at the mercy of the unconscious order that constitutes us. Much of Lacan's language is a mystification of what is mysterious enough as it is. This leaves all the power to decode meaning in the hands of the analyst, who is the only one who can interpret the play of unconscious meaning.

This alienating of human power to understand life and our position in it is not in line with the existential project to throw light and elucidate human existence. We need to take from Lacan's project what it can reveal about the human paradox but leave the rest for those who like to play parlour games. In the last analysis, instead of opening up human experience, Lacan closes it down. If we want to take seriously the demands of a Copernican revolution which puts life at the centre stage where the Ego or I used to be then we must take ourselves out of the intra-psycho and centre our theories on the human condition instead.

Ludwig Binswanger (1881–1966)

The beginning of existential therapy

[T]o be a man means not only to be a creature begotten by living-dying life, cast into it and beaten about, and put into high spirits or low spirits by it: it means to be a being that looks its own and humankind's fate in the face, a being that is 'steadfast'.

(Binswanger 1963: 204)

Working at the beginning of the twentieth century, Binswanger is probably the most significant of early existential practitioners, for he was the first one to write elaborate case histories that demonstrated not only the application of philosophical concepts to psychiatric work, but also the effectiveness of his methods. When we consider the limitations of his work, particularly the still so clearly apparent medical parameters of much of his practice, we would do well to remember that it was only because of the pioneering work of people like him that we are now able to think of human distress from a non-medical perspective.

Binswanger was a member of a family with a long tradition of psychiatry; his grandfather and father before him had been medical directors of the same clinic in Switzerland, the Kreuzlingen Clinic. This clinic figures importantly in the history of psychiatry and psychoanalysis as it had many well-known patients (including Anna O). Binswanger himself was an esteemed colleague of Freud's and one of his loyal long-term correspondents in spite of the important theoretical disagreements between them.

Binswanger attempted to make Heidegger's work the foundation of his practice and he called his ensuing method *Daseinsanalyse* (which is sometimes translated as 'Daseinsanalysis' and sometimes as 'existential analysis'). His work is well documented in May, Angel and Ellenberger's *Existence* (Binswanger 1946; May et al. 1958) and in the book *Being-in-the-World* (Binswanger 1963), which brings together some of his papers. Binswanger acknowledged towards the end of his career that his work was founded on a misunderstanding of Heidegger's work in its attempt to describe the human predicament as if it can be categorised and grasped in the manner of medical

science. This fruitful misunderstanding is well documented by Seidman (1983) and is based on Binswanger's interpretation of Heidegger's social theory as far more solid and positive than it actually is. It can easily be shown that Binswanger combines Heideggerian and Buberian notions of human relating which are then applied to psychotherapeutic work. Binswanger assumes that Heidegger's notion of 'solicitude' could be read as a form of I-Thou relating and that this should be the guiding principle for the therapist. But this is only one aspect of Binswanger's representation of Heidegger's philosophy as a concrete theory of everyday existence. As Seidman points out, Binswanger took the philosophy at the ontic level, when it was intended for the ontological. In other words, Binswanger acts as if Heidegger were speaking of the concrete happenings of individual lives when instead he was describing the essential and necessary conditions of all human life. The different aspects of human experience that Heidegger intends to be valid in all cases, Binswanger uses to replace psychopathological categories. Although this is objectionable to some, it cannot be denied that it leads to some interesting explorations.

Binswanger considers mutuality or being-with to be fundamental to human existence. Instead of having to choose between Heidegger's inauthentic being with others or authentic being alone, we can redeem ourselves and others through true encounter in Buberian style. This encounter, which is a loving mode of being, is what the therapist should aim for with the patient. Binswanger replaces his early categories of *Umwelt* (the relationship to the physical world), *Mitwelt* (the relationship to others) and *Eigenwelt* (the relationship to self), as described previously, with four categories of relating. These four ways of operating are essentially four ways of the self in modulating its relation to the world in different modalities, but in each modality the self is also transformed in the same way in which it transforms the world.

The *anonymous* mode of relating is that of individual living in relation to an unknown and collective mute world which puts its requirements and demands to us in a fairly absolute manner and which leaves us relating like objects and automata.

The *plural* mode of relating is that of formal relationships, in which we compete and struggle for dominance. In this mode there are several beings fighting or grappling for power. This is the dimension where we ourselves become divided and torn between winning and losing, seizing and yielding.

The *singular* mode of relating is that of our relationship to ourselves (although this can also be done in the plural mode when we fight with ourselves or distinguish various warring factions inside of ourselves). The point of the singular relationship is that it remains inward and confined to the intra-psychoic, leaving us in a peculiar self-relating mode which can lead to such attitudes as narcissism and autism, but also to a state of inner harmony where we are at one with ourselves.

The *dual* mode of relating is that of intimacy with a single other. This is very much Buber's I-Thou and therefore includes the possibility of our

relationship to the infinite as well. Our brother–sister relationships, as well as parental relationships or relations to a loved one or to God, all come in this category. Love and friendship epitomise this modality. In it we transcend nearness and farness by the creation of a new and privileged spatial relationship between ourselves and the elected other.

If we are to understand the particular modalities of relating in which patients engage we should observe their world relations and describe them with the greatest care. Binswanger does just that in his numerous case studies, where some of the usual methods of psychiatry are revolutionised by a novel form of understanding the subjective experience and the relational world in question – not in order to diagnose a pathology, but rather to map the person’s mode of operating and expose strengths and weaknesses, leading to obvious ways of amending and completing their experience.

Binswanger’s work reads a bit like an anthropological description, and indeed the subtitle of his most famous case – *The Case of Ellen West* (May et al. 1958), a young anorexic woman who eventually commits suicide – is that of ‘an anthropological-clinical study’. He uses all sorts of conceptual categories such as materiality, temporality, spatiality and causality to indicate the complexities of a person’s world relation. He frequently shows how constricted psychoanalytic categories of thinking are and how little of all possible aspects of being human they represent, thereby reducing the person to a narrow band of self-understanding. He shows, for instance, how the category of ‘anal retentiveness’ needs to be replaced and expanded with a far more complex grasping of the particular operating modes of opening up, filling, retaining, postponing, storing, spending, saving, owning, counting, etc. – all extremely complex experiences and world relations in their own right.

In spite of the flight into abstraction and poetry that often seems the consequence of Binswanger’s descriptive analysis, the imaginative and complex nature of his analyses of his patients paint sweeping and lifelike pictures of their human predicament. One may question how pragmatic his interventions are, and how relevant to current issues his work may be, but there is no doubt that his explorations were revolutionary, and are still inspirational in the sense that they highlight how much more is embedded in a person’s pathology than immediately meets the eye. Binswanger led the way in a search for a more satisfactory grasping of the meaning of problems in living.

His *Case of Ilse* (Binswanger 1963) illustrates the essence of his contribution, which I take to be his ability to bring out the personal and positive search for meaning and transformation through what seems, on the surface, like mental illness and disorder. Ilse is a young woman who is hospitalised for having committed acts of apparent self-destruction. She has, for instance, inflicted severe burns on herself by deliberately putting her forearm on the stove. Binswanger states that this act was not one of madness but rather a calculated attempt to show her father that she was willing to save him through personal sacrifice. The idea to do this occurred to Ilse after watching a

performance of *Hamlet* and realising that Hamlet might have saved the situation by being more decisive and murdering the king at an early stage. She had great concern for her father's well-being and sensed that she might similarly save him by an act of self-sacrifice. Binswanger is able to show the complex meaning of the act and of both its desired and actual result. Although he never articulates it this strongly, he shows that one of the ways of looking at madness is that it is the outward product of brilliant, but failed, solutions to critical problems. If we can pinpoint the original problem, its idiosyncratic attempted solution and the passionate originality of its author, this person does not only not have to collapse into illness, but can be helped to find other, more successful, creative solutions to the usually persisting problem (which is often situational and relational and not of the person's own making). It was Laing who was to take up this lead some fifty years later, in spite of his extremely critical assessment of Binswanger's work (Laing 1982).

Perhaps the most significant contribution of Binswanger was to systematically emphasise the importance of finding out what a patient means by a symptom, or any other aspect of their expression of themselves. The psychotherapist is never allowed to interpret anything in accordance with a pre-established system of meaning that is of the therapist's invention. In good phenomenological tradition it is the underlying specific meaning that is explored and never guessed at or imposed. This aspect of Binswanger's contribution remains most relevant today.

Medard Boss (1903–1990)

Daseinsanalysis

In the form of perceptive connections with all its encounters, each human existence spans the open spatiality of its own world, sustaining and maintaining its ecstatic freedom.

(Boss 1979: 90)

Medard Boss is without a doubt the foremost exponent of existential psychotherapy in its purest Heideggerian form. Of Swiss nationality, he worked in the Zürich area, which became a centre for the approach. Boss termed his approach ‘Daseinsanalysis’ to indicate the close links of his particular perspective with the work of Heidegger and he wanted to reserve this term exclusively to his own cause (Condrau 1991). Boss was trained as a psychiatrist and a psychoanalyst, but his dissatisfaction with these professions brought him to collaborate for over a decade with C.G. Jung, as well as seeking inspiration from Binswanger’s methods. Eventually Boss turned to Heidegger’s work to find a more phenomenological basis for his own practice and he began an intensive collaboration with the German philosopher, who came to give seminars for Boss and his staff for over a decade. Boss published the notes of these seminars after Heidegger’s death under the title *Zollikon Seminars* (Boss 1987). Boss’s other publications are equally noteworthy. He published a book on sexual perversions and then several books on dreams (1946, 1957b, 1977). *Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis*, which was written in 1957, dealt with existing forms of psychoanalysis and analytical psychology, arguing that they are insufficient in terms of understanding people’s true preoccupations and proposing an existential alternative. His work culminated in the book *Existential Foundations of Medicine and Psychology* (1979), which argued strongly for the importance of a new direction for both of these disciplines and, because of this, proved extremely controversial. Boss created the Daseinsanalytic Institute in Zürich, as well as the International Federation for Daseinsanalysis which, to this day, remains the largest organisation of psychotherapists of this orientation.

In his books on dreams Boss argues that existing psychotherapeutic

explanations of dream phenomena are inadequate at grasping the human reality expressed in the images conjured up. He shows his erudite knowledge of the literature as he reviews other methods and explanations, and each time he proposes that they fall short of touching the truth of the dreamer and provide some artificial theory instead. Boss always returns to the notion that we have a world in our dreams in the same way in which we have a world in our waking lives. The relationships we have to this world in our dreams is just as real as those of our waking lives and the one can throw light on the other. Boss does not accept the notion of the dream symbol, nor the theory of hallucinatory wish fulfilment. Instead, he considers everything that happens in the dream as if it were an ordinary event and looks at it phenomenologically for the meaning that it contains. 'The dream things must be accepted as things with their own and full meaning and content, just as they are felt to be within the immediate experiences of the dream' (1957b: 101).

For Boss, then, no distinction is made between the subjective and the objective level of the dream. Dreamers express a particular mode of being and relating to the world around them in their dreams and this is just as valid an example of who they are as an account of a real, waking event. Only in our dreams can we ourselves conjure up the sort of world that we are ready to relate to. When we are in a state of hunger we conjure up an edible world; when we are in a state of creature likeness we conjure up animals; when we are open to other persons of a particular sort we find them also in our dreams. Boss claims that there is no need to refer to concepts of displacement, condensation or projection and go through complex analyses of the dream material. What I am, do, encounter, and am preoccupied with in my dream conveys directly my current state of being.

When I am attacked by a dog in my dreams, this does not stand for the unconscious desire of aggression that I project out on to an external object, nor is it the symbol of my sexuality. It merely demonstrates my openness to the danger that this real and live creature represents and my willingness to face it. In tackling the dream in such a real manner, I may well discover parallels with other aspects of my life, and so I may well find that I am currently extremely open to sensuality though largely preoccupied with its dangerous nature. But this does not make the dog a symbol of my sexuality, nor a projection of my aggression – merely a reminder of the way in which I encounter the world on many different levels. In looking at dreams in this way we can come to an existential discovery of ourselves and the world we live in and relate to, with the restrictions and possibilities that we see in it. The dream illuminates and clarifies our specific world relation and shows its potential and limitations if we are willing to open our eyes to it.

In this sense, Boss was extremely faithful to Husserl's admonition that we had to return to the things themselves, though perhaps even more so to Goethe's aphorism: 'Do not look for anything behind phenomena; they themselves are the lesson!' He also applied this method of careful observation

of the phenomena reported to the rest of his psychotherapeutic work. It is not only dreams that do not need interpretation and complex analyses, the same goes for the facts of everyday life as well.

In his *Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis* (1957a), Boss shows convincingly how his personal point of view on psychosis was dramatically altered by open discussions with one of his patients, who ridiculed his physiological and analytical interpretations when she had a breakdown and began to hallucinate. It was crucial for her that her hallucinations should be met with credulousness and that they should be dealt with as anything else in life needs dealing with. Boss found that as soon as he was open to considering his patient's hallucinated reality with seriousness, the patient immediately felt much better understood and willing to work. Staying with the actual experience of this patient, which was at first extremely disturbing, gradually made her capable of steering in a more positive direction. Boss treated her experience at all times as a concrete occurrence and addressed all its implications and consequences.

Boss considered himself in many ways in line with Freud's attempts at finding meaning in what may at first seem absurd. He argued that Freud, like others before him, had held that the notion of an unconscious was crucial in order to explain the limits of consciousness and to account for the meaningfulness of phenomena which would otherwise remain unexplainable. Boss argued, however, that there was as much need for the concept of the unconscious as for the concept of consciousness – in other words, none at all. Here Boss turns to Heidegger's perspective, which is that of Dasein as the place where being comes to light. Sometimes phenomena are brought out more than at others, there is always a limit to how much light we can throw on phenomena. There is no reason to assume that there is such a thing as full consciousness of anything, nor that there is such a thing as an unconscious reservoir of phenomena. Human beings encounter phenomena and disclose them, never fully or completely, but they always disclose them in some way. In other words, the division between reality and unreality, or between consciousness and the unconscious, is too stark and does not correspond to the actual state of affairs, which is both more complex and more simple.

Boss quotes the first sentence of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a) – 'Every dream reveals itself as a psychical structure which has a meaning and which can be inserted at an assignable point in the mental activities of his waking life' – as indicating the epitome of the joy of discovery of much that had hitherto remained concealed. Unfortunately, Freud then made the mistake of imagining a myriad of explanations that did not bring us any closer to revealing what was hidden. Concealment and darkness are part of the world-disclosing presence that human beings are. There can be no light without darkness, but it is not necessary to consider darkness to be a realm that needs to remain isolated in order to study it and assign to it a number of special laws. Light and darkness are two aspects of being that need to be seen as

connected. What I disclose at any one time is a function of what I focus on, what I happen to, or choose to attach myself to or connect myself with. I can focus on lighter or darker aspects of my experience, but all are equally valid. If we can relinquish the notion that our conscious life is the definitive version (leaving us to believe in an unconscious counterpart), we become more able of observing the meaning disclosing that goes on in human beings at all different levels with all the shifts of focus and attention that happen continuously.

Just as we can make room for dreams and psychotic phenomena in this way, we can also make sense of parapraxes or any other phenomena that seemed to Freud to require the notion of the unconscious. The chairman who opens a meeting by saying 'I declare this meeting closed' is clearly disclosing his own abhorrence of the meeting. In fact, for it to be possible for him to say such a thing, he is quite contained and moved by this negative orientation towards the meeting. The fact that he was not disclosing this orientation to himself by reflecting upon it, makes him so much the more absorbed by the orientation and capable of disclosing it in his actions and words. We need to stop equating self-awareness with consciousness and unawareness with unconsciousness. We need to abandon the very idea of separating out consciousness and unconsciousness, and observe human being as it manifests in action and in the multiple realities, concealed and revealed, that are open to it.

Boss (1962) contests that we have no need for most other psychoanalytic concepts either. He holds on to the basic rule of free association, because it is a fundamentally open attitude which allows a person to access the play of the whole field of reality that makes existential analysis possible. For the same reason he always continued the use of the couch, which he considered a good vehicle for the facilitation of free association. He objected strongly to almost everything else in psychoanalysis. Repression and resistance, for instance, are unnecessary and redundant concepts when we dispense with the notion of the unconscious. Boss acknowledges that a phenomenon like resistance can be observed, but he considers this to be related to a person's commitment to particular ideas or persons, other than those involved in the revealing of their inner preoccupations. He gives the following graphic example of the way in which the notion of repression can be overcome elegantly by understanding such phenomena rather as the dynamism of contradictory interests.

A young woman falls in love with a gardener who works in a flower nursery that she passes every day on her way to work. He looks at her intently every day and she gets very excited about this. One day she stumbles and falls in front of the nursery and from that moment on both her legs are paralysed. Hysterical paralysis is diagnosed. Boss states that the analysis of this young woman showed how her parents disapproved of every sign of sensuality and how the woman herself, fiercely attracted to the gardener, at the same time had doubts about her right to go towards him. This simultaneous wanting to move towards him and move away from him resulted in what is the logical

outcome of simultaneous movement in opposite directions: paralysis. There was no need to assume that there was anything repressed or unconscious about this process, although much of it was mysterious and not thought out, recognised or articulated. The girl had a clear awareness of her attraction to the gardener at all times, and she had an equally clear awareness of the unsuitability of her interest. These two attitudes combined in the mysterious paralysis, which was neither conscious nor unconscious, but merely the result of a contradiction in her way of disclosing reality. The girl was under the spell of her parents' opinions and equally under the spell of the gardener's attraction. The missing factor was that of her ability to move herself forward in the direction of her choice. The paralysis was not the expression of some unconscious thought, but rather the direct expression of her particular mode of being in the world of her specific intentionality and attitude. The analysis consisted of her reclaiming the freedom to move lovingly towards another if she so wished, and as soon as this became possible the paralysis receded.

In exactly the same way in which repression and resistance have to be seen as real phenomena, so it is with projection and identification. What a person experiences is real to them, even though it may be unreal to the other. It is not sufficient to merely turn the tables on them and consider what they observe in the outside world as a mere projection of their inner feelings or vice versa. If, Boss says, a person speaks of feeling poisoned by someone, it is not good enough to claim such an accusation to be based on the projection of aggressive feelings on to the other person. This represents a kind of trick that lets us off the hook of understanding the person's world-relation. Someone who experiences another person as poisonous is disposed towards the world in an essentially vulnerable manner. They may be saying that they are incapable of coping with what the other dishes out to them. This may say something about the other's intense demands on them in the same way in which it probably says something about their own current incapability of making the situation safe for themselves. This may indicate something about their immaturity or lack of strength in relation to the given situation or other person. While they may have a desire to feel aggressive enough to defend against the perceived attacks, it is unlikely that they feel sufficiently strong to be equal to the challenge. Therefore, an interpretation about projection would be extremely undermining and would indicate a great lack of understanding of their actual position in life. The same could be said for interpretations of identification or projective identification. These are so many devices that stop us from paying proper attention to the quandary our client is actually in. They are automatic responses to a specific and demanding situation.

We have to come to the conclusion that the therapeutic relationship demands a great deal more from us than psychoanalysts assume. We have to revise the most fundamental aspects of it, including that of the concept of transference.

Transference is not a mere deception based on a faulty linking of affects and instincts to the 'wrong' object as Freud thought. Transference is always a genuine relationship between the analysand and the analyst. In each being-together, the partners disclose themselves to each other as human beings; that is to say, each as basically the same kind of being as the other. No secondary 'object cathexes', no 'transfer of libido' from a 'primarily narcissistic ego' to the 'love-object', no transfer of an affect from a former love object to a present-day partner, are necessary for such disclosure, because it is of the primary nature of Dasein to disclose being, including human being.

(Boss 1957a: 123)

There can be no excuses and no soft options. In the therapeutic relationship all phenomena have their own direct reality and they have to be dealt with in this manner. We cannot blame anything on pathology, the past, or the mysterious unconscious. We have to be equal to the vagaries, complexities and contradictions of the mysterious realities that we take part in creating together with our clients. Boss's approach is controversial and challenging to psychotherapy. Unfortunately, much of it is couched in Heideggerian language, which is not easily accessible to most practitioners steeped in a different jargon. Boss's impact has therefore remained restricted. Boss did also provide his students with some interesting shortcuts to good practice: he is famous for suggesting that we should ask our patients 'why not' rather than 'why' for instance, helping them explore their possibilities and freedom, rather than remaining enclosed in a fearful world.

Viktor Frankl (1905–1997)

Logotherapy and the search for meaning

But even a man who finds himself in the greatest distress, in which neither activity nor creativity can bring values to life, nor experience give meaning to it – even such a man can still give his life a meaning by the way he faces his fate, his distress.

(Frankl 1955: 12)

The originality and poignancy of Frankl's work and the impetus for it stem from his personal reflections on the depth of human misery as experienced first hand during the war. Viktor Frankl discovered existential principles while he was interned in a number of concentration camps during the Second World War (Frankl 1946, 1955). In his own words, in the camps he realised that there were only two sorts of human beings: decent ones and non-decent ones and that this division existed across the whole range of races, nationalities or professions. In his work after the war he described how, having lost all of his family and suffering greatly himself with extreme humiliation, deprivation and sheer misery, he struggled to find a way of continuing to lead a meaningful life. After the war he applied the principles that he had arrived at to a type of psychotherapy that he named 'logotherapy', from the Greek 'logos', which stands for word, concept or meaning. Frankl founded what he called the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy (the first two being those of Freud and Adler).

Frankl argues that meaning is the most essential ingredient for living a worthwhile life. Even in the camps it was possible to find meaning, for there was always 'an immense and important task, perhaps a more formidable task than the tasks we had to accomplish before we came here: the task of suffering with courage and dignity' (Frankl 1967: 116). In relation to this he quotes Nietzsche's dictum that *he who has a 'why' to live for can bear almost any 'how'*.

Frankl argues that the greatest peril of contemporary men and women is a lack of meaning – that people no longer come to psychotherapists because of neurotic symptoms as they seemed to do at the beginning of the century,

but rather more often because they have lost a sense of purpose. He contends that we live in a vacuum of meaning: we lack a specific philosophy of life and yet the need for this is built in to every human being. In his book *Psychotherapy and Existentialism* (1967), he describes three basic principles of human existence, all of which are fundamental givens of our lives.

1 Freedom of will

People are not free from biological, sociological or psychological conditions that rule their lives, but they are always free to take a stand towards these conditions. Frankl shows how it is possible, even in the horrific circumstances of being trapped in a prison or a camp to find something to laugh about or believe in.

2 Will to meaning

The will to pleasure that Freud posited, or the will to power that Adler posited, are narrow concepts that can be contained in the wider concept of the will to meaning of which they are derivatives. If we try to aim for pleasure and happiness we are sure to miss our target, for we mistake the effect for the end. If we aim for power we miss our target, because we mistake the means for the end. We do need some power in order to live, and good living leads to some pleasure, but life is in essence about making sense of things. People reach out for meanings to fulfil and they find a satisfactory identity only to the extent that they can commit themselves to causes greater than themselves. Logotherapy confronts the person with the specific meaning to be carried out by this particular person. Frankl (1967) refers to Goethe's warning that: 'If we take man as he is, we make him worse; if we take him as he ought to be, we help him become it' (Frankl 1967: 23).

3 The meaning of life

Essentially, logotherapy is a way of helping another person to discover the meaning that he or she can give to life. Even when it seems impossible to retrieve meaning out of an apparently abject or outrageously difficult life, it is still possible to do so. Frankl claims that there are three fundamental ways in which life can be made meaningful:

- We find meaning through what we give to life in terms of our creative works and the deeds that we do.
- We find meaning through what we take from the world in terms of our experiencing values. This is the meaning we find through loving the world and everything in it.
- We find meaning by the stand we take towards a fate we no longer can

change. The latter is the meaning of suffering, and Frankl argues that this is a much underrated source of meaning.

Frankl illustrates his work with case material in which he shows how such concepts can be concretely applied. He is keen to affirm that the human condition is not an easy thing to face and that it always involves what he refers to as the tragic triad – pain, death and guilt. These three principles confront us with the inevitability of our suffering, of our mortality, and of our fallibility. These are givens that we have to take into account and which form the parameters within which we have the task of creating meaning for ourselves. Frankl argues that many people expect life to give meaning to them, when we should see it the other way round, namely that we should seek to give meaning to life. We can only do so if we try to reach for our absolute best.

For Frankl, ideals are not something to be sneered at, for they are the very stuff of survival. When speaking to a terminally ill patient, he says, ‘Your life is a monument’, encouraging the person to suffer with dignity. He reminds a bereft person, who has lost a sense of meaning since the death of his wife, that being bereft of his wife is a final gift he can offer her – in sparing her the grief she would have had to suffer if he had been the first to die. To those struggling to live a decent life, he gives Nietzsche’s advice: ‘He who knows a “why” for living will surmount almost any “how”’ (Frankl 1967: 102).

Frankl insists that it is possible to refocus life in the context of our finiteness and the finality of life, which makes us aware of our responsibility to make the most out of what we have got. This also means that he uses humour frequently and to good effect. He is particularly well known for the invention of the concept of paradoxical intention, which is the intervention which consists of prescribing the symptom, something now frequently used in strategic psychotherapy. Frankl contends that this method is effective because symptoms are often provoked more by anticipatory anxiety than by anything else. The person is anxious about being anxious and stutters because of being afraid of stuttering. The method also rests on the observation that that for which we try hardest, with excessive intention, is often most difficult to obtain. Frankl recounts how efficient it can be, especially in situations of phobia or obsessional neurosis, to release people from the thing they most fear by encouraging them to wish it upon themselves.

To tell the person who continuously doubts whether they have turned off the gas, to imagine what might happen if they forgot to do so one day, leads to their recognition that their house might explode. To then imagine the house actually exploding and feel the satisfaction this might bring takes the pressure off the checking symptom. Equally the client who has an obsession with hand-washing or other cleaning rituals may find great pleasure in being helped to imagine besmirching things or getting her hands extremely mucky. Frankl also speaks of the improvement experienced by the claustrophobic

person who is afraid of fainting in a lift, when he is encouraged to actually try to faint instead of trying to control the emotional response. Frankl also uses the technique of dereflection, which is a method for taking the attention off useless preoccupations and taking an activist rather than a negativistic approach to one's problems (Frankl 1967: 123). This is particularly effective for people who have a tendency to be compulsive in their self-reflectiveness and who hyper-reflect or suffer from anticipatory anxiety. His method of intervention is based on a conversational method in which he disputes false ideas and suggests different ways of thinking about a predicament. The method is often referred to as existential analysis.

Frankl wrote over twenty books and lectured all over the world. He created an Institute for Logotherapy, which still flourishes today, but which teaches a more complete method of psychotherapy now with the aim of helping people to arrive at a fresh view of themselves and the world. First, it aims at strengthening the self and finding its latent abilities. Second, it aims at relief from negative aspects of the self through a process of clearing of deficiencies, hurts and disturbances (Längle 1990). This is done by being with the client on a noetic level, by understanding clients' motivations and by helping them to relate to themselves and their world through modification of their attitudes. It is important to help clients to be themselves as well as in finding meaning. In the last analysis, clients often come to a therapist in order to make things right again for themselves and for others. We may therefore be able to speak of a will to justice as well.

Rollo May (1909–1994), James Bugental (1915–2008), Irvin Yalom (1931–) and others

The American contribution

It is the task of the therapist, therefore, not only to help the patient become aware, but even more significantly, to help him *transmute this awareness into consciousness*.

(May 1969a: 79, italics in original)

Rollo May has played a unique role in the development, and particularly the popularisation, of existential psychotherapy by translating it into easily accessible concepts and methods. His editing of the book *Existence* (1958) in collaboration with Henri Ellenberger and Joseph Angel led to the introduction of such figures as Binswanger, Minkowski and Boss to the American psychotherapy scene. To this day, the book remains a classic in the existential psychotherapy literature.

May was himself introduced to this way of thinking by his mentor Paul Tillich (May 1973), and much of May's own writing is recognisably Tillichian in nature. Another important influence on May was his fight with tuberculosis, which led him to question his outlook on life. His book on anxiety (May 1950) is a direct product of this experience and is in line with Kierkegaardian and Heideggerian notions. His little book on *Existential Psychology* was also an important document in the early days of American existential therapy (May 1969a). His best-seller, *Love and Will* (1969b), made many of these ideas known in a more popular format but, from that point on, much of his original existential impetus began to get absorbed by the then growing movement of humanistic psychology. May ended up integrating into this movement and much of his work is directly compatible with that of person-centred therapy. Indeed he was associated with people like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, though he never shared their optimism about the human condition and continued to emphasise some of its darker sides. May argues that 'the aim of therapy is that the patient experience his own existence as real' (Reeves 1977: 85). The objective of his existential therapy is thus to attain a balance and integration of all the ontological structures: to participate in being with others while also achieving individuation. May's first book

The Meaning of Anxiety (1950) referred to Kierkegaard's idea of anxiety as the dizziness of freedom. He also made a link between anxiety and the threat to an individual's values. His mentor Tillich responded to the book with another book. Later on May referred to Tillich's *The Courage to Be* (1952) as that of the courage to accept imperfection. He claims the importance of acknowledging that there is 'reason for the deep anxiety inherent in the tragic possibilities of living' (Reeves 1977: 193).

May sees the task of the therapist as helping the person to become more and more centred and, therefore, also more able to go out from this centre to be with others. Once a person is able to accept imperfection and anxiety the task is to centre oneself in oneself and to find one's own power to choose and affirm one's values and live by one's own convictions. The subjective side of centredness is self-consciousness, which is my capacity to know myself and experience myself as the subject who has a world. One of the objectives, therefore, is to transmute awareness into consciousness and gain insight. May insists that insight tends to follow decisions and commitments rather than the other way round. People need to learn to act on their values and then they can gain an insight into who they are and how the world works.

The therapist is required to be present and to relate in a personal way and to focus on possibility for experience and growth, not on interpretations about the past. It is the blockage of the person's own freedom that needs to be removed, and in order to do so the therapist has to remain flexible to adjust method and technique to each individual client.

It must be clear that this form of existential therapy, as described in a number of May's books (1967, 1969b, 1983), is humanistic-existential and tends to be much more interventionist and less descriptive in nature than existential-phenomenological psychotherapy. This path was also followed by other American and usually specifically Californian therapists like James Bugental (1978, 1987), who calls his approach existential/experiential (see also Valle and King 1978). It was also followed by Irvin Yalom who did some work with May and who focuses particularly on death anxiety and other ultimate concerns such as the concern about isolation, freedom and meaninglessness. Yalom has really drawn attention to the existential approach through his case studies and therapeutic novels (Yalom 1980, 1989, 1992, 1996, 2001, 2005, 2008) and has made existential thinking far more popular. Yalom was trained in Sullivanian therapy and also made his mark in the field of group therapy, showing up the link between group work, systemic approaches and an existential orientation. In many ways Yalom's work is more directly compatible with a humanistic-integrative stance than it is with a phenomenological-existential stance as defined by European practitioners. It could even be argued to show important cognitive-behavioural influences. Yalom's work, especially in his case studies (Yalom 1980, 1989; Yalom and Elkin 1974), is additionally often quite psychiatric and behavioural in nature. Existentialist concepts are merely used to intensify confrontation with poignant issues, but they are by no means

the guideline to therapeutic intervention itself. In spite of this Yalom's work draws attention to human concerns and incites to philosophical reflection and reading his work is often the way in which people first encounter existential ideas and get an interest in studying further.

It is noteworthy that May's original description of existential psychotherapy in *Existence* (May et al. 1958) is rather different. May constantly emphasises the importance of understanding and the irrelevance of technique. Problems are to be seen as limitations to a person's being-in-the-world. Meanings of the patient's experience must be taken from the frame of reference of the person's life, not from the psychotherapist's interpretative frame. May acknowledges his debt to Boss when he asserts that transference should not be seen as a transfer of feelings the patient had for his parents on to the therapist, but rather as evidence that the patient perceives the therapist through the same restricted or distorted spectacles through which he saw his parents as well. The objective is to free the patient from as many undesirable restrictions as is possible. This is done primarily through the therapeutic relationship which is to be as real a human relationship as is possible. May here uses the word 'presence' to indicate the quality of being-with the patient that the therapist has to be capable of. He also speaks of the therapist as a 'mid-wife'. This requires the therapist to have a commitment to constantly analysing out his own ways of destroying presence. It is important to recognise that we inevitably tend to destroy presence and, as therapists, we must be aware of when and how we do this with the effect of distancing ourselves from our patients and their preoccupations. The aim is for patients to become aware of the existence that they have and that previously was clouded and now becomes illuminated. May refers to the three world dimensions of *Umwelt*, *Mitwelt* and *Eigenwelt* that Binswanger uses and he sees the aim of the therapy as allowing patients to fulfil their existence. Cure of symptoms may be a by-product of this enterprise, but should not be the goal. May considers Kierkegaard's dictum that 'truth exists only as the individual himself produces it in action', and sees commitment to living fully as a prerequisite for truth.

Most of this is repeated in Yalom's work which considers engagement to be the only real medication against meaninglessness (Yalom 1980). Yalom recognises four levels of polarities and challenge in life, but he does not attach these in a systematic manner to the philosophical dilemmas described by existential authors. This leads him to miss the poignancy of the tensions that exist in human paradoxes, as he emphasises the basic concerns and anxieties rather than seeing these as part of the complex interchange between fears and desires that make up the dynamic framework of human living. Yalom recognises four basic challenges and threats, and calls them ultimate concerns (inspired by Tillich's concept) in relation to certain conditions of human life. These are, according to him, death, freedom, existential isolation and meaninglessness.

It is easy to see how these correspond to *Umwelt*, *Eigenwelt*, *Mitwelt* and

Überwelt, but Yalom does not look at the other side of the paradox on each of these dimensions. He ends up considering these four concerns as anxiety-provoking mechanisms that lead to defence mechanisms and psychopathology. He substitutes the concerns for the notion of drives. He then proceeds to work with his patients in such a way as to help them deal with these anxieties and symptoms. The medical model dominates with the goal of removing such anxieties rather than learning to live with them. The originality and poignancy of existential-phenomenological thought, whereby the whole of human existence is reconsidered from a philosophical rather than a medical perspective is lost in this process. The existential concepts become a mere prop for therapeutic endeavour. There is little awareness of the challenges of human living as consisting of a continuous tension between life and death in terms of our physical presence – between being related to others or being isolated in terms of our social experience, between being resolute or desolate in personal terms (in relation to one's freedom), and between a search for truth and a confrontation with absurdity in global terms. Yalom views human life as something that needs to be cured and made well rather than as a paradoxical challenge to which we need to rise. He misses the depth of despair and the acceptance of human suffering as the central pivot around which human beings come to consciousness. He is firmly committed to the here and now of humanistic therapy and appears to be persuaded of an entirely materialistic existentialism which ignores the spiritual streamings of much of continental thinking. The same humanistic striving for the full realisation of the human potential is present in Bugental and Rogers (Rogers 1951; Rogers and Stevens 1967; Bugental 1978, 1987). More recently Kirk Schneider (Schneider and May 1995; Schneider 2008), has called his approach existential/integrative therapy and it is clear that he aims for a therapy that can take on board aspects of many different techniques and insights, but that still aims to draw vital force from its roots in philosophical thinking. There are other contributors in San Francisco worth noting, especially in relation to the Saybrook Institute. Michael Guy Thompson, a psychoanalyst also trained with the London-based Philadelphia Association, has made his own existential mark in the United States. He is on the faculty of the California School of Professional Psychology and has contributed many papers to phenomenological and existential journals and books. But of all US authors, Gendlin's work on focusing is in many ways the most faithful to phenomenological principles. He has done some remarkable work in bringing these principles into therapeutic practice (Gendlin 1978), especially in terms of learning to pay attention to intentionality and affectivity.

There is also the important contribution of the Duquesne University Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, which was founded in 1980 and houses a fantastic library, which includes a complete copy of the Husserl archive from the University of Louvain and organises regular seminars and conferences on phenomenological matters.

Hazel Barnes (1990) and especially her pupil Betty Cannon's (1991) work on the impact of Sartre's philosophy on psychotherapy is also an invaluable contribution, coming from Boulder, Colorado. There are a number of therapists in Canada who are working with the existential approach, including Steven Ticktin, who used to work in the UK. The contribution of Edwin Hersch (2003) is of particular importance in its attempt at faithfully translating an existential phenomenological method into therapeutic practice.

Thomas Szasz (1921–)

The social dimension of therapy

Perhaps the relationship between the modern psychotherapist and his patient is a beacon that ever-increasing numbers of men will find themselves forced to follow, lest they become spiritually enslaved or physically destroyed.

(Szasz 1961: 272)

Thomas Szasz's contribution to existential psychotherapy comes out of his work as a psychiatrist and professor of psychiatry in New York. His approach is a socio-political one and he vigorously denies that there is such a thing as mental illness (Szasz 1961). He calls the idea of mental illness a myth and he considers the difficulties people come to psychiatrists and psychotherapists with to be problems in living. The illness model is not suitable for this field, Szasz argues, as we are not dealing with anything that affects the body, but rather with something that affects the mind and the way in which a person lives. Of course, if a person suffers from a neurological defect, this is quite a different matter and such a person can be treated medically. Also, if a person is a danger to others then such a person should be dealt with by the law in exactly the same way as anyone else. All other people who need psychotherapeutic help do so because they have personal, relational or moral problems in living.

Unlike Laing, Szasz does not hold on to his medical antecedents when working with someone who consults him. Szasz is within the existential tradition in as much as he believes psychotherapy to be an essentially philosophical and moral debate:

In most types of voluntary psychotherapy, the therapist tries to elucidate the inexplicit game rules by which the client conducts himself; and to help the client scrutinise the goals and values of the life games he plays.

(Szasz 1961: 255)

While much of Szasz's work consists of a fundamental challenge to his

profession of psychiatry, he has made a contribution to the practice of existential psychotherapy by describing a simple method of therapy through dialogue (Szasz 1965, 1992). The first point of Szasz's work is that it is contractual and voluntary. No one should enter psychotherapy without wishing to undertake such an activity, and no one should do it without a clear sense of what it is they are paying for, what it is that the therapist should provide and also what the therapist should abstain from. Szasz (1992) proposes an alternative word to indicate psychotherapy – 'iatrology', or healing with words. In his book *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1965) he calls his form of psychotherapy 'autonomous psychotherapy' and insists that it is necessary for the patient to assume full responsibility in order to fulfil the contract with the therapist. 'In this respect therapy is anything but morally neutral' (1965: 193) – and if the client does not comply the contract should be terminated. However, this is the only way in which the client is being coerced. It is rather like Sartre's dictum that the only choice a person does not have is not to choose. Clients must choose to work or not work at all, but once they have chosen to work they can do so in the way they think fit. The therapeutic relationship that follows is a game that follows certain rules and principles. Szasz argues that this game must otherwise be played according to the free style of the players. He does not believe, for instance, that a training analysis has any more use than that of preparing the analyst for having experienced the game of therapy from the perspective of the other player: 'Having a "good analysis" does not make one a good analyst, nor does knowing one's "blind spots" ensure him against analytic ineptitude' (Szasz 1965: 216).

Szasz goes on to give therapists practical advice on what is most helpful in doing autonomous psychotherapy, and he lists the following:

- Forget the idea of trying to cure.
- Stick to the contract and do not try to provide services that go beyond it. (Do not worry about the person's health or financial state.)
- In order to play the game well, see your patients often at first. (Szasz suggests four or five times a week.)
- Do not intervene if they get into an emergency; that is their lawyer's or their doctor's problem. The therapist must remain the therapist.
- Do not encourage the patient to be preoccupied with you. His preoccupation with you is a way of not attending to his own life. Nothing is to be gained from assuming that what he thinks and feels about you is anything less than real.
- Combine your analytic work with teaching, writing and research. Its quality will improve. Also be free of hierarchical impacts on you in the same way in which you need to leave your patient free of your coercion.
- Do not take notes, for the therapeutic process is about personal encounter.
- Remember that you are only responsible for your own conduct, not for

that of your patient. Be truthful, do not misinform, do not communicate with third parties.

Make every effort to understand the patient by trying to feel and think as he does. Finally be honest with yourself and critical of your own standards of conduct and of those of your society. In sum you must be an analyst.

(Szasz 1965: 220)

Clearly Szasz is deeply committed to his own form of liberal psychoanalysis. His work adds to the existential perspective in that it develops the critical dimension considerably. In terms of direct application to praxis, there is little added to what has been said by others before.

Ronald Laing (1927–1989)

Anti-psychiatry

We live equally out of our bodies, and out of our minds. Concerned as I am with this inner world, observing day in and day out its devastation, I ask why this has happened?

(Laing 1967: 50)

Laing crashed onto the British scene with his book *The Divided Self* (1959) when he was not much more than 30 years old. He had a tremendous impact across many other fields besides psychiatry and he made many people think again about mental illness. He wrote particularly about the experiences of people who have been labelled mad, or schizophrenic. Though David Cooper actually coined the term anti-psychiatry (Cooper 1967), it was Laing who ended up with the label, even though he was at first sceptical and later very much opposed to using it. The movement of anti-psychiatry became associated with the counter-culture movement of London of the swinging sixties and an international following of curious intellectuals and fascinated individuals gathered around it. Together with colleagues, including David Cooper and Aaron Esterson, he created the Philadelphia Association in 1965, which continues to offer long-stay therapeutic communities. He was to some extent informed by the phenomenological and existential writings of Heidegger, but was most particularly inspired by the existentialism of Sartre. The original ideas of existential philosophies were however mitigated by other ideas, especially those of psychoanalysis. Laing's work was an uneasy synthesis of object relations theory and existentialism. The ideas of Winnicott, who was Laing's supervisor, figure prominently in much of what Laing had to say. Rycroft's ideas were also influential. He was Laing's analyst. This psychoanalytic influence, as well as his early psychiatric training, hampered Laing's ability to develop a fully fledged existential approach and he continued to think in medical terms in spite of his increasingly mystical inclination.

Nevertheless, Laing's contribution to the understanding of the process that is involved in a person's schizoid, schizophrenic, or psychotic experience of the world is enormous. His classic book, *The Divided Self* (1959), is as

relevant today as it was when he wrote it in the 1960s. It led to the experiments of Kingsley Hall (Berke and Barnes 1991) and the Philadelphia Association in 1965 and later the Arbours Association when a split occurred in the movement after the Kingsley Hall experiment had failed. These were all ventures to allow people to experience their disturbance in a free and facilitative environment without medical interference. The idea was that madness need not be about merely breaking down, it could in fact lead to a breakthrough. Laing saw madness as a transformative experience of metanoic change, which was a bit like a shamanic journey.

One of the persistent problems with this model was that the communities failed to provide residents with sufficient support and stability. They did not offer enough therapeutic intervention or alternative ways of looking at life by philosophical examination of the human predicament. People were often left to flounder in a negative and destructive cycle of depression and anxiety, though undoubtedly it has provided some of the stronger and self-motivated people to get through a breakdown without resorting to hospitalisation or even medication.

It is a pity that Laing's insights were not applied in a more effective and radical manner, for his passionate descriptions of the plight of people, who previously would have been dismissed and treated as schizophrenics, spoke to many. His vivid descriptions of the subjectivity of psychotic experience leave no doubt at all that much of so-called mental illness is an extreme form of existential misery or anxiety that can be understood and worked with. His descriptions of ontological insecurity as a basic lack of trust in one's physical and concrete existence in the world are poignant. They provide a good foundation for grasping the experience of clients in distress. But they also pathologise and I have argued elsewhere that this is because Laing confused the ontic and the ontological (Deurzen-Smith 1991), since he equated ontological insecurity with a pathological state of mind generated by negative family dynamics. He missed the point that ontological insecurity is the very foundation of the human condition, although his readers loved his work because they knew he was writing about experiences that concern us all, even though, seemingly he was only talking about the experience of schizophrenia. If we translate Laing's ideas into descriptions of ordinary human living his findings and evocative descriptions become directly relevant to most of us, schizophrenic or otherwise. His descriptions of abuse in family life (Laing 1967, 1971; Laing and Esterson 1964) caused a stir and made many people aware of the indoctrination we are subjected to in our childhood. Laing's popularity came from the relevance of his work to a whole generation of young people who recognised their own plight in his words.

His discussion of ontological security was meant to concern schizophrenic persons who are ontically unsettled because their families fail to integrate them into the world in an acceptable manner. Typically the family, usually the

mother, is described as smothering or suffocating the person, who is not allowed to find independence or stand on his or her own feet. Laing speaks of the lack of a sense of reality that such a person experiences and shows him to be ‘absorbed in contriving ways of trying to be real, of preserving his identity . . . to prevent himself losing his self’ (Laing 1959: 42–43). He speaks of three fundamental anxieties and dangers that befall a person in this situation:

- *Engulfment*, which is the fear of being flooded, overwhelmed, surrounded and destroyed by the other.
- *Implosion*, which is the sense of being so completely empty that one is in danger of disappearing into a black hole – of falling into an endless pit of nothingness where one’s existence explodes inwards and is annihilated.
- *Petrification*, or depersonalisation, which is the experience of being turned into a thing by the other – of having one’s selfhood and autonomy so negated; that the only solution is to freeze or let oneself turn to stone.

Laing links this threefold experience of distress with the notion of being disembodied: a situation where the person does not experience the body as a real self but rather as a false self, which can be manipulated and observed by others. Sartre’s notion of the look and the experience of shame when being made into an object for the other is very close to Laing’s descriptions of petrification. The main difference is that Sartre describes what he purports to be an essential aspect of being human, whereas Laing is sketching the process of pathology that leads to schizophrenia.

Laing sees the cause for such an occurrence as essentially that of the dysfunctional family, where one identified patient is made to carry the burden of insecurity for the rest. In his later work (Laing 1961, 1971), he used Bateson’s concept of the double-bind to show that families, especially mothers, would make it impossible for the identified patient to function with an identity of their own, by constantly sending contradictory messages to the person, which amounted to saying, ‘You will be damned if you do and damned if you don’t’. This had the effect of paralysing the person from achieving independence and a sense of self.

Laing carried out a long-term research project with families at the Tavistock Institute to observe such pathogenic processes in the family. His descriptions of the interactions of schizophrenics and their families made it look as if schizophrenia was the product of a certain type of dysfunctional family. It can be argued that the processes that Laing observed are at work in any family, and indeed there were many who took Laing’s and Cooper’s work on the family to lead to the conclusion that families were bad in themselves.

None of this provided guidelines for a new form of psychotherapy either, and it is hardly surprising that the Laingian project ended up in what became

essentially a form of enlightened object relations psychoanalytic psychotherapy, which locates the cause for distress in traumatic early interaction. The existential foundation to his work which allowed for a much broader socio-cultural and political perspective to distress was lost. It became harder for him to focus on the individual's own active contribution to their current predicament and help them retrieve their inner authority.

This seems in flagrant contradiction with the active existential contributions he made in his book *The Politics of Experience* (1967), where he advocated a strongly political and self-affirmative stance, taking a critical and bracing look at the alienation people experience because of the way in which society is organised in Western culture. The underlying theme here was that people could take control, and that it was possible to overcome passivity and alienation by taking positive action. Here, Laing even spoke of the possibility that breakdowns were a necessary and constructive way forward for people who were enslaved by consumerism – the breakdown that could lead to a breakthrough and a whole new way of life. His work during this phase was suffused with the 1960s' optimism about the possibility of expanding one's mind, and this attracted an enthusiastic following. Laing justified their dissatisfaction with the way in which the world was going with such noteworthy and often paradoxical statements as: 'If I don't know that I don't know I think I know and if I don't know that I know I think I don't know' (1970: V, 34). More than justification, it provided insecure and disappointed young people with a rationale for their protest, and with a sense of their hidden and unacknowledged potential. It also added a dimension of spiritual search to his work. It is hardly surprising that towards the end of his career, as many of his previous colleagues realigned themselves with psychoanalysis, Laing himself joined in with the rebirthing and human potential movements.

In 1964 Laing together with David Cooper wrote an authorized précis of Sartre's *Critique of a Dialectical Reason* and *Saint Genet* (Laing and Cooper 1964). This might have formed the basis for a renewed interest in a Sartrian form of psychotherapy, but this never materialised. In fact Laing's method of psychotherapy remained extremely individualistic and was never systematised, although he taught it in an inspirational way to those he supervised. This had much to do with his deeply felt sense of tragedy and sadness, which both inspired others and stopped him formalising his work. His colleague John Heaton put it like this: 'Laing had great personal authority in his understanding of the infinitely varied forms that mental suffering presents. I think this is what made him into the effective and world famous therapist that he was' (Heaton 2005: 35).

Most of the concepts Laing contributed fit more naturally with a Winnicottian analysis than with existential theory. This is very clear, for instance, in his notion of the good, compliant child in the family who can become the bad child in adolescence – ending up as the mad child – when, erring from the ways prescribed by the family, the parents and psychiatrists

decide that such a shift must be pathological. However, Laing shows how the phase of being good is often experienced as one of existential death or nothingness by the patient, whereas the phase of badness is one of existential revolt and an attempt at gaining some ground in the world. Mental illness, therefore, instead of being merely about pathology, is potentially about creating a new space in the world. Symptoms can be understood and seen as being meaningful.

Even when people are delusory or hallucinatory it is possible to help them understand their experience, which is indicative of how they relate to the world and which often reveals their frustrations and aspirations quite clearly. Laing speaks of the possibility of changing someone's biography by helping them talk about themselves in a new way. For instance, when a person has delusions about being poisoned by other people, it is possible to help them see in what ways they experience the others as a danger to themselves, rather than dismissing the statement as a delusory one. People who describe themselves as dead or as reincarnations of Buddha or Christ have similarly good reasons to do so. According to Laing, this happens in relation to the split between a false self and a real self, when a person feels only capable of continuing to survive by complying with outside requirements. Meanwhile, they get very detached from the external performance of decency and they end up feeling dead to the world – thus the description that sounds like a delusion. Equally, on the inside the person may feel so full of isolation and suffering that identification with a figure like Christ may become the only way to create a sense of identity and importance in their plight.

Laing also shows how it is the inner conscience that inspires a lot of delusory statements. One girl, talking of her mother, says:

I was born under a black sun. I wasn't born, I was crushed out. It's not one of those things you get over like that. I wasn't mothered, I was smothered. She wasn't a mother. I'm choosey who I have for a mother. Stop it. Stop it. She's killing me. She's cutting out my tongue. I'm rotten, base. I'm wicked. I'm wasted time.

(Laing 1959: 200)

This extract shows how the girl, in metaphoric language, is trying to describe her experience of being smothered, but finds herself incapable, through the intervention of her own conscience, to express anger against her mother and claim her own rights. As soon as she tries to save herself, she has to destroy herself, uttering the same accusations at herself as she has heard from her mother, even though she experiences the latter as killing her and stopping her talking.

Laing showed consistently how it was possible to address the essential sanity in the person and ignore the insanity, or, rather, be aware of how the insanity is often a function of the situation or the structure of the family or

organisation the person belongs to. This insight led to Laing's development of what he termed social phenomenology, which was a detailed observation of the person in the context of their immediate social environment with all its interactions. This led to working with people as part of their families or groups; something that has since been much developed in various systems of family therapy.

He went through a phase where he considered the influences of the environment on the individual to be so important that one had to go back to the earliest environment of the womb, at the moment of implantation of the egg. He did a lot of therapeutic work with rebirthing around this time, allowing people to re-experience their birth in order to understand what had gone wrong and get it right the second time around. This led to a controversial exchange with Rogers at the London Park Lane Hilton in 1978, when Laing accused him of not taking people's negativity into account and went on to show how Laingian therapy consisted of literally being a midwife to another person. It is unfortunate that he never formulated principles of therapy in a more dialogical way.

Perhaps it is in *The Politics of Experience* that he came closest to a definition of his way of working: 'Psychotherapy must remain an obstinate attempt of two people to recover the wholeness of being human through the relationship between them' (Laing 1967: 45).

This idea of a good and true relationship which does not hide behind the paraphernalia of therapeutic distance was sometimes illustrated when Laing worked with people in conferences or on visits. He had a tremendous capacity for resonance with the other's distress and was not put off by erratic or idiosyncratic behaviour. The best analysis of a session with a patient is probably to be found in Clark's (2004) article, describing his intervention at a conference in 1985 with a woman diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic. What stands out in this work is the way in which he uses silence and respects the other's intimate awareness of her world, linking in with this as much as possible. He speaks of creating a shared reality and his client responds by saying that she feels he knows how to tap into a person's mind. Salvador Minuchin, who observed the interaction in question, called it a communion of love.

Laing himself spoke of the task of psychotherapy like this:

The psychotherapeutic relationship is therefore a research. A search, constantly reasserted and reconstituted for what we have all lost, and which some can perhaps endure a little more easily than others, as some people can stand lack of oxygen better than others, and this re-search is

validated by the shared experience of experience regained in and through the therapeutic relationship in the here and now.

(Laing 1967: 47)

It is probably this reframing of the essential nature of communion and searching for a better understanding of human reality in the therapeutic relationship that remains Laing's most important contribution.

The contribution of the British School of Existential Analysis and Psychotherapy

The process of therapy is about . . . the restoration of an un-lived dimension of life, whether this is described as forgotten, denied, repressed, or abandoned.

(Cohn 2005: 224)

It was the work of both R. D. Laing and David Cooper that first drew attention to the relevance of existentialism to psychotherapy. Yet their contribution was mainly one of social critique and deconstruction of established practice and did not propose a consistent and coherent existential alternative in its place. Various therapists of different orientations, who first came to London because of Laing's new ideas, eventually established a consistent movement of existential therapy (De Koning and Jenner 1982). It was with the creation of the Society for Existential Analysis in London in 1988, and the launch of the *Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, that these existential practitioners found a home and first acquired an umbrella organisation for the existential approach as well as a forum for the expression of a range of diverse existential views.

History of the creation of existential therapy and the Society for Existential Analysis

I took the initiative of creating this society in order to bring together the many different people who had an interest in this approach and on the strength of having published the first book to formulate a consistent framework of existential therapy *Existential Counselling in Practice* (Deurzen-Smith 1988). Ronnie Laing encouraged me in setting up this society and he had promised to give a talk on his method of doing therapy, but died before he was able to do so. I was the founding chair and many others contributed much to the success of the society, including the subsequent chairs, Ernesto Spinelli, Mike Harding, Paul Smith-Pickard and Paul McGinley. Initially

the society was based at Regent's College School of Psychotherapy and Counselling, of which I was dean at the time.

The first conference of the society was held on 3 December 1988, just two weeks before a huge crisis hit Regent's College. This was the Lockerbie plane bombing, in which a number of Regent's College students died. The awfulness and sadness of their young deaths was to be a strong motivation in establishing an existential approach that could face human and existential issues head on in a spirit of openness and mutual respect. Gradually the momentum around this new therapeutic approach gathered force. The British School became particularly known for its emphasis on the philosophical roots of the existential approach in a radical manner. It generated many publications and influenced the creation of existential training programmes across many countries of Europe and even in other parts of the world.

Publications

As a direct result of the launch of Society for Existential Analysis, Ernesto Spinelli's book on phenomenological psychology, *The Interpreted World* (Spinelli 1989) was published and this was rapidly followed by a spree of other publications by the same author (Spinelli 1994a, 1997, 2001, 2007). Hans Cohn also joined the society and published several papers and two books on his Heideggerian therapy (Cohn 1993, 1994, 1997, 2002). Anthony Stadlen (1989; Stadlen and Stadlen 2005), John Heaton (1990, 1994), Simon du Plock (1995, 1997) and Freddie and Alison Strasser (1997) also contributed new texts. Alongside these new voices I continued to formulate my own growing body of work (Deurzen 1997, 1998, 2002, 2009) as well as editing and writing books together with colleagues (Deurzen and Arnold-Baker 2005; Deurzen and Kenward 2005; Deurzen and Adams 2009; Deurzen and Young 2009). Perhaps most importantly the approach continued to develop and expand across the rest of Europe as well. Interest was generated across Scandinavia and Eastern Europe and societies were founded in Denmark, Sweden, Eastern Europe, then also Portugal and elsewhere in the world. The formulation of the philosophical form of existential therapy that is typical of the British School continued to evolve in complex and varied ways. A number of academic and research centres were established. The *Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, edited over the years by Hans Cohn, John Heaton and Greg Madison, but always in partnership with Simon du Plock, became a force to be reckoned with. It continues to articulate and accumulate all this evolving knowledge and expertise, drawing in more and more authors and members of the editorial board from around the world. Many younger contributors have also emerged and have made contributions of their own, for instance Eleftheriadou (1994, 1997) and Lemma (1992, 1994, 1997). There are numerous others who have written articles for the journal or contributed to the edited books, including Lucia Moja Strasser, Anthony and Naomi

Stadlen, Diana Mitchell, Nick Kirkland-Handley, Mike Harding, Paul Smith-Pickard, Richard Swynnerton and Martin Adams (see e.g. Harding 2003, 2004; Smith-Pickard 2004, 2006; Deurzen and Arnold-Baker 2005; Smith-Pickard and Swynnerton 2005; Deurzen and Young 2009).

Some of the most interesting new developments are coming from slightly tangential approaches, such as Digby Tantam's existential narrative approach (Tantam 2002, 2008), Greg Madison's focusing based approach (in Deurzen and Arnold-Baker 2005), the eco-psychological approach of Martin Milton (1997, 2000, 2005) and the philosophically based approaches of Tim LeBon (2001), Antonia Macaro (2006) and also of Alex Howard (2000) and Steven Gans and Leon Redler (Gans and Redler 2001). The work of some other authors in the UK dovetailed with these existential developments, including the work of David Smail (1978, 1987, 1993), Peter Lomas (1981), Chris Mace (1999) and Pat Bracken (2002). Mick Cooper's textbook on *Existential Therapies* (2003) brought all these strands together and compared and contrasted the British school with other forms and schools of existential therapy, creating that meta level of thinking about the existential approach that took it into the mainstream.

History of the splits

One of the strengths of existential therapy is its openness to diversity and its lack of systematisation, allowing for fluidity, variety and personal input. This has led to a process of continuous dynamic tension and expansion, when different contributors have disagreed with each other. This has created a stimulating and vibrant intellectual climate. This creative tension has known its times of unrest and even of destructiveness over the years, when controversies arose over the management of Regent's College, and the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling was created by myself in conjunction with Digby Tantam with the support of Freddie Strasser and Claire Arnold-Baker and a number of others. In the end this Diaspora has been to the benefit of the existential approach and there are now many courses that include existential elements of training. Existential therapy itself is becoming a household name in the UK and there are numerous mental health and therapeutic services both in the voluntary and public sector that specialise in the approach (see for instance Barnet 2009). Existential therapists trained at a number of institutions are accepted for registration as existential psychotherapists with the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy. The European Commission also offered its support to existential therapy training in the form of several Leonardo and Socrates grants to a partnership of the University of Sheffield, Dilemma Consultancy and the New School together with various other countries and universities in Europe, including Sweden, Ireland, Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, Romania, Italy, Belgium, France and Portugal. This e-based training programme is known as Septimus (www.septimus.info) and

has trained many therapists throughout Europe and the wider world in elements of the existential approach.

As has been already implied the particular characteristic of the British School is to see the existential approach as deeply embedded in continental and sometimes also Eastern philosophy. Training always includes some and usually extensive exposure to a range of philosophical ideas, but also takes in a variety of other psychotherapeutic approaches. A critical appraisal is thus encouraged and independence of thinking is fostered. It is this spirit of openness to debate and integration of various perspectives that best characterises the British School's approach. The British School has also formulated a number of pragmatic guidelines for existential practice and actively continues to develop and debate its methods.

This has attracted members from all over the world to the Society for Existential Analysis. An International Collaborative of Existential Counsellors and Psychotherapists (ICECAP) was founded in 2006, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary conference of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling. ICECAP brings together existential practitioners from around the globe.

Several research groups have recently been established to demonstrate the effectiveness of existential therapy. A partnership, EPCORN (Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling Outcome Research Network) was created between the Universities of Surrey, Abertay, Strathclyde, Sheffield and Middlesex. ICECAP has created IRNET (International Research Network in Existential Therapy). Much emphasis is likely to be placed on such research in future as several doctoral programmes in existential psychotherapy and counselling psychology are now in place and are establishing a solid research base in the field. This will be increasingly important if Existential Therapy (ET) is to become a player in a world where regulation and evidence based practice is the order of the day. It is to be hoped that this will not undermine or destroy the essential spirit of search for truth without reliance on technology that is so dear to existential therapists.

Philosophical practice

An alternative to therapy

It is its practical potential that makes philosophy really important.

(LeBon 2001: xii)

Gerd Achenbach and Ad Hoogendijk are respectively German and Dutch contemporary philosophers who started establishing themselves as consultant philosophers (Achenbach 1984, 2002; Hoogendijk 1988) and led the way to a number of other developments all over the world. They proposed an alternative to psychotherapeutic culture by working purely in the arena of existential investigation with their ‘visitors’ (as they call their clients).

Achenbach argues that in philosophising what matters is not the thinking that informs life, but the living that calls to thinking and that can give direction in its own right. Living comes before thinking. Practice precedes theory. Much of existing psychological and philosophical theory is based on the assumptions of a society caught up in alienation in the scientific and the abstract. What matters is to help people with the issues that are alive for them.

The object of this kind of philosophical consultation is not to explain away or interpret, nor to generalise from the specific and do away with people’s experience against a backdrop of set assumptions about the human psyche. Instead, the object is to pay attention to the problems in living with which people struggle in reality, using the universal as a test of their limitations, but not as a reductionist principle.

The objective is to reach through people’s words for their meanings: both the meanings they are caught up in and the meanings they are reaching for themselves. Helping a person to interrogate him or herself about meaning and to pay attention to his or her world in a questioning way is the goal.

According to Hoogendijk (1988), the psychotherapeutic stance of abstinence and silence is a useful tool, but the interpretation coming from presumed wisdom is not. An open attitude of dialogue is needed instead. Appropriate spaces of silence, attention and letting be are part of such a dialogue.

Attentiveness to the issues and ability to recognise, draw them out and pull them together for the visitor is crucial. One should keep in mind

Wittgenstein's dictum that philosophy is a fight against the bewitching of our reason by language. The philosopher should not be fooled by the language spoken and should not become drawn into the magic circle created by the therapeutic interaction. The consultant philosopher remains standing in the wider circle of life.

According to Hoogendijk (1988), the philosophical issues that come to the fore in the client's discourse are always part of a polarity, for this is how the human condition is arranged. A guide to the issues that we may focus on and discuss with our visitor may be summarised as follows (Hoogendijk 1988: 43):

- 1 *Language and meaning*: We constantly help visitors clarifying how they use specific words and what they are trying to say underneath the words used.
- 2 *Power and impotence*: We remain sensitive to the ways in which individuals struggle with the dilemma of wanting to affirm their power, yet constantly finding themselves vulnerable.
- 3 *Freedom and determination*: We help visitors manage the paradox of using their margin of freedom, set out against a whole range of facticity and necessary conditions that they have to contend with at the same time.
- 4 *Male and female*: We are sensitive to the natural differences and tensions between the sexes.
- 5 *Action and reflection*: We help visitors to be aware of the dialectical interaction between their conduct and their reflection upon it, which itself sends us back into action again.
- 6 *Knowledge and wisdom*: We pay heed to the tension between knowing something, or thinking you know it and being able to use something as a guiding principle in life.
- 7 *Dynamic and static*: We make distinctions between the movement in a person's life that heads in a certain direction and the stasis that keeps them from moving on.
- 8 *General and particular*: In every intervention we make we can reflect upon the specific individual situation of our visitors and contrast this with the general principles that it implies.
- 9 *Abstract and concrete*: We make sure to take visitors from abstract to concrete considerations and vice versa.
- 10 *Contradiction and paradox*: Looking at the ambiguity of life leads to the perception of contradictions – but equally to an understanding of the tensions of paradoxes which allow one to take account of both sides without being torn apart.
- 11 *Nature and culture*: Keeping an eye on the aspects of my life that are connected to natural elements allows me to recognise, by contrast, what has been added on by culture.
- 12 *Have and be*: It is useful to make distinctions between the things I have

and that seem necessary but extrinsic, and the things that I am and that are part of me in an intrinsic way.

- 13 *Seriousness and humour*: I can juxtapose many different ways of being in the world: this particular distinction enables one to see when it is useful to reflect seriously and when giving in to humour may be more to the point.
- 14 *Explanation and understanding*: I constantly move between descriptions, and explanations on the one hand and a much more fundamental grasping of what all this actually means on the other hand. It is the latter that leads to understanding.
- 15 *Individual and collective*: We incessantly have to moderate between our own interests and that of the collective we belong to – we can ensure that our visitors monitor both these dimensions of experience.
- 16 *Analyse and synthesise*: We can ensure that problems get as much analysed as understood through synthetic movement.
- 17 *Familiarity and estrangement*: We keep track of how people move between the familiar and the alien noticing what is welcomed and what is avoided.
- 18 *Fact and fiction*: The philosophical consultants will be particularly aware of juxtaposing those elements of stories that are factual and those elements that stem from the visitor's own story telling and interpretation.
- 19 *Dependency and autonomy*: The constant tension between people's dependence and interdependence with others needs to be weighed against the equally important reality of autonomy.

When we monitor these tensions and paradoxes, as well as many others, we find a guiding light for the dialogue with the visitor – who otherwise might be inclined to think about life in a one-sided manner.

We should never assume that we know what the range of human dilemmas is. There are endless combinations of opposites that can become an issue for a person. Though there is much universal similarity, there is great diversity in the way in which people experience their lives and their current problems and there are many permutations of the themes mentioned above.

According to Hoogendijk, one should strive to help people recognise their own themes and dilemmas and get a grip on them. The philosophical work does not focus on pathology, but rather on the adventure of rediscovering a sense of being in charge of one's own human destiny again. In the process people clarify questions they have about themselves and the world. They understand contradictions in which they have been caught or that they had never before considered. They deepen their wisdom and get a wider perspective on reality. They also discover that there is order in chaos and chaos in order. They find a place in which to be safe within themselves and with this will hopefully come a sense of peace and releasement. The main objective of such work is to accept existence in its contradictions and to rise to its challenges.

In cognitive terms, visitors can learn to think more constructively and to formulate inner workings more effectively. They discover new connections and new patterns of living and being. They also recognise and then eliminate blind spots and escape from repetitive patterns. They may rediscover the possibility of renewal and achieve an attitude of wonder and curiosity. According to Hoogendijk, the overall effect of such work is to gain a sense of courage, which is not the same thing as self-confidence or strength, for these will only come with the actual experience of living the new insights and applying the new learning in practice.

Both philosophers insist that they are not therapists, and they posit categorically that in this work the philosopher can only be a mentor or tutor and cannot substitute for either a parent or for outside reality.

In later years philosophical practice has continued to expand and many other philosophical consultants have come along and together have created a Society for Philosophical Practice, which has organised conferences throughout the world and has given rise to many other publications (Lahav and Tillmans 1995; Marinoff 1999; Curnow 2001; Herrestad et al. 2002). There are now lots of different takes on philosophical practice, some work with children, some work in organisations. Some borrow from Neuro Linguistic Programming, others from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. But some remain faithful to the purely philosophical discussion and debate that arises when we explore a person's preoccupations about the human condition. It seems here that philosophical practice has most to offer to existential psychotherapy and vice versa.

Parameters of existential psychotherapy

Objectives of the existential project

Do nothing against thy will, nor contrary to the community, nor without due examination, nor with reluctance.

(Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, III: 5)

Introduction

It is time to summarise what existential therapists actually do, once the philosophies and contributions of past practitioners have been mastered. It goes without saying that different therapists practise in different ways, since the range of possibilities is so great. With existential therapy, even more than with other approaches to therapy the individuality of the therapist really matters and comes into play. Existential therapists allow themselves to be fully present in their work and to draw on their most profoundly personal understanding of human existence. What existential therapists do is therefore different from therapist to therapist and also very different with different clients or with the same client at different times. Each existential therapist plays to his or her personal strength and draws much of their therapeutic capacity from the learning they have taken from the struggles they have been through in their own lives. But of course such learning has to be fully assimilated, processed and digested for it to be useful to our clients. A continued process of philosophical contemplation and dialogue with others is a necessity if the existential therapist is to remain alert and awake. Of course such vitality is aided enormously by a continued study of existential philosophers. Elements of each philosophy studied will become an intrinsic part of the way an existential therapist works. But this is no excuse for lecturing clients about life. The philosophical insight should be used only when this is to the client's benefit, always only in order that clients are enabled to face their lives with more courage and vitality and with a greater sense of meaning, understanding and aliveness. The existential project is ontological rather than ontic. We do not try to mend the practical aspects and problems of a person's life, but give them a wider perspective from which to handle them for themselves, now

and in future. We focus on the person's struggle with human existence and elucidate the parameters of the human condition that the person is trying to come to terms with. We help them to get better at reflecting on their situation, deal with their dilemma, face their predicament and think for themselves. Of course we do not deal with mere abstractions and ontological universals. We also pay attention to ontic, everyday concerns and deal with personal, psychological or interpersonal, relational aspects of existence. But each time we do this we set such specific concerns against the horizon of the wider concerns of a person's life, enabling them to reconnect with the deeper, broader and more universal elements that profoundly underpin their world. Existential psychotherapy aims at a full description of the essential givens and challenges of human living rather than merely analysing the internal workings of the psyche. Its objective is to help people to uncover the everyday mysteries in which they are enfolded and by which they are often mystified, as if blindfolded. Existential therapy is a process of truth finding. It aims to help people to disentangle their lives and generate clarity. It addresses all important issues directly and encourages a person to reconnect with a strong sense of personal direction. Careful attention is paid to both the universal and the particular aspects of a person's existence in order to understand the relationship and tensions between them. The process of therapy is intended to lead clients to greater awareness of where they find themselves in their lives, how they got there and where they might want to go to next. It pays equal attention to past, present and future, since these are intimately interconnected and equally relevant to a person's orientation in the world. At the same time the whole landscape of the life world is taken into account so that a particular problem is seen within the overall perspective of the tasks and challenges of human living. This makes it easier for a person to recognise or reorganise their life project and fully re-engage with it. This enhances the capacity for taking charge of one's own life again. People learn to live deliberately rather than by default.

Existential work builds upon several millennia of philosophical thinking, and supplements this with the concrete and practical discipline of systematic phenomenological description. Husserl's and Heidegger's observations of the human condition launched a truly Copernican revolution in which human beings are no longer described as at the centre of the universe, but rather as interrelated with others, with a physical world, and with Being itself.

The person as the centre of a network of relationships

Nevertheless for each of us it still seems as if we are the centre of the universe. We are the focal point of a network of interactions: the centre of our experience is always in ourselves. My life is always mine, yet this mineness is profoundly problematic, for it is generated by and dependent upon my connection to that which is not me. I, inevitably, deeply care: for I am nothing without my

relationship to the world of things, people, events and ideas. I am preoccupied with what happens in my world and with what is there in it. I am concerned about the people I encounter. It is part of my basic nature to be, in this way, linked to everything and everyone around me. I am, more than anything, an emptiness which only comes to life in the process of resonating with what I encounter. I am, in a way, nothing but the reflection of what I see. Although I am the centre of my existence, as a centre I am open and the world comes to light through me.

My self is not a substantial entity. My 'I' is like an eye, an iris, a lens, an opening which lets through the light of existence. Its function is to be transparent and to be open so that the life (being) can shine through. I can modulate the extent to which I let things in or keep them out, but my only mode of being is to be the medium through which life flows and comes to light. Whenever I try to capture being and keep it to myself I become opaque and blind. Then I can no longer taste the life and transmit it or live it. I have become a zombie, dead while alive. The more I open myself and let life touch me and come to light through me, the more I become full and alive myself. I am a source of reflection and refract the light that shines through me. The clearer I am the brighter life will be for it. But I should never mistake myself for more than a focus of light.

If we study the person as if he or she is a substantial entity, separate from a world, we distort our image of what a person is or can be. If we turn our attention to a person's inner world as if it were an object for scrutiny we end up depersonalising the human being in front of us and deprive her of her vitality and responsive flexibility. We distort the picture of what people are by studying them as if they were solid objects. We miss the fundamental human function of bringing things to light and making the world meaningful when we stick to the mechanics of human nature. This is a catastrophic omission when we are addressing a human being in distress. For distress is often the effect of stagnation and solidification of a person's experience. We only make it worse if we act as if that solidity is the person. Human life has to be understood in action, interactively and dynamically. The study of human beings is an ecological one and has to take the entire context of human living into account in a dynamic fashion. We need to focus on onto-dynamics, rather than psycho-dynamics.

But it is often hard for people to grasp this openness of experience and this lack of substantial reality in ourselves. It may be made somewhat easier by thinking of ourselves as a channel, a river, through which the water of life flows. This allows us to remember how we change and how we are constantly faced with having to take new directions, make new decisions, how we are never set in our ways once and for all, unless we opt for stagnation. Our project is to be redefined and re-engaged with at all times, as Sartre, Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty pointed out. We need to remember what and who we are and that we will come to an end. This is what Heidegger meant by paying

attention to 'the call of conscience': living in constant reference to the profound sense of unease with ourselves and our lives that wakes us up and keeps us on our toes. Our greatest reality lies in the anxiety that reminds us that we are not basically at home, safe or substantial and that calls us to attention, to action and to awareness of Being. Unlike many established forms of psychology and psychotherapy existential therapy does not consider anxiety to be evidence of pathology but rather an essential reminder of our vibrant and dangerous aliveness.

The call of conscience

Conscience, as Heidegger describes it, is a very different entity from that pictured in the writings of Freud (1923) and more recent psychoanalytic authors such as Melanie Klein (1937). It is similarly miles away from the concepts of humanistic writers such as Berne (1972) or Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951). Such authors operate from the assumption that the highest authorities known to humankind are either the instincts (the id, the child, the libido, the true self) or society and culture as represented by parental injunctions and prescriptions (superego, ideal self, parent). Typically they picture a person's greatest challenge as that of accommodating one to the other and generating out of this a mature sense of self (ego, adult, self).

Psychotherapeutic culture has turned away from old-fashioned religious notions of God and commandments and has based the salvation of humankind on a coming to terms with self and other instead. The sleight of hand that occurs in this process enables the psychotherapist to become a secular priest who is not accountable to any higher authority than his or her training organisation and supervisor, while guiding others, less adept in the art of living, with sometimes overpowering influence and control. The control comes from the reference to the dogma that describes the person's shortcomings and doubts as pathology rather than as a built-in reminder of personal vitality. A person's predicament is framed as a human fault, allegedly based on something that has gone wrong in the past, and to be corrected by the therapist through the client's gradual awakening to the truth of the therapist's interpretations or interventions, which give causal explanations for what ails. This gives the therapist the power to reframe the client's perceptions and rearrange them in such a way as to make the therapist, and his or her insights, the central power of salvation. Although there are some spiritually based psychotherapies, such as Jungian and transpersonal approaches, which refer to archetypes and supra-personal notions, in fact, they do not introduce anything beyond the personal, for their symbols are inevitably representations of culture rather than of some higher authority. Psychotherapy, as a profession, is remarkably united in its emphasis on anthropocentric concepts and concerns. Most current forms of psychotherapy have the common objective of cure through an understanding of human conflict in intra-psycho-

interpersonal terms. The cognitive-behavioural emphasis on social insertion and correct management of one's mental resources is a more pragmatic variation on the same theme. With mindfulness approaches it does reach out towards a more meditative approach, but is nevertheless incorrigibly focused on the practical personal control aspects of human living.

In sharp contradistinction, Heidegger (1927a) suggests that human beings can be understood only if we are willing to abandon our certainty about the person or the ego. We need to dissolve our artificial certainty and self focus and launch ourselves into being open to what is and what calls out to us from beyond our cultural, personal and parental parameters. He reminds us that we know very little of what it means to be alive because we let ourselves be touched very rarely and very little by existence. We have not yet understood being at all and we have not begun to ask the right questions yet. We should, according to Heidegger, be more willing to consider ourselves in light of the eternal truths that affect us. If we are willing to heed the voice of our conscience which calls us to this realisation, then we may rise above the humdrum of our existence and discover a new reality. Such a call of conscience has nothing to do with superegos and ideal selves, parental voices or cultural dictates: it is not an introjected voice, but a voice that comes from Being.

The call asserts nothing, gives no information about world-events, has nothing to tell. Least of all does it try to set going a 'soliloquy' in the Self to which it has appealed. 'Nothing' gets called to this Self, but it has been summoned to itself – that is, to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. The tendency of that call is not such as to put up for 'trial' the Self to which the appeal is made; but it summons to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self.

(Heidegger 1927a: 273)

Psychotherapy, as we know it, does not raise such questions, but primarily attempts to engage with the inner dialogue that takes place inside of a person. It aims to adjust people to existence as we know it, rather than encouraging people to understand and enlarge it. Existential therapy encourages people to reach beyond their current reality and reconnect with the source of human being.

Oedipus revisited

If we consider the Oedipal myth it will become clear how far-reaching the implications of this distinction are. Heidegger discusses the myth of Oedipus as recounted by Sophocles in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* (Heidegger 1935). When we compare this to Freud's observations on the same play, we see an entirely dissimilar interpretation and we come to rather different conclusions. In the myth of Oedipus, the infant Oedipus is given away by his

parents, Laius and Jocasta, who fear the predictions of the Oracle, which has proclaimed that their son Oedipus will kill his father and marry his mother.

In fear of their own lives they charge a shepherd to take their son away and put him to death. This shepherd carries baby Oedipus on a rope, which is threaded through the infant's pierced feet (the origin of his name, Oedipus, which means 'swollen feet') but instead of killing him sells him to a childless farming couple who raise him as their own child. When Oedipus has grown into a man he himself consults the Oracle and he is dismayed at its prediction that he will kill his father and marry his mother. He believes the farmers to be his parents and in order to escape the curse decides to leave them behind and live elsewhere. On his travels, on the narrow road to Thebes, he encounters King Laius and gets into a dispute with him over the right of way. He slays Laius in the process of asserting his rights and goes on to encounter the Sphinx, a monster that has held the town to ransom for many years. The Sphinx has been asking a riddle of all those who enter Thebes, and Oedipus is the first person able to solve it. The question of the Sphinx is: 'Who goes on four feet in the morning, on two feet at noon and on three in the evening?' Oedipus answers confidently: 'Man, for he crawls as a baby, walks on his two feet during middle life, and with the aid of a stick at the end of his life.' It is very telling that Oedipus can solve this riddle about human existence since he himself is named, of course, as the one whose feet are swollen from having been carried on a stick instead of making his own way.

Oedipus is given the widowed Queen Jocasta as bride in reward for ridding the city of the Sphinx – which, after Oedipus has solved the riddle, hurls itself over a precipice – and then has four children with the queen: Polynices, Eteocles, Ismene and Antigone.

Everything now seems as it should be, but after many years, when Thebes is under the spell of a terrible plague and civil war, the Oracle announces that the cause of all the misery is the sin of Oedipus in having killed his father and married his mother. Oedipus cannot tolerate the revelation of his guilt and he blinds himself to shut out the truth. He leaves Thebes and wanders around as a beggar for many years, guided by his daughter Antigone.

Antigone's plight

Years later Antigone herself is involved in a further tragedy as her uncle Kreon, who is now king, commits an injustice, which she fights to the death. Her two brothers, Polynices and Eteocles, have killed each other in a battle about the right to the throne and Kreon, their uncle, orders a state funeral for the one and decrees that the other's body should be left to rot on the battlefield. Antigone is determined not to allow one of her brothers to be hailed as a hero while the other is demeaned and she dedicates herself to giving her brother a burial in spite of Kreon's orders. She risks all and goes out after dark to cover the body with earth, but is caught by the guards and punished

by being walled into a hole to die, in spite of Kreon's attempts to persuade her to recant and save herself. Antigone is engaged to be married to Kreon's son, Hemon, but neither he nor Antigone's sister Ismene are on a par with Antigone's determination to let truth and justice prevail. They want an easy life and think that they can convince her to behave by offering her a part of it. When she sacrifices her life for her principles, however, Hemon and Ismene follow suit and kill themselves as well. Kreon's wife, Eurydice, having lost her son, also kills herself and Kreon is left alone to face the ravages of his life.

The meaning of tragedy

The original Greek tragedy is obviously about existential issues: it shows how people have to meet their destiny, no matter what the price to pay, and no matter how much they might try to hide. It is based on the notion that we are the play things of the gods and of the greater powers beyond us. Although Freud was aware of the important theme of the search for truth in the Oedipus myth, he adapted its meaning to his own, somewhat narrow, point of view, rather than following the lead of Sophocles.

The action of the play consists in nothing other than the process of revealing, with cunning delays and ever-mounting excitement – a process that can be likened to the work of psychoanalysis – that Oedipus himself is the murderer of Laius, but further that he is the son of the murdered man and of Jocasta.

(Freud 1900b: 262)

Freud went on to argue how the revealing work of psychoanalysis would similarly expose people's essential instinctual desires to marry the parent of opposite sex and kill the parent of same sex. This is a strange perversion of the message of Sophocles, who makes it quite clear that everyone in the tragedy tries to avoid this very misfortune, including Oedipus himself. Indeed Oedipus does not marry his mother because he desires her, but merely because she is given to him in marriage as a result of his achievement in putting the Sphinx out of action: she is, as it were, imposed on him by fate, very much against his wishes and it is possible for this to happen only because he is ignorant of the fact that she is his mother. The same can be said of his killing of his father, which happens out of misfortune and over a dispute entirely unrelated to Jocasta (whom Oedipus has not even met yet at this point in the story). What is revealed to Oedipus by the Oracle at the end is not his forbidden sexual and aggressive longings, but the fact that he has been unable to escape his predicted fate.

What is overwhelmingly tragic is not that he desires his mother and wants to kill his father, but that he has committed all these ignominies while believing

himself to be doing all the right things. Oedipus goes through life with apparent success and achievement, but his godlike status is reduced to nothing, because he and his parents have made tragic mistakes that in each case consist of attempting to escape misfortune. In the last analysis, the tragedy is about human frailty and failure and its moral lesson is that we have to face up to our fate and that trying to postpone doing so only makes it worse.

As Richardson points out in his article 'The Place of the Unconscious in Heidegger' (Richardson 1978), Heidegger was much closer to hearing that existential message in Sophocles' work.

The way from that radiant beginning to the gruesome end is a struggle between seeming-to-be (concealment and distortion) and non-concealment (Being). With the passion of a man who stands in the refulgence of glory and is a Greek, Oedipus sets out to reveal this hidden truth. Step by step, he must bring himself to non-concealment, and in the end he can bear it only by putting out his own eyes, i.e. he deprives himself of all light, lets the darkness of night fall around him and in his blindness cries out for all doors to be thrown open so that a man may be revealed to the people as who he is.

(Heidegger 1935: 106–107)

Heidegger goes on to argue that the challenge that Oedipus has to face is that of achieving authenticity in the light of the tragic givens of his life. These givens have more to do with the fact that we, as human beings, are condemned to err and fail and are finally reduced to size by fate and time (remember the Sphinx's riddle!) than with sexual and aggressive drives or the suppressed longing to commit incest. The search for truth and the unveiling of what is hidden are not reserved for the mystique of psychoanalysis, they are rather one of life's prime tasks and one could wonder whether the myth that psychoanalysis tells about it is of the order of revelation, or rather of the order of obfuscation.

The major flaw in Freud's perspective is multiplied a hundredfold in most psychotherapeutic writing, teaching, training and practice of psychotherapy: it is to look for explanations at a microcosmic rather than a macrocosmic level. Even systemic approaches to therapy, which aim to overcome the inward spiralling of intra-psychoic interpretations, are still caught in the system or the group. The fact that individuals and systems are inserted in a wider circle of meaning is usually lost. Ironically, it is that wider meaning that many of our clients are struggling with. Instead of getting light thrown on it through the psychotherapeutic process, they all too often are redirected towards more immediate concerns and their longing for truth is scorned and translated into sexual, relational, or personal terms.

Wider contexts of meaning

What Greek culture still remembered, and our culture has forgotten, is that people are part of a wider context of meaning than that of their own psyche or that of their interactions with others. Heidegger, but also Nietzsche, tried to remind us of the hidden truths of everyday life, which together represent the meaning of existence and provide us with the substance of the great comedies and tragedies of theatre and literature. Over the past century, psychological interpretations with their narrow filter of reality and their internal rather than external focus have stripped the arts of their existential potency. In the same way, much of our helping professions are in the habit of reducing individual problems to a regressive meaning in the imaginary playgrounds of primitive emotions and narrow motivational forces, rather than addressing the wider moral and universal issues of meaning that are often hidden in our everyday struggles with life.

Higher and more universal levels of meaning can encompass lower and more specific levels of meaning, which can still be true as well. But it is far more difficult to generate universal truth out of specific interpretations, because such superordinate truths require us to have a sense of grandeur and perspective and to understand the lower levels of meaning that are being integrated, as well as having an overview of the whole. Cognitive-behavioural psychology, as well as humanistic psychology and psychoanalysis have concentrated on obtaining explanations for people's actions and people's motives in terms of the building blocks of their personalities or internal processes. At most they have added on the social dimension. What has been missed out is the wider context of meaning in which this occurs. Sometimes we get an inkling of what our actions may stem from, but we get very little sense of what they are for. We are good at finding explanations and causes, but less tuned in to the reasons of human action. In fact the 'what-for?' question is often considered taboo. Neo-Darwinian biology, psychology and philosophy have finally made such teleological studies the focus of attention. It is high time this focus is imported into psychotherapy (Slavin and Kriegman 1992). Philosophy, in its classical interpretation of a love for wisdom, can refocus issues of life and meaning in dramatic ways (Midgley 1983, 1994; Nagel 1986) and should be used to this purpose.

When I first worked in psychiatric hospitals in the early 1970s, I was astounded at the lack of interest professionals showed in relation to their patients' desire for existential meaning. It was commonplace to hear a distressed new patient talk about her everyday life as if it was worthless and as if she had lost touch with the sense of fitting in to a meaningful picture of the world. It was even more commonplace to hear psychiatrists, psychologists and psychoanalysts ignore this cry for meaning and respond to it with either a medical solution (sedation) or a psychological solution – explaining this 'symptom' by reference to early childhood experience or psychological

malfunction. Neither of these methods enabled the person to grasp the purpose and meaning of their reality. Not only do such explanations not address the original question, but also they actually take the person away from it. In doing so, we fail in our responsibility of helping the lost person with the difficult exploration of the world. Quite often I found myself resonating with the person's existential questioning and I could see how their particular set of circumstances had brought them to this vigorous interrogation of life. They were, to my mind, in search of truth. In my supervision sessions I had to defend myself constantly against accusations of collusion or even insinuations that I might myself have psychotic tendencies if I could see the patient's point of view so clearly. It was taboo to help the person find herself in the existential tragedy that she was acting out to learn its lessons the hard way. We had to pretend to be able to cure her disconcertedness with existence, for it was evidence of insanity. We have to be above it and judge it, rather than partake in it and understand it.

It often seemed to me that psychoanalysts or cognitive and behavioural psychologists were running scared of their patients and their revelation of existential truth. The more intense a patient's account of existential dilemmas was, the harder the interpretations would fall on them, restraining them in a position of pathology and treatment. Psychotherapists often seemed to me like impersonations of Oedipus – trying to evade the human condition and prevent or cure those who were living on the sharp edge of existence. It appeared to me that psychotherapy had not only lost its insights into the deeper meanings of Oedipus' battle, but also lost its connection with the remainder of the insights of Sophocles as well. For if by looking at Oedipus' plight we could conclude that searching for truth is our only objective, the situation is quite different when we look to Antigone's role. While Oedipus is running away from fate and has to learn the lesson that we have to walk through life with swollen feet and open eyes, his daughter Antigone learns these truths from an early age. She is exposed to her father's catastrophe and she stands by him and guides him through his old age. Later on she faces more ignominy when her brothers kill each other and her uncle refuses to bury one of them. But characteristically she refuses to hide behind convenient excuses, for she is determined that truth will out and she is prepared to die in order to do the decent thing. She is the one who sees the light when others are blind. The light however burns and kills her. This raises interesting questions about our need for illusions and falsity. It may well be that the capacity for denial and self-deception provides powerful adaptive advantages (Slavin and Kriegman 1992; Dennett 1995). If Oedipus is the epitome of denial and the neurotic life that Freud was interested in exploring, Antigone is the epitome of transparency and the authentic life that Heidegger wanted to reinvest with meaning. Oedipus was ultimately destroyed by his attempts to escape reality, and Antigone is destroyed by her attempts to face reality. Neither of their ways of being is the guiding light that can show us the right way to live life,

but both are important warning lights that can keep us from going astray, in one direction or the other.

Truth as guiding light

It is hardly surprising that the concept of the unconscious adhered to by psychoanalysis was preoccupied with the human tendency to hide the truth. It is equally understandable that Heidegger introduced the concept of 'Aletheia' (ἀλήθεια, literally meaning unhiddenness or truth). While the project of psychoanalysis – to expose our ugly secrets – may be laudable and necessary, it all too easily leads to a skewed view of the wider challenges of life. To become absorbed by the vagaries of the unconscious mind, is to blind oneself, like Oedipus, to the real failings and wider significance of one's human destiny.

In the Sophocles tragedy there are many other characters and all of them have a different view of the world. Each has to learn a crucial lesson and each is confronted with mortal questions. Laius tries to escape from his destiny of being killed by his son, and he is willing to sacrifice his infant child in order to be safe, but when he wants to kill a young man who is in his way (just as his infant child was in the way), he is slain in turn. Jocasta comes to grief in a similar way and she finally takes her own life when she discovers that Oedipus, the son she had been willing to abandon, has brought a great disaster upon her and the city, after all. Ismene, Antigone's sister, wants to avoid getting involved in politics and believes that she can carry on as before, when her whole mode of existence is being questioned by the events in the city. Although she appears to opt out and leaves Antigone to look after Oedipus, and later, their dead brother Polynices, she is eventually encouraged to find her own ability to confront the challenges of her life, by following Antigone's example. Hemon, similarly, wants to defend his father's power, but realises his ignominy after Antigone's death; this inspires him to take his own life, which becomes the sacrifice through which Kreon is truly hurt and brought back to size. Kreon's plight is that of believing he can rule and decide whatever is convenient for him, when the reality of life shows him that his actions have consequences well beyond what he can oversee. He is left alone after all the ones he loved have been scorched by his own actions and decisions.

Challenges of life

There are many existential lessons in the Sophocles tragedy, but the stories of Oedipus and Antigone stand out as the bookends of human endeavour and its vicissitudes. We should keep in mind that the human condition brings many varied challenges and many different viewpoints, and that all have their own validity and need to be understood in their own right. But all have consequences and all carry their own weakness. The plight of Oedipus and

Antigone is particularly significant and symbolises the two basic attitudes to life, helping us to steer between a rock and a hard place, or to stay with the Greeks between the Scylla and Charybdis of life. Kierkegaard would have called Oedipus' attitude one of being dominated by the finite, whereas Antigone's attitude would be that of being dominated by the infinite. The former, in psychiatric terms, is of the order of neurosis, the latter of the order of psychosis. Yet dismissing such attitudes as pathological is to say that all of human life is a sickness, for all of us are condemned to erring on one side or the other at various times. There is no such thing as normality: there is only *neurotic* normality or *psychotic* normality. We either focus on our narrow secular existence to get absorbed by survival strategies, or we allow ourselves to be drawn into the wider circle of meaning and get absorbed by universal principles. Managing life successfully is undoubtedly about being able to handle both aspects of existence as necessary counterparts, finding a flexibility and ability to move between extreme positions.

Therapeutic culture, following Freud's initial emphasis on the narrow interpretation of life, is primarily focused on issues of adaptation and survival. This is particularly true with the CBT approach to therapy, which seeks to adapt the individual to the reality of life as soon as possible. Heidegger's philosophy, as well as that of other existential philosophers can on the contrary broaden our vista usefully by reminding us of the wider horizons of meaning that surround us. It is time that we move to a broader interpretation of Oedipus, and with this to an understanding of Antigone. Heidegger's path leads us in that direction.

Interestingly, the early Heidegger of *Being and Time* (1927a) brings the focus of this new expansion towards being and meaning back to the concrete assertiveness of a resolute self. The later Heidegger leaves our connectedness to being much more open and emphasises our ability to release ourselves into the universal, with an attitude close to resignation or surrender – *Gelassenheit*, or letting be, as he terms it (Heidegger 1966). It may well be that this is illustrative of the human maturational process, where growth and development require strength and determination, whereas decline and imminent death require us to let go and relinquish our illusory battles with fate. Here again, Oedipus and Antigone foretell these two basic attitudes: Oedipus' life is about learning to relinquish in old age, whereas Antigone demonstrates the headstrong and wilful self-assertion of youth. Working with clients from an existential perspective is about helping them steer their way through the Scylla and Charybdis of these two extremes of existence.

Time as the dynamic principle

Throughout his career, Heidegger was committed to connecting philosophy to real life, and he believed that profound philosophical understanding is only possible for people who examine their individual experience of being human.

But although his project is thus based in self-observation, this self-observation is carried out in relation to observations about existence rather than in relation to observations about the mind. One of his observations is that people are fundamentally temporal: that is, they exist in time and, in the process, reveal being. Because we are essentially temporal we are never complete or finished, but always a process of becoming. Heidegger's theory of humankind is therefore a dynamic theory rather than a static theory – it is not psycho-dynamic but onto-dynamic – that is, it sees human existence rather than the human psyche as the dynamic element.

The horizon from which something like Being in general becomes understandable is time. We interpret Being from time (*tempus*). The interpretation is a temporal one. The fundamental problematic of ontology, as the determination of the sense of Being from time, is that of temporality. (Heidegger 1927a: 2)

We live in a world where things are either no longer there or not yet there, the dimension of time is crucial to our self-understanding. The existential perspective against which all of our actions have to be evaluated is that of the wider scope of all that is humanly and universally possible. It conjures up Nietzsche's reference to the concept of eternal recurrence: to live in such a way that what you do and what you are can be repeated over and over again and that you can still love it and relish your fate. It was this concept that provided a new morality, a secular goal for humankind to follow: not to be saved in the afterlife by God, but to make something of life on earth in this particular fashion. Psychotherapy, which can be seen as the best candidate to provide a secular moral backbone (Rieff 1966), usually only proposes some minimal goals that can hardly satisfy the eagerness of those who want to live to the full. The psychoanalytic promise of life with ordinary human misery in a constant struggle with past and instincts is hardly a satisfying replacement of the salvation promised by religion. The cognitive behavioural model that promises effective social functioning is probably more up to date and relevant to our technological society, but it still overlooks the yearning of the individual for a little more than obeying the routines of the nine-to-five. The humanistic or indeed the positive psychology goal of pleasure and enjoyment and self-actualisation come a little closer to providing a satisfactory answer, but are rather one-sided and self-centred and do not suit all tastes and all cultures. Seeking to establish a Garden of Eden and ignoring the darkness and evil that life on earth is also about is not a satisfactory existential solution (Deurzen 2009).

Towards vitality and fullness of life

The existential project is to retrieve the intensity and fullness of human existence as it is reflected in an individual's life and which is paradoxically exposed in personal predicament. The objective is not to make all suffering go away, but rather to welcome it as evidence of one's particular position in the world, which can reveal our possibilities and limitations to us. The client is therefore not seen as a victim or a patient but rather as his or her own source of light. Nietzsche's dictum of *amor fati* is probably a good rule of thumb in that it reminds us of opening ourselves up to the destiny that is ours rather than trying to evade it. The project is therefore to learn to open up to what is there in our lives, no matter how hard the truths of our troubles, and see our own position and orientation towards all of this in order to reclaim our central role in our own lives.

The existential psychotherapist must therefore stand steady in troubled times and help the client to be brave in confronting turmoil and confusion as well as contradiction, yearning and craving. The project of existential work is never just to make things better or other than they are, but rather to see them at last in all their damning reality and find a way to accommodate this new knowledge until it leads to a depth of understanding that allows us to become more fully alive. For it is in rising to our most difficult challenges that our blood starts to run freely in our veins again and that we become awake again, whereas we fall asleep as long as we avoid pain and trouble and we find ourselves dead before we know it: dead while alive. Clients are generally in the enviable position that they have plenty of difficulties to contend with. They are not too much at risk of falling asleep and forgetting themselves. What they need is someone to help them see the opportunities in their challenges, rather than someone to help them ease the pain and forget once more about the challenge of living with one's eyes wide open. Existential therapists aim to provide such help.

Ground rules of existential work

These small things are inconceivably more important than everything one has taken to be important so far. Precisely here one must begin to relearn.

(Nietzsche 1908: III, 10)

Introduction

Clients want a psychotherapist who is trustworthy, understanding and capable. They imagine that it is possible to live rather more resourcefully than they are doing at present and they look for signs of such living in the professional they consult. Clients scrutinise their psychotherapists for evidence of quality of life. Finding the merest hint of humanity and decent living in the psychotherapist gives clients hope. Seeing evidence of psychotherapists' blind spots, badly borne adversity, arrogance, complacency or confusion is reason for discouragement.

I have been told many accounts of prospective clients who were put off by a therapist in an initial interview simply because his study was cold and messy, or because she seemed downtrodden, or because she appeared to lie about the tightness of her schedule, or because he had looked depressed and unkempt. We cannot take the concrete underpinnings of our practice for granted and need to look at the basic parameters of existential work in order to generate some guidelines for the way we conduct ourselves when seeing clients. At the same time, we must remember that one of the fundamental characteristics of existential work is its openness to the individual creativity of the practitioner and the client. None of these guidelines, therefore, are rules that are written in stone. It is of the utmost importance that existential psychotherapists should adapt their mode of operating to their own personality and style, as well as being flexible in relation to the particular requirements of their clients. Existential therapists have generally ignored the importance of practical issues when in fact these matters are what life is based on and need to be looked at like everything else. Authors such as Langs (1992), Smith (1991) and Casement (1985, 1990) have described these parameters in detail.

But their recommendations are based on psychoanalytic assumptions. We need to rethink practice in a phenomenological way.

Setting: the physical dimension of the relationship

It is important to be considerate in providing an environment for consultation that suits the purpose of a confidential, intense, in-depth conversation with a vulnerable person. It may be well to keep in mind that clients look for psychotherapists who have established a solid foundation for their own life and whose working environment reflects such robustness, inner confidence and joy in living. It does not matter what the particular style of the therapist is, whether he or she works in small or large premises, in the public or the private sector, among functional or more lavish surroundings, in casual or more formal dress. What matters is that he or she is at ease, genuine and solid, and that there is an atmosphere of confidence and welcome in the consulting room. I would add the desirability of comfort without ostentation, privacy without too much interference from outside intrusion, and warmth both in temperature and in cosiness. In short the environment should suggest a place of safety and sanctuary, in which it will be good to open up and expose one's life, one's most inner experiences and deepest thoughts. It should also be a place in which the therapist him- or herself can feel profoundly at ease and true.

This can be achieved in multiple ways, depending upon personal style. It should be recognised, however, that the atmosphere we create sets the tone for the particular kind of relationship that ensues.

Consulting room

For reasons of personal comfort, it is helpful to have a pleasant consulting room – as much as possible soundproofed so that one is not disturbed by outside interference, and private so as to feel a territorial sense of ease. But, if necessary, it is possible to make ourselves comfortable even in a strange or hostile environment. We can strive to provide an appropriate setting for our clients, no matter what the conditions, as long as we bring a sense of harmony with us. Working in a mental hospital, with a row of similar, cold uncomfortable offices which are allocated to different staff, it is interesting to observe how with very small additions (a poster, a row of books, a rug, a plant) and a rearrangement of furniture, some staff members bring order and warmth to the same room that remains unwelcoming and chaotic when inhabited by others. Clients and patients will pick up on even the smallest hint of animosity in the environment. They will remark on even apparently small matters such as the smell in the room or the cracks in the window panes. They instinctively warm to the room of Dr A because it smells of vanilla biscuits and freshly cut flowers (she brings both in from home). They feel cosy in

Dr B's office because it smells of books and pipe tobacco. But they feel uncomfortable in Dr C's office, because his room reeks of fear and pungent aftershave. They positively loathe the office of Dr D for it smells of nothing but anonymity and hospital sterility.

Environments and atmospheres set the scene for what will occur and it is worth thinking about this in some of the detail, even though it is the climate of the therapist's personality as it is reflected in the room, rather than purely the room itself that the client responds to. It is naive to assume that one can create a neutral environment, as neutrality itself is a particular choice of signal. The neutral message is a potent one to send: it is a message that leaves clients in limbo and it may well make them mistrustful and having to focus more carefully on the person of the therapist for further clues as to his or her reliability or humanity. What is supposed to take the client off the therapist's scent only appeals so much the more to the client's animal instincts to sniff the therapist out, and neutrality is an open invitation for turning the client's focus of attention on the therapist rather than feeling at ease with the environment and accepting it as safe enough to work in.

There are some other pragmatic considerations. Noise and other sorts of interference will generally disturb sessions beyond what is helpful. If the therapist and client are not at ease, no good work can be done. Unease because of environmental factors could come from all kinds of sources: being in someone else's office, being at home alone with a client and fearing sexual or aggressive advances, disturbance from telephone or other professionals at hand. These sources of discomfort should be guarded against and eliminated as much as possible. The client has enough troubles to cope with without introducing additional disturbances on to the scene.

Disturbances

Having said this, it is no catastrophe when the regularity and security of the therapeutic frame is disturbed. As long as the disturbance is taken into account and addressed, the anxiety or mistrust that it evokes can be an occasion for monitoring the client's dealings with situations of anxiety and mistrust. It is a fact of life that we can sometimes not be as private, as quiet, as special and regular as we would wish. Existential psychotherapists will feel ready to face the disturbances that will inevitably come about in the therapeutic relationship and use them as opportunities to explore the client's response. However, we do not need to build in such disturbances deliberately as there will be plenty of naturally occurring ones.

When such interference is unavoidable, the psychotherapist's attitude to the situation is most important: the therapist's ignoring of the phone or of people knocking on the door with a definite reaffirmation of his or her commitment to the client may sometimes be more salutary than a bland undisturbed environment. The psychotherapist's awareness of the disturbance

that is created for the client is essential. The challenges that come from a real situation have the advantage of triggering the client's usual response to such distress and may therefore provide an opportunity to tackle it. This can be done only if the psychotherapist is sensitive to the situation and the effect it has on the client. At the same time, the client has a chance to observe the therapist's response to the situation, which will reveal the therapist's true state of mind and ability to tolerate and handle frustration. When outside interference or frame irregularities do create a real problem, this is often more related to the therapist's inability to creatively respond to it rather than to the situation in itself.

Imagine that you are a patient in a mental hospital, in the middle of a story of woe and sorrow, quietly sobbing, worried about imposing tears on the therapist, when suddenly the door opens and a colleague of your therapist enquires about possible use of the room. The therapist's attention is suddenly shifted away from you and you detect a mixture of irritation and relief in him, as if he is annoyed at being interrupted yet pleased to be distracted from your painful confessions. You feel mortified and let down and rather insignificant and you respond to that in your own peculiar manner, either by withdrawing into yourself, by getting angry, by feeling despair, by discounting the importance of the therapeutic relationship or in any other number of ways, that might become a problem. Now imagine that the therapist instead remains composed and turns towards you, brushing the colleague off with kind determination, maintaining eye contact with you, while waving the intruder away, saying: 'Not now please, we are at work here. I shall speak to you later.' You may suddenly feel enchanted at being treated so considerately and respectfully. You may feel greatly encouraged by your therapist's ability to take the interference into his stride and by him proving to you that it is possible to deal with others kindly and firmly while providing a possibility for privacy. Such moments can become very significant in the course of therapy. Much is learnt from them that may go unsaid. If adversity in the session is met by the therapist with equanimity and commitment to the client, it will stand out as a landmark of loyalty rather than as another confirmation of the unreliability of the external world.

Analysts speak of the importance of a secure frame (Langs 1979; Smith 1991), but we need to question the assumption that it is security that we should aim for, even though security is defined in a relative manner by these authors. What is needed is optimal challenge, not total security or absolute chaos. The therapist who comes late and regularly calls in sick is just as confusing as the therapist who always starts and finishes on the dot without any regard for what happens in the moment, may be unnerving. The therapist needs to show respect for the client and the work that they do together, and a vital and dynamic attitude in relation to inevitable change and challenge is one of the most important assets we can bring.

Seating

Clients need to be made comfortable enough to feel ready to confide. While easy chairs or couches help to generate an atmosphere of comfort, too much comfort may disturb the sense that work has to be done. It may even lead to a tendency in both parties to waste time. Lying down often generates a feeling of relaxation and abandonment which may be good and necessary for a time, especially if the client is rather guarded and needs to let her hair down, but it may also invite regression and a desire for self-indulgence. For some clients lying down is definitely counterproductive and leads to a feeling of great vulnerability and an inability to think. Allowing the client to recline might still encourage a process of talking freely, in line with psychoanalytic free-association, and this is entirely compatible with the early stages of existential analysis. In the later stages a more cooperative and active modality of working is often preferable as reality needs to take centre stage. When brief work is being done, a business-like seating arrangement works best.

Much existential work will be done seated in chairs facing one another or side by side. I personally favour an arrangement where clients have several choices of position, for different clients prefer different arrangements. Some like the closeness of facing confrontation, some like the armchair-to-armchair fireside talk, while others like to be able to stretch out in different directions by taking a position on the couch. Fixed positions are unhelpful; one-sided recommendations need to be viewed with suspicion. It is often useful if the client has a bit of room to explore what comes naturally to them, while reflecting on the significance of such a preference.

The social dimension of the therapeutic relationship

Contract

It almost goes without saying that a clear contract has to be established about the duration, fixed fee (with annual increase to take account of inflation) and consistency of the sessions. It is helpful to put the contract in writing, so that there can be no ambiguity about what has been agreed. Having a simple form that details the parameters of the work and establishes mutual agreement is probably the simplest way of getting these matters out of the way with as little interference with the therapeutic process as possible. Giving the client a printed outline of what is to be agreed and allowing them to think about this before they sign the contract is simply good and fair business practice.

It becomes particularly important to have clearly established rules around the time of termination when clients need to know where they stand. Working with a month's notice on either side seems to be a decent and usually acceptable arrangement, as existential psychotherapy does not set out to create excessive dependency on the therapist nor would warrant the therapist

claiming to know better than the client when he or she is ready to terminate. Equally, there needs to be some commitment to discussing reasons for sudden desires to stop working and therefore a period of notice is sensible. If the contract is not for long-term work, however, a shorter period of notice may well be acceptable.

Policy on cancellation of individual sessions should be liberal from an existential perspective. I, personally, work with a policy of not charging for cancellations that are given with more than one week's notice. This takes care of the occasional illness and holidays and establishes a situation of trust, where the occasional cancellation on the therapist's side is also taken as fair. Clients who cancel frequently for less good reasons obviously jeopardise this situation of mutual trust and they may lose their right to a definite slot in the weekly schedule. If in any doubt about how to deal with a situation, it may be helpful to remember that therapists are professionals who are hired by the hour: they do not get paid for going on holiday, but they do not have to continue serving clients who mess them about either. Psychotherapists often forget that they are their clients' servants and impose rules that would be considered unfair and unreasonable in any other setting. To expect clients to fit their lives around the psychotherapist is an abuse of power that needs to be challenged.

Professional protection

Some other items should figure in the contract with the client. They are mostly things that professional ethics codes require. These will include a clear mention of the ethical and professional code the therapist works to and the professional body the therapist belongs to. There may be details of the therapist's training, which clearly delimit the competency of the therapist and do not claim any expertise the therapist does not in fact have. It is also wise to make it very clear to the client that psychotherapists do not take medical or legal responsibility for the client whatsoever and that therefore the client will need to attend to such matters separately and independently. Of course the therapist will need to be duly registered and insured and will also need to advise the client of the limits of confidentiality in case there is reason to believe the client may hurt him or herself or another person, is mistreating or neglecting a child, or is plotting a terrorist attack. It may very well be that the client finds all this offputting and will bring it up for discussion in the initial session.

Extra-therapeutic contact and gifts

It is unlikely to help the therapeutic situation if the therapist and the client are associated in other ways than strictly as partners in the therapy. Existentially speaking, meetings outside of the therapeutic hour could be grist for the

mill if they are considered as such and talked about carefully as part of the therapy. In small towns or villages such dual role situations may be unavoidable and need to be managed with as much openness and care as is possible. Clients extending the boundaries of the relationship by giving gifts, writing long emails or making phone calls to the therapist could be equally considered to provide further material for therapeutic consideration. In principle, anything could be used in a beneficial manner, but it must be recognised that it is difficult at the best of times to retain one's ability to consider what the client says and does and that it is best to avoid feeling personally implicated or challenged to the extent that one is hampered in one's work. To add interferences to one's impartiality and one's tolerance in the form of extra demands on one's availability is not to be recommended. I would personally use the first opportunity where a client made such a demand on me to explore the interactions between us and explain my attempts at remaining open and impartial to the client.

I usually accept a present gracefully, but discuss its significance. My professionalism is such that clients very rarely personalise the relationship in these ways and that presents are only ever offered to me at the end of the therapy, if at all. I will not avoid my clients if I happen to meet them in a social situation and I will greet them cordially, but I make a point of lightly exploring the implications of the encounter in the next session. Such open exploration of any of these matters should enable clients to recognise for themselves what the effects of such extra-therapeutic interactions are, and this will allow them to regulate them better and find an appropriate distance from me to suit them as well as myself.

There are many other aspects to the social interaction of the therapeutic relationship, but these are discussed separately in Chapter 32 as they are fundamental to the work.

Personal dimensions of the therapeutic relationship

Existential psychotherapy does not set out to mystify people into submission. It does not seek to diagnose any form of pathology or substitute external theoretical concepts for the way in which the client thinks of herself or her world at present. Therefore, theoretical concepts, including philosophical ones, should be left at the door of the consulting room. What existential therapy does is to forcefully confront clients with their set mode of living and their current ways of being in the world. It also holds out the promise that it is possible to live a worthwhile and meaningful life if one is willing to face up to one's share of human misery, and eager to relish one's share of human joy, by actively immersing oneself in one's destiny and participate in life to the best of one's abilities. It is important that the existential therapist has been able to realise such promise in his or her own life.

Equality

Existential psychotherapists are quite likely to feel vulnerable and ontologically insecure. It would be most unusual for a person to be attracted to this approach without that personal connection to its premise. Existential practitioners have usually known numerous crises in their lives and they will have few illusions about their superior status as human beings. What they should not be is existentially lazy. Vitality and alertness will tell by the way in which we are in the world. The therapist who hides behind dogma or blank anonymity is unlikely to be very existentially inspired or inspiring. Generally speaking, anyone who has been willing to take the existential path will tend to have some idiosyncratic traits that show through with a certain sparkle of aliveness. They are willing to meet their clients as equals and, at the same time, they are aware of the heavy responsibility that they take on in guiding another person through the exploration of their human dilemmas.

Openness

Existential therapists will make it clear that they expect a similar willingness on the part of their client to come to the sessions with a basic commitment to talk about everything that is on their mind and in their life – in short, about everything that matters to them. This is not unlike the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis – to say everything no matter how insignificant or absurd it may seem. For existential therapy to be effective there has to be a further commitment on the part of the client to be willing to examine whatever has arisen and confront its implications and connections.

In return, clients can expect of existential therapists that they will be committed to exploring such issues with the client. Existential therapists should enable clients to describe experience fully and clarify and understand its meaning. Out of this will come times where contradictions, implications and other aspects of the reported experience are explored, and this will often involve challenging interventions which evoke disagreements between client and therapist. Precisely because of this, the therapist has to be committed to spending more time listening and understanding than talking and interpreting.

Commitment to truth

Existential therapists are required to be disciplined enough to pursue truth rather than the client's imagination, although coming to terms with the imaginative side of one's existence is of course part of the truth. They must be willing to be drawn into the conflicting interpretation of the universe that the client has created, while remaining capable of seeing the other side of every statement that the client makes, and see the missing paradox in every certainty the client has.

Resonance

Existential work can be done efficiently only if the therapist is willing to be touched by the client's material. The work is based on the notion that there are universal human concerns. Specific predicaments are personal and cultural variations upon general human themes. Personal problems are not seen, therefore, as the outcome of a particular set of psychopathology, but rather as a unique situation of confrontation with the human condition. While the therapist looks for the specific contribution that the client makes to the problems encountered, the therapist should also be able to appreciate the tragicomic dimension of inevitability and fatality involved in human situations. Therapists should therefore lend themselves to the possibility of first-hand experience of a similar situation and use past, present or future personal experience to feel into the intensity and poignancy of the client's situation.

Therapists who do not have such an ability to lend themselves to temporarily identify with the client's position, and to live into the client's preoccupation, will be hard put to work from a position of resonance. Resonance is this ability to tune into the human dimension of a person's troubles and to figuratively let the vibrations of it set off a similar sound in oneself. It is more dynamic and active than sympathy and far more engaged and passionate than the fairly cognitive experience of empathy. I have referred to the same notion elsewhere as co-path_y (Deurzen-Smith 1994a). This goes slightly beyond pure resonance and adds the element of co-presence – the actual challenge of being with the other person in a forthright and available manner. Such co-presence requires one to be steady and stable while resonating closely with the client's preoccupations.

Boundaries

Having described the intensity and closeness required for existential work, it is time to consider the boundaries that guard the separateness between therapist and client at the same time. Existential work is done through conversation and silent being together. It does not involve physical contact or forms of gratification other than payment and the sense of pleasure in doing a good job. The work done is private and will be kept confidential in ways agreed between the two parties involved. A particular device that may be recommended to existential therapists is to share their written account of the sessions with the client for open discussion of the inflammable issues that this will inevitably evoke. It is an extra check on the therapeutic relationship, preventing it from going off into a fantasy world. Without a procedure of write-up or supervision, it is all too easy for the therapist to get uncritically drawn into the client's world. Without a device for sharing the judgements made about the client, it is all too easy for the therapist to get absorbed in his or her own theoretical framework or that of the supervisor.

Especially when working with co-presence and resonance, it is all too easy to assume that we fully understand the client and that we can begin to do their thinking for them – as Heidegger would say, leaping in for them rather than leaping ahead of them. Unfortunately, such ideas usually rest on a sense of grandiosity on the part of the therapist and we need to let ourselves be corrected by the client's right to reply to our final impressions of what went on in the sessions. An encouragement to the client to write up their own side of the story can also be an excellent stimulation for more intense existential work. Writing is a good vehicle for existential therapy.

Screening

In the same way in which there are certain personal characteristics expected of therapists working in this way, there are also certain characteristics of clients that are more or less compatible with existential work. If one is to work to the best of one's abilities, it is important to give some thought to the kind of clients it is realistic for one to take on. It helps to let your referral sources know of your selection criteria, so that you do not have to turn clients down after the initial interview too often.

I personally find it essential to see a person for an initial full session to determine whether we can and want to work together. I charge for this session in the usual way and ask the client to think about whether they want to carry on with the therapy for at least a day, before confirming the next appointment. It seems important to allow a person to make up their own mind in the peace of their home and after having slept on what went on in our first session.

Initial interview

In the initial session, I get a sense of the sort of orientation that my prospective client has towards the world. I check whether they have a basic openness towards exploration and a willingness to try and articulate what is not immediately at the forefront of their awareness.

In addition, I check whether the person is able to pay for the sessions. If this is not the case, I would prefer referring them on to a free counselling or therapy service than taking them on resentfully. It is important that clients realise that making oneself available to puzzle out their difficulties with them is a demanding task that requires much emotional and mental energy on my part. I want my commitment to them to be recompensed in a fair manner. I charge the amount of money that makes it worth my while to provide this service. It is up to the client to accept or reject this exchange. I do not barter or use a sliding scale. I set the value of my work and do not downgrade it for one client or upgrade it for another. People may opt for fewer or less frequent sessions if they cannot afford to pay for more. I also offer group work for

those who cannot pay for the individual sessions, or for those who have come to the end of such sessions.

Apart from the considerations of readiness in emotional and financial terms to engage with the process of existential therapy, I do not make judgements about pathology. If a person is willing to work and is able to pay for the work, then other aspects of their physical or mental health are not my business. If I judge myself incapable of coping with certain aspects of their behaviour I shall say so openly, clearly indicating my limitations, perhaps referring them on to more appropriate sources of help.

I prefer not to take on people who have known me in a different context, or people who I would meet socially. If at all possible I like to separate my professional and personal lives because this makes it easier to leave my work behind. I enjoy being free to be an ordinary human being rather than a wise psychotherapist in my personal life. For the same reason, I prefer to work in an area that is far away from my home, so that I do not get stigmatised in the neighbourhood. These are considerations of my personal preference, however, and should not be seen as rules. In the past, I have sometimes worked with former students as clients; I have also worked once or twice with family of colleagues or friends of family. In many ways this has as much facilitated the work as impeded it. I have also worked from my home with people living in my neighbourhood and whose children attended the same school as mine, and this I found to be an imposition both on myself and on them in the long term. Working in a smaller community I have had to learn to accept that clients may become supervisees or vice versa and that none of this is really a problem if handled with care.

I, personally, do not now select people in accordance with gender, age, nationality or any other such personal aspects. There have been times in the past, when I was a young single woman working from an isolated office, that I felt far more comfortable working only with women. In that situation, it is better for all concerned to recognise such limitations and to stick to a selection process in accordance with it.

The final consideration should be whether you honestly think that you can help a person, and whether you like this person enough at the initial interview to feel ready to get to know her and learn to understand her. It is important for therapists to be sensitive to the prejudices they experience in relation to new clients and to formulate these clearly for themselves. It is crucial to be honest with yourself about the labelling that is going on in your mind. We all label other people when we meet them and being a therapist does not stop that. In fact, much of our training increases our ability to label and diagnose. We need to learn to freely formulate our judgements to ourselves and detach them from the values they are laden with. If I judge a client to be middle-class, for instance, this may be the result of careful and accurate observation of their speech and mannerisms. There is nothing wrong with forming such a judgement. What is dangerous is if I attach such a judgement immediately to

a sense of recognition of a fine specimen of humanity or, on the contrary, to a sense of condemnation of this person's narrow perspective. What I need to learn to do is to be able to note traits and characteristics, appearances and attitudes, with all the patience of a zoologist or a botanist and attach only the values to my observations that are warranted by the client's own experience. The more experienced you become at mastering the art of phenomenological observation, the wider the range of clients that you can work with effectively.

Of course clients will be screening the therapist as well at the initial meeting. It is sobering to keep in mind that it is you as the therapist who is going to the job interview, rather than your client. In the end it is up to your client to decide to pay for your services or reject them. Too many therapists behave as if it is they who can call the shots, and they intimidate clients by treating them as patients who should be in awe of their superior insights and healing power. In reality, this confidence trick only keeps in place the client's dependency and tendency to turn into a victim. It is not a position that encourages good and efficient work. It is of course a position that encourages and cultivates an attitude of need towards interminable work.

Therapists who are confident of the high standard of their work will rarely use such methods to enslave clients. They will realise that clients gain much needed self-respect from being in a position to follow their own authority and to contract for the minimal amount of time necessary to sort through current problems and dilemmas.

For the same reasons it is crucial to let people know in the initial interview how you work and what you will expect of them. Ground rules must be made clear from the outset, and it is a cruel game to leave clients to discover the rules as time goes by, letting them sweat it out in silence. Existential therapists have no compunction whatsoever over answering questions. In the initial session, prospective clients should be encouraged to ask everything they need to know in order to make an informed decision about whether to embark on the therapy with you. Questions that are asked at a later stage can often lead to important new points for exploration. If personal questions are asked of you – about whether you have children, are married, believe in God or whatever else – an extremely brief but straightforward reply is the quickest way into an exploration of what prompted the question, or whether the answer is reassuring or anxiety provoking. Therapists should be frank and down-to-earth and, while not letting themselves be drawn into social interaction, should maintain an openness that will allow clients to reveal concerns through queries. It is a simple rule of thumb to wonder what worry prompts a question and to find ways of exploring this with your client after having replied. It is a different matter, of course, when clients start asking for advice on how to conduct their lives. Such questions can be equally useful, however, in focusing attention on the client's own desire to find direction, and to help them in formulating what the various options and obstacles are.

After the initial interview time should be given to the prospective client and

the therapist to make up their minds about whether to enter into the contract. I generally invite my client to phone me in the coming week to confirm their decision. I think that it is tremendously important to insist on the client's total freedom and choice in entering into therapy. I would hesitate to take a person on in existential therapy if he or she lacks a basic willingness to frankly discuss their preoccupations and is merely interested in instant symptom relief. If there is no readiness to enter into a philosophical exploration of their personal world it is unlikely that much existential work can be accomplished.

Spiritual dimension of the relationship

Much has already been said elsewhere about the belief system and the basic assumptions on which this approach is based. As a philosophical exploration of clients' concerns, the existential approach is committed to clarifying its own ideological underpinnings so that, in principle, any dogmatism it entails can be questioned. In practice, it is extremely hard for existential therapists to notice prejudice in ideological terms. Their focus is so much on clarifying client's ideology, rather than operating from the basic assumptions of their own ideology, that they can easily assume themselves to be completely non dogmatic. In fact, the commitment to exploring a person's values and beliefs rests in itself on a value and belief system, which sets a certain tone to the work and could become an imposition.

Existential therapists need to constantly examine their own convictions, therefore, and recognise how they interfere or at least interact with their clients' preoccupations. In the case illustration, it will be obvious that my own conviction of my superior insights into the laws of life often interfered with my understanding of what was active for my client at that time. By standing on a sort of high moral ideological ground, it becomes possible to detach oneself from the needs of ordinary mortals in a most unfortunate and unhelpful manner.

Perhaps the most important factor to prevent this kind of alienation from taking place is that the existential therapist, rather than living some kind of holy, abstinent and devout life, needs to be immersed in the complexities of living as actively as possible. Real understanding of tension and communion with the contradictions of human existence has to be experienced first-hand and constantly, so that value judgements can be kept to a minimum and complacent superiority is kept at bay. I recognise it myself when my value system becomes too tidy and my life too neatly organised and my views too secure and my whole being too self-righteously existential. Then, it is time to let myself be plunged back into the abyss of life, from where I have to rediscover what attracted me to this way of working in the first place. To be toppled off one's pedestal and re-immersed into the flow of life is the only guarantee of maintaining a searching attitude. Those who sound too

self-assured and too definite about what makes a therapist existential, or those who are too sure that existential is right, are clearly out of touch with the forces that determine matters of life and death. They have become mere promoters of existential dogma, pronouncers of quasi-truths. I know myself to be among them all too often, and writing this book is in some ways proof of that. There is no way around it but to confess my intense longing to be rescued from my sureness and to be willing to be challenged and let that happen whenever possible.

Consciousness and the unknown

Consciousness . . . is total emptiness.

(Sartre 1943a: xxxii)

The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me.

(Pascal 2008: 26)

The complexity of consciousness

Existential psychotherapy is often dismissed as superficial because it rejects the notion of the unconscious. Such dismissal is based on a superficial appraisal of the approach. Existential psychotherapy strives to consider the whole area of consciousness afresh, with an open attitude to what can be discovered. It only rejects the idea of the unconscious as an intra-psyche locus and does not deny that there are degrees of consciousness, some of which may well be described as unconscious or subconscious. There is no question of losing any of the depth of understanding that has been gained from psychoanalytic and humanistic investigations, but rather there is the opportunity to plumb those depths and test that insight. The objective of an existential approach is always to combine different insights and integrate them whenever possible and whenever this provides us with a foothold for further investigations. We need to dare extend awareness of depth with an acknowledgement of the breadth and complexity that is involved in these matters and that can be derived from multiple sources, including cognitive and spiritual ones.

When I refer to the term consciousness, I mean it to include the entire range of mental processing, reflective and non-reflective, from total immersion in an event or blind experience of emotion through to active and articulated description, knowledge and conscious control. If we want to hold on to the notion of the unconscious, it would have to be found a place within this wider human capacity for consciousness. The usefulness of the concept of the unconscious has been surpassed by neuroscience a long time ago. It seems unhelpful to hold on to such a concept when it clearly conjures up so much

uncritical and unexamined prejudice and is often confused with other aspects of mental processing.

The domain of consciousness is so intricate and mysterious that it deserves to be looked at a little more carefully (James 1890; Klein 1977; Dennett 1991; Damasio 1999; Blackmore 2003). Consciousness is the capacity for awareness, though etymologically the word was initially connected to the idea of conscience, i.e. of self awareness. There are many different definitions of what consciousness is and how it is achieved and many theories on whether or not animals are capable of it and whether computers will ever simulate or acquire it. There is no doubt that consciousness is multiple and layered. It is a complex manifestation of life that goes beyond our own understanding of it. Perhaps it is the everyday mystery par excellence, for we use it on a daily basis without ever coming close to guessing the capacities that we draw on and the abilities that we let lie fallow. Consciousness appears to be located in the brain and the nervous system, the centre of all of our physical and mental activity. Our central and peripheral nervous systems are so sophisticated that they far outstrip our current understanding of what really goes on. In spite of the great progress that has been made in terms of neurophysiological descriptions of what goes on in different parts of the brain, we are a long way off from matching the mind and the brain and understanding clearly what it means to think and to have ideas about the world and ourselves. To a large extent then consciousness remains a closed book. It is more subtle than any technology created by humankind. We still cannot fully understand either consciousness or the functioning of the brain, given the present limitations of our scientific endeavours. It is therefore no wonder that there are so many different theories around to explain what happens to the human mind in various situations.

Use of the term ‘unconscious’

It is hardly surprising that people have come to speak of areas of consciousness that are generally beyond the reach of our reflection with broad descriptive terms such as the ‘unconscious’, the ‘subconscious’ or the ‘soul’. References to such hidden parts of human consciousness have existed throughout the history of philosophy and Freud’s contribution is often much overrated (Ellenberger 1970; Smith 1991). The use of such terms, however, can easily lead to dogmatic and superstitious thinking as they refer to entities and realities largely beyond our grasp. Speaking about such concepts with unwarranted certainty may prevent us from looking carefully at the processes of consciousness in which we are involved. When we divide consciousness broadly into two or three layers we allocate subtle and complex forms of awareness into catch-all categories that stand in the way of more thorough investigation. It is interesting to note that different philosophers have had different theories about these matters. Kierkegaard’s (1843a, 1845) idea of

stages on life's way takes the view that human beings are capable of many levels of consciousness: first they are merely vegetative, then they become animal, then conscious, then capable of self-consciousness. It is with this self-consciousness that we then follow the sequential path of the pursuit of the aesthetic, then the ethical and finally the religious ways of life. The suggestion is that these various layers continue to coexist to some extent.

Confusing the map for the territory

There have been numerous maps of consciousness. The problem is that people take their schemes for granted and forget that they are merely temporary maps which must be replaced with more accurate ones when it is possible to draw them. Of course, one can divide experience into conscious and not-conscious elements, or into physical, social, psychological and spiritual dimensions. It is good to keep in mind that many other divisions are also possible, and that these divisions are neither absolute nor necessary, nor are they indispensable. If one takes the map for the territory, it may happen that we get lost on the territory for lack of paying attention to the immense gaps that remain in our map. It may also be that we get lost because the map is far too sketchy, not detailed enough, and of not much use when it comes down to finding our way in a specific land. Equally some maps that suggest certain crude frontiers may stop important new explorations.

To divide mental life into consciousness and the unconscious is like drawing a map of the world on which there is a mere indication of the division between land and water without any further differentiation between seas and rivers, areas of land that are low or high, or any indication of the way in which lands are linked and roads can be found leading from one to the other.

The unconscious as an object of faith

Even so, the established dogma of many forms of psychotherapy takes it for granted that one should accept the notion of the unconscious in a *prima facie*, unquestioned manner. It is quite common for non-psychoanalytical psychotherapists to be questioned by their psychoanalytic brethren about their adherence to a belief in the unconscious. A denial of such faith is often met with shock and instant disapproval.

Without further specification, the question of whether one does or does not accept the notion of the unconscious is a rather meaningless one. If the questioner intends to find out whether one recognises that some aspects of experience are not fully registered or reflected upon by our mind it is a misleading formulation, which does not allow for alternative ways of accounting for the same phenomena. I have never come across anyone who would deny that there are different levels of conscious experience and that states of reverie are different to states of acute awareness, that self-reflection is something

quite other than automatic action, and that sleeping and dreaming are not the same as waking life. Yet there are many people who do not 'believe in the unconscious' as formulated by psychoanalysis. These same people have little or no problem in accepting that there are many different parts of the brain and different brain functions and brain states which explain why consciousness is a complex and varied phenomenon.

It is high time we abandon our beliefs in something as vague as the idea of 'the unconscious' and replace it with an understanding of different functions of consciousness and different states of mind. The old days of psychoanalytic religion are over when to be asked whether one believed in the unconscious was a bit as if one was asked whether one believed in the holy grail, or in the immaculate conception. If one denied such faith, one was found out to be a heretic, unworthy of being cloaked in the holy garb of psychoanalysis. It made it all the more compelling to take the scientific route and discover in a more rational way what could be known and said about consciousness. Indeed, there have long been psychoanalysts and philosophers of mind who are doing just that (such as, for example, Marr 1982; Natsoulas 1985; Dennett 1991, 1995; Smith 1994), but they are the exception rather than the rule.

New explorations of consciousness

The idea that the unconscious was 'discovered' by Freud is a grave error, as has been shown quite clearly by Ellenberger in his classic book *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970). Many authors had been concerned with the idea before him, for instance Nietzsche (1881) and Lipps (1897). People in most cultures and throughout human history have had places and names for aspects of mental life that were not immediately in awareness, as is clear from anthropological data or states of possession, for instance. Quite often such states are considered to be associated with divine forces and are seen as supernatural events. The division of the mind into consciousness and the unconscious is a typical manifestation of a more scientific, technological outlook on the same issues that were previously dealt with from human or religious perspectives.

Many philosophers have considered problems of the complexity of consciousness. The fact that aspects of mental life were out of our reach in one way or the other has been documented and discussed in interesting ways by a variety of authors over the past millennia. For centuries, Western philosophy held God responsible for any aspects of mind that were not immediately accessible. In recent years, philosophers have developed, together with certain members of other disciplines such as psychology, linguistics and computing science, an active, multiple exploration of mental phenomena in a new discipline called 'cognitive science'. The thinking of these scientists often includes reference to unconscious events, but seeks to find new ways of conceptualising

these. Their work shows clearly how much more complex and diverse the issues are that we regularly deal with in psychotherapy.

The multiplicity of consciousness

One thing that emerges out of such research is that consciousness is not simply binary, as the crude division between conscious and unconscious suggests, but multiple and complex. It is instructive to remember how many different aspects of mental life may be covered by the simple idea of an unconscious.

As far as I am concerned, this cuts across either adhering to the classic notion of the unconscious as formulated by Freud or following the path of simplistic dismissal of the idea of the unconscious in the way that Sartre does (Sartre 1943a). His critique of the unconscious is based on the idea that the censoring function, which is supposed to keep things repressed in the unconscious, would have to be a conscious function in order to make the distinction between what is to be kept in or out of consciousness. Such a critique of the unconscious is not fundamental enough to be convincing, although it does show up a weakness in both assertions and makes it clear that consciousness and unconsciousness must be closer relatives than we thought. There has been much debate about whether Freud or Sartre are right (Cannon 1991; Gardner 1993; Spinelli 1993, 1994a, 1994b; Smith 1994, 1995), but in the final analysis such debate is a red herring. We need to get around to tackling the real issues afresh without being either advocates of one side or the other. Consciousness and its mysteries deserve to be explored in themselves rather than through the assertions of particular theorists.

The instinctual

One of the things that Freud emphasised, when he revived the concept of the unconscious, is how much of our apparently rational behaviour is actually motivated and directed by instinctual drives. The forces beyond our ken that we do not really wish to acknowledge are, according to Freud, essentially biological ones. There can be little doubt that Darwin and Freud, through their reconsideration of the human species as essentially part of the animal kingdom, helped us to find a new humility as mammals. To rediscover our biological ancestry and our animal instincts represents an important step in the direction of the truth that had been denied for so long. It places us firmly in a more modest position in relation to the rest of the universe. The creation of an essentially anthropomorphic concept such as the unconscious, which is supposed to be the seat of human motivation and which becomes the object of intellectual theorising, almost defeats that purpose. In some ways, such a complex elaboration obscures the instinctual level, instead of exposing it. To account for our biological, hormonal and visceral life is important. Such a

shift in focus must not be lost by mixing up our animal desires with imaginary explanations about other aspects of consciousness.

Authors such as Darwin, Nietzsche and Freud made the effort of questioning human superiority, and all three posited that it was vital to acknowledge the realm of the instincts in its own right. To break out of the Victorian view of humans as special beings created by God, and to bring them back to their animal nature, was an immensely controversial and groundbreaking feat. Soon, however, many became so fascinated with the mysterious drives and desires that it became difficult to see things in perspective as other aspects of human consciousness were lost.

Freud needed to regard the instincts as safely contained and repressed in this imaginary place of the unconscious. In his day it was hard enough to assert that our animal drives were hidden and contained. It would have been too controversial to simply note the instinctual aspects of everyday behaviour and begin to pinpoint the impulsive and in-born quality of much of what we do and experience. A century later it has become possible for us to observe humans in the same way in which we have learnt to observe animals. The science of ethology (Tinbergen 1951; Lorenz 1982) has taught us much about the instinctual aspects of human interaction, and there is now less of a need to relegate such ordinary strands of human instinctual behaviour to a secret place. Nor do we need the notion of the unconscious as an explanatory system, for it is more effective to acknowledge the intricate nature of the chemical, hormonal and genetic phenomena that influence much of our conduct. Previously, the very thought that our complex mental life could be contained in the little black box of our brain was too perturbing and shocking. We now have more ease with the concept of humankind as a physical and biological entity. We can note, without feeling threatened in our religious beliefs, that some of our existence – such as our sleeping life, for instance – is governed by the ancient structures of the brain stem, whereas others are dominated by primitive and basic hypothalamic functions. Why refer to this with a vague, imprecise concept like the unconscious, when we can be so much more specific about these functions and address them as neurological and fundamentally physical processes? Being coy about that and couching it in mystical terms keeps us unscientific. Ironically, Freud, as a scientist, would have been among the first to want to learn the new lessons we now can draw from neurophysiological research on such things as our sexual or our aggressive impulses. This is not to say that we do not need a more descriptive, poetic and intentional interpretation of the meaning of all this physiological activity to satisfy our sense of meaningful humanity. Having the hard concrete facts allows us to come up more freely with such models for understanding ourselves as well.

Of course psychophysiology cannot yet account for all aspects covered by the notion of the unconscious, but it can explain some. Another important aspect of the unconscious that can now be more usefully understood from the basis of its physiological process is that of the function of memory.

The memorised and not memorised

When people use the term 'unconscious', they often refer to things that they remember without actively recalling them. When I have a vague memory of an experience that I have had, but which does not translate into words or specific images, I may just have a sense of an atmosphere or an ambience. I can call this a memory that has been repressed into my unconscious, but this does not help me to specify in what way this memory is not conscious, nor does it clarify the ways in which it is in fact conscious. It is more helpful in this case to speak of a visceral or an inarticulate memory, or even of a vague memory, for at least that allows me to retain the differentiation between that which I partly remember but am unable to recall with the more articulate aspects of this memory. Such differentiation will discourage me from believing that everything I remember is completely true. It allows me to note that memories can be stored in many different ways and can be recalled in different ways, and it helps me to avoid creating false memories wholesale. If I remember only a certain ambience, then I may have stored only that much information. If I make a demand on myself, or someone else, to retrieve a whole story that goes with that ambience, it is highly questionable whether such is a feat of recall from my unconscious or, in fact, a creation that I have added on to my original ambience memory. We need to guard ourselves from confabulation and make sharp distinctions between different sorts of memories, rather than adhere to a simplistic belief in an omnipotent unconscious. We now know so much more about the encoding and storage of memory and are much better informed about what happens in the process of memory retrieval as well. We also make distinctions between short-term, long-term and working memory, episodic memory and semantic memory. We distinguish between the role of the medial temporal lobe and in particular the hippocampus in the formation of memory and that of the prefrontal cortex in consolidating memory. This is more in line with Sartre's distinction between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness than with the idea of repression. This is also interesting in terms of the notion of procedural memory, e.g. the memory of motor learning that remains with us without us having to actively recall it. This is unreflective memorising, since we simply do what we have learnt earlier, in an automatic manner. Such learning depends more on the ancient structures of the cerebellum and basal ganglia as well as on our reflexes. It is what we often refer to as going into automatic pilot.

The created and imagined

There is a whole other category of things that may be referred to as unconscious, but that are actually fantasised and imagined aspects of childhood and babyhood that have allegedly been repressed, but that in fact may have been created out of our own imagination. The human mind is so

malleable an organ that it can produce plausible memories out of accounts that we read in books or see in films or hear discussed by other people. We can easily be fooled and take our own fantasy for reality. We can spend years on the couch spinning yarns about our past experiences, when the actual contents of our memory may be very thin indeed and does not in itself warrant the lyrical and dramatic interpretations that we enjoy giving it. Piaget (Loftus 1980) used to tell the story of his false memory of having been kidnapped when he was a small child. He had a strong recollection of a man taking him from his pram in the park while his nanny tried to resist this. It was only when he met his old nanny years later in adulthood that she confessed to him that she had made up this story and had planted it in his mind. He realised that his memory was the product of his own confabulation based on the fictional elements with which his nanny had provided him. The creation of romantic or tragic versions of past reality is entirely possible and we have to keep in mind how facts and fiction are inevitably combined in the stories we tell ourselves about our past.

It goes without saying that psychotherapists can fall into the trap of taking their clients' stories too much at face value, and equally might encourage new versions of the past that are less than truthful. Psychotherapists and their clients are always in danger of creating a kind of *folie à deux* which is condoned by reference to 'the unconscious of the patient'. This aspect of the so-called unconscious might be more usefully thought of as our creative and imaginative abilities. These are clearly an important human talent and people make up explanations for everything that they cannot understand. A good illustration of this point is the discovery during twin research that twins separated at birth and adopted by different families often displayed the same characteristics, but that they and their adoptive families had found different explanations for the same phenomena. One adult twin reported to the researchers that he was extremely fastidious and, when asked how this had come about, he explained this to be the result of his adoptive parents' fastidiousness. The twin brother who had been adopted by a different family also reported himself as being extremely fastidious, but he explained the same phenomenon as the result of his reaction against his adoptive mother being an absolute slob (Slavin and Kriegman 1992). Think of the complex psychoanalytical explanations that one could have come up with to interpret the fastidious behaviour and its origin, and how all this alleged unconscious activity is in fact nothing but the imagination of the interpreter. People like being able to explain things, to give them meaning, but much of this meaning-giving may be a matter of convenient fantasy rather than of pure fact. I have referred to this elsewhere as the function of 'illusion formation' (Deurzen-Smith 1994c). This is quite a serious problem in psychotherapy and is known as the phenomenon of false memory, which can be generated by some therapeutic methods, especially those which use hypnosis or suggestion.

Repression

The idea that we have to keep certain things repressed in the unconscious because our consciousness cannot tolerate them is a potent source of potential confabulation. Freud argued that the ‘censor’ keeps those aspects of our instinctual life, of our desires and of our memories, repressed that we do not feel able to deal with.

Sartre argued against the idea of repression by showing that the notion of a censor requires it to execute some level of decision making about what to censor and that this implies a consciousness of sorts. It raises the question of whom and what makes the decision that certain things do not deserve to meet the light of day. Somewhere a little intelligent homunculus seems to be making some very important decisions for us. As discussed above, Sartre preferred to speak of bad faith or self-deception, since we seem to be part of this conspiracy of silence we condone. He considered ‘repression’ to be an aspect of consciousness rather than relegating it to the dark unknown of an unconscious.

But Sartre covered only part of the problem of unconsciousness by this device. He was unable to account for all unconscious phenomena in terms of them being manifestations of bad faith. Yet his considerations of Freud’s contributions carry truth. What he put his finger on is the possibility that Freud’s account is causally inverted. Instead of considering that something is repressed because it cannot be consciously faced, it may be that we simply prefer to describe those things as unconscious which we want to disclaim. As mentioned earlier, the possible reasons for something being out of the focus of our consciousness are multiple, and if we try to understand it through a single concept such as repression this stops us from investigating the matter carefully. The concept of repression itself can be replaced with that of avoidance, in the sense that the things I cannot tolerate to focus my conscious attention on I may prefer to avoid. Such avoidance can take the shape of actually moving away from things, or it can take the shape of denying that they are the case. In every instance, it involves the move of not facing up to what is. This is referred to as being in bad faith.

The intentional and the non-reflective

Although Sartre’s reasons for discounting the unconscious are not entirely convincing, he does propose another distinction in levels of consciousness that can be of use when we take a new look at this whole question. Sartre extends Brentano’s and Husserl’s notion of intentionality to propose that there are different levels of intentionality. As I write down these words, I can focus either on the actual letters that I am forming on the screen or I can focus on the sentence that I am writing; equally, I can look ahead in my mind for the meaning that I try to convey and I can switch my attention from one to

the other of these foci at will. It is the foreground/background phenomenon of Gestalt psychology, which allows us to explain some aspects of our unconscious or rather our non-reflective behaviour (Spinelli 1989, 1994a). What we observe now is that consciousness is a phenomenon of our intentionality, but much of our intentionality is a sweeping movement that reaches out towards something while we are momentarily not reflecting on the things that we have to overlook in the process. It can be shown that a large part of our awareness is on the level of peripheral vision. Our attention cannot be on everything at once. This does not mean peripheral matters are out of our consciousness, but rather that they are not the object of intense focal scrutiny. We must conclude that there are distinctions to be made in degrees of intensity of our focus of attention. Many of the computational processes that happen in our mind (specifically in the neo-cortex) are so complex that we do not ourselves grasp our own intentions. We are not able to reflect upon our intentions in a clear, all-encompassing manner at all times. Our minds come to conclusions that we have not reached by carefully considering each logical step of our decision making, but nevertheless many aspects of the matter in hand may have been considered rapidly by a brain used to doing the work for us. The voting with our feet that ensues is based in the combinations and interactions of information ingested and digested by our brain and processed in accordance with our fundamental set of intention and present state of mind. This is complicated even further by the fact that our own brain is not the only system involved in these computations. Because of this, our actions often speak much louder than our words or our thoughts, as does the state of our body or the emotion in which we suddenly find ourselves. Consciousness operates on all these different levels, and our particular mode of relation to our world constitutes our consciousness at all these different levels at once. Learning to tune into this world relation and modulate it more actively and less reactively is one of the challenges of being alive. It is what Heidegger referred to when he argued that we always exist in a given state of mind, or disposition, which also entails a certain understanding of the world and which can be articulated in language in order to make it available for greater scrutiny.

The tacit and the taken for granted

Sometimes we refer to something as unconscious when it hangs between two people in a tacit manner: it is the very structure of their relationship that contains the meaning. No explanations are needed, though both understand, without needing to formulate or explain. Of course, the different parties may understand something slightly different, but there is an unspoken agreement nevertheless. What is mute is not therefore out of the mind: much of what happens between people remains forever unsaid. But although it is not articulated, it has its effect on both parties and is, in some sense, within awareness

as well. When I do you a favour there is an instant awareness in both of us that I am in some way superior to you if I can afford to be generous towards you. You will feel in debt to me and you may experience this as gratitude (if you experience my power as benevolent and welcome), as resentment (if my power impinges on you and is a potential threat) or as obligation (if you do not wish to remain beholden to me). Neither of us will say anything about this, but the interaction between us will be based on an unarticulated relation that we both experience and make sense of in our own way. Your response may be to repay the favour instantly, thus evening the score between us, or it may be to remain obliged to me and to keep yourself under my protection. You may even increase your obligation to me by continuing to elicit further favours, and you may in doing so gain a sense of your power over me – using me as one who *owes* you favours for which you do not have to pay anything back. On the contrary, you may hate me because you owe me something, and remove yourself from me, or try to reduce me to a lower level by undermining me. That, too, is a way in which you can even out our relationship. In other words, the exchange between us can be responded to in many different ways and often without either of us taking the trouble to formulate what is happening. Nevertheless, on some level we both know what all of this is about. It seems more accurate to refer to such a phenomenon as a tacit, or non-articulated, or unspoken exchange, than as an unconscious communication. Some would prefer to think of it as the level of intuitive interaction that is the structural reality in which all human reality takes place.

The implicit: assumptions

Many statements have implications that remain unrecognised by the speaker or the listener and that are therefore never made explicit. If I say something like: ‘I can’t be there on time’, I imply that there is some other priority in my life that stands in the way of my being on time, but I may imply numerous other things as well. This particular statement certainly implies that my abilities are limited and that I am not ubiquitous. It also implies that I accept that there are certain times to be in certain places. It furthermore states that at the particular time stated that particular place is not one that I can manage to be present at. The tone in which I make such a statement adds more about my general agreement or disagreement with this state of affairs. It will indicate whether I am cross with others for expecting me to be able to be there, or whether I am relieved to be able to excuse myself, or whether I am disappointed with myself for not being able to be there, and so on and so forth. All of the implications discussed so far are on the level of basic assumptions: they are factors that form the foundations of a statement or an experience. Every statement made has a surprising number of such implications, or rather premises, and taken for granted fundamental conditions. These can, if

so desired, be brought to one's attention, revealing worlds of meaning folded into the simple meaning one thought one was expressing.

The implicit: consequences

There are also implications that concern consequences rather than presuppositions and these are also frequently overlooked. If I say that 'I can't be there on time', it may be implied that I will get into trouble for this, or that I will miss an important event, or that I will simply be late. Much of the time I intend my statement to express some of those implications knowingly, and I try to convey them through my attitude and tone while I make the statement. At other times, I will not be aware of the implications of my statement and I will discover these only in due course. I can never oversee all of the implications of my statements and actions as reality only unfolds with time. However, it is possible to speculate about possible outcomes, implications and consequences of situations, and of the actions that I mean or contemplate taking. Existential psychotherapists encourage clients to explore the territory that will be opened up by their future actions and examine the implications, consequences and effects of their potential words and conduct.

Connections

Every fact in the world, or every statement or action, is connected to many other facts, possible statements and possible actions. Explicit messages have implicit messages which are far more complex than the explicit message itself: any message is merely the nodal point of a whole network of related items. Few of us oversee these structures beyond the nearest of implications; our consciousness tends to be focused narrowly rather than broadly. Even so most of us much of the time are aware of some of the wider ramifications of our situation. We cannot completely ignore them whether we actively reflect on them or not, because we are at the centre of this web of connections. We are intrinsically linked to these things outside of us: we are part of the system and it is part of us: we know it in ourselves and our bodies. But to posit that such processes happen in the unconscious does not help us at all in getting a grip on what is essentially still a mysterious aspect of being human. It merely mystifies it further and puts it out of our reach. We know that there are wheels within wheels and that situations and relationships and motivations can be endlessly opened up to reveal new aspects. It helps to be aware of that folded over, mysterious aspect of reality and be open to explore it, rather than to dismiss it once and for all as part of the unconscious. It is certainly important to find as many connections as possible and oversee our lives as best we can. This may even be one of the greatest challenges of a human life. Our quality of living becomes far greater as we become capable of such moments of vision where the past, present and future connections of life come together

in our minds. But such connections are never merely linear, they are rather multiple and intricate chains of interconnections, like the connections between the neurones in the brain, or the social connections between individuals.

The realm of the unknown

It remains therefore mysterious how such connections work and why there are sometimes coincidences and synchronicities that make us feel there are unknown forces of fate and destiny that guide us. Humankind is limited in its knowledge and understanding of the universe. We are woefully inadequate at explaining much of what life is about, even though we like to focus on those things that we do explain (although we do not necessarily understand them). We know only as much as we have been able to experience, explore, investigate, and make sense of, and that is probably relatively little altogether. There are universes upon universes of mystery left. The sky is literally the limit, for far from taking us back into our humble beginnings as animals, this kind of 'unconscious' domain takes us right up to the stars and planets and the possibility of the existence of different worlds beyond the one we know. We may well wonder what effects the universe has upon us of which we are not cognisant. The unknown includes all phenomena that scientists have stumbled upon, but are unable to explain, as well as some phenomena about which we have not even begun to think or even imagine, but which undoubtedly rule us. We would do well to leave ample room for uncertainty on this score, instead of assuming that we have scoured the universe and described all natural phenomena within our grasp sufficiently well to know what makes and breaks humanity. For many people this aspect of the unknown is at the level of religion and is referred to as the divine, the transcendental, or the spiritual. People, in an attempt to describe the ineffable, conjure up all kinds of concepts, including that of God or the unconscious. The notion of living in harmony with the unknown forces that control our destiny, either from the skies or from our mysterious insides, is not such a stupid one. Pretending that one can know about these things with relative certainty or interpret them to others is quite a different matter. Authors like Jung (Samuels 1985) and Assagioli (1975) do us a favour when they draw our attention to the realm of the supra-human, but unfortunately they have made it sound as if they were able to know about this realm with a kind of certitude, in an almost scientific manner.

It is not so much a matter of taking up an agnostic position, but rather one of semi-certainty that I will always have to leave a large margin for doubt and mystery, if I am to do justice to the unknown. For I will never fully capture what is beyond my ken and for as long as I live I will have to allow for the limits of human knowledge. It may be simply a matter of scale. We know about those things that are on a human scale, but much of the universe is smaller or larger than that. We have only the merest hint of insight into what

we are unaware of out there. I personally think this is a rather pleasant thought, which limits our need to take control over everything under the sun.

The unseen or the intuitive

Even in the everyday activities we accomplish there are plenty of things we cannot grasp, not distinctly see, although they affect us. Such mysterious unseen forces are at work in our lives all the time. For instance, the particular quality of intensity with which I approach a dog or a child in the street will make that dog bark or wag his tail at me and that child either smile or cringe from me. The attitude that I muster when I lecture will light a spark in my students, or bore them to tears and put them off the subject for ever. Such effects cannot simply be reduced to the tone of my voice and the facts that I amass, but are related to a complex totality of a number of things, including the confidence I have in myself and in others, my engagement with the subject, the vision I have of what I am doing and the passion I muster.

These facts and qualities are so complex and over-determined that we often only recognise them through the effect they have upon others. Some people would like to refer to these phenomena as intuition. Intuitive action is perhaps our ability to tune into signals of unseen, unheard, unsmelled, untouched, untasted realities that touch us in spite of ourselves in an immediate way that we have so far not accounted for. It leaves open the possibility of extra-sensory perception, which may simply refer to perception by a sense that we have not yet been able to locate. Alternatively, this sixth sense may refer to the ability to combine and interpret information that has reached us through our five senses, but that only becomes meaningful when it is totalled in a particular way allowing new connections to be made. The sixth sense may therefore simply be that of mindful but direct and immediate processing of the other senses. In addition we have the capacity for perceiving pain, balance, our inner state (through proprioception), time, temperature and direction. This means that the processing of information in a rapid fashion by our intuition (i.e. non-reflective consciousness), is going on constantly and takes into account a lot of facts. Perhaps our sixth sense is far more indispensable and a more prominent part of consciousness than we normally like to give it credit for.

The hidden and the obscured

If, as Heidegger suggested, consciousness is like a light that we shine upon things, it is inevitable that by directing our consciousness to things we create a shadow effect at the same time. Objects cast a shadow and by elucidating one thing I necessarily obscure another. When I focus on one aspect of my character, I leave the other side of that same coin in the shade. This does not mean it is unconscious; it simply means it is not in focus, or rather is being

obscured, for the moment. Jung's notion of the shadow, or the hidden strength of character that I may draw on secretly though I show myself in the opposite light, is one example of this phenomenon – although a focus on shadow aspects would automatically render the previously lit side into the new shadow side, something not considered by Jung. His insight into the male or female counterpart to our habitual and natural mode of being is another aspect. But Adler's notion that inferiority feelings lie behind all striving is another example of this same rule of thumb. Wherever one thing is emphasised and in evidence, the opposite is by the same token present in the background. The same principle underlies the Shakespearian recognition that those who protest too much may thereby be hiding an opposite sentiment. An affirmation leaves the negation neglected, a negation calls out for a recognition of the possibility of affirmation. From an existential perspective, this is of course the principle of paradox, an omnipresent and essential aspect of life. Where there are tears, one watches for the joy that was lost or the joy that is aspired to. Where there is strength, one searches for the weakness it aimed to overcome. Where there is weakness, one looks out for the strength it calls out for or is in itself already an expression of. None of these aspects need to be relegated to an unconscious, they can be seen as the play of light and dark, and as necessary counterpart to our varied uses of our many layered consciousness.

The subliminal and the supraliminal

Human perception and human consciousness have a certain limited scope. Many phenomena are simply out of the range of our sensory perception. We cannot hear anything above or below a certain range of tone, and we cannot see anything that is outside of the range between infra-red and ultra-violet. We tend to focus on the middle range of phenomena available to us, and every individual has a personal range within which experience comes more easily. Nevertheless, we are capable of picking up signals from outside our range and so, for instance, micro-messages embedded in advertisements may speak to us while we are focused on the macro-message. A voice that we vaguely hear in the distance, or a familiar shape that brushes our horizon, may have an effect on us in spite of ourselves. We may be inexplicably reminded of someone just by such a fragment of subliminal awareness that we have not noted as it was outside our usual range. These are all phenomena of subliminal or supraliminal perception; they are happenings that stretch us just a little beyond our habitual focus and allow us to include in our field of observation things that we do not actively take in. The passivity of this experience, and the non-focal nature of it, may lead us to conclude that these are subconscious or unconscious experiences, but this should not condemn us to relegate them into the, by now, overburdened realm of the unconscious.

The contextual and systemic

Human meaning does not just lie inside of ourselves, it comes about to a large extent because of our interrelations with the world and with others. Putnam once wrote: 'Whichever way you cut the pie, "meanings" just ain't in the head' (Putnam 1975: 292). The externalistic view of the mind is usually ignored by therapists who tend to focus on the concept of an internal world. Nevertheless, they cannot deny that many of the structures of meaning that we function within are social ones, or cultural ones. This is something we have to take into account.

When I walk into a room, I pick up an atmosphere that is created by the particular way in which the house is built, the furniture is arranged and the colours are combined. I also pick up on the smells, and on the general quality of the air, and the distance between objects – the particular combinations of factors that I am exposed to. This kind of human environment conveys messages to me that I compute without necessarily reflecting upon what I am computing. Similarly, the way in which groups of people relate to each other is construed of manifold messages that refer to specific cultural codes and conventions and that have instant effects on me. These contextual, cultural, systemic and structural elements happen outside of myself, for they are part of my environment. They are the background against which I define myself and they determine me in many ways, either by drawing me in and making me conform, or by rejecting me and therefore making me respond in contradistinction and reaction. The process that determines my response is complex and largely automatic, but I can learn to detect it and sensitise myself to it. I do not do it justice if I think of it as an internal process, as an unconscious process. This deprives me of the benefit of seeing the functional side of things and to recognise that there is something relational and consensual that is happening. It is therefore important to reclaim this area of unconscious process as yet another aspect of complex consciousness and human relations, and not let it be obscured and relegated into the usual dumping ground of the unconscious. This is what is referred to as embodied intersubjectivity in phenomenological thinking.

Etcetera, etcetera

It must be abundantly obvious by now that using the term 'the unconscious' can be an excuse for not examining human reality carefully. Shunting things away into a colourless depth is not a desirable way to proceed if we are serious about understanding being in the world. The unconscious gets the blame for everything that we do not wish to have to clarify and understand. Anything that is automatic – or complex, or preverbal, or causal, or veiled – gets called 'unconscious'. It is a handy concept, and a useful confidence trick to be able to employ it so blithely, but I think it is about time we gave up this easy

catch-all terminology and allow ourselves some sharper self-examination. It is striking that many of the things that psychoanalysts refer to as unconscious are the same things that behaviourists refer to as either instinctual or learnt behaviour. As I have already shown, these are merely two small, and rather better known, aspects of the whole range of mysterious phenomena that humans have not yet accounted for.

It is a pity that concepts such as the unconscious, which once served a purpose of drawing the attention to missing levels of awareness, get used in such imprecise ways. It is still all too frequent that one is reproached for slipping on a word or forgetting someone's name as if this was a sin committed by one's unconscious. The man who forgets his umbrella in his analyst's office is terrified to be told that he wants to attack his analyst and invade his privacy with his phallus, when the poor man may just have been so pre-occupied with the discussion in the session that his attention was simply not on retrieving his umbrella at that moment. Even Freud knew the dangers of getting caught up in one's psychoanalytic interpretations when he said that sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

I had a telling experience of this kind at some point in my past, when I went to Durham to give a talk at the university and twice in a row left the text of my speech in the toilet, once before the dinner that followed my speech and once after it. This forgetfulness was not to be dismissed either as insignificant or as an expression of an unconscious desire. I prefer to look at it as the manifestation of my particular attitude to the world. It was an effect of me, acting in a certain, intentional manner. This manner was intelligent and intelligible, though entirely automatic and rather comical. When I retrieve my actions sequentially it goes like this.

I finish my lecture and the subsequent answering of questions and begin to relax as soon as my public performance is over. I go to the loo, literally to relieve myself and my whole intention is on the letting go of my tension. I feel like clapping, singing and shouting, for I have done my bit and done it rather well. The build-up of weeks of preparation, the process of travelling here and gearing up for the lecture has come to its natural end. I am ready to relinquish the sharp attention I kept up while preparing and delivering my speech. I go to relieve myself, and then wash my hands – all of my actions are cleansing and releasing ones. In tune with this, I deposit my paper out of reach on the window-sill and look at it with some satisfaction. It is well placed there; safely lodged in that light corner. I am dimly aware of the finality of my gesture and experience satisfaction in it. I think: 'Ah, yes, now some nice warm water on my hands – the soap, what a delightful smell – I could do with some nice wine too, I hope it is a good dinner.' With this thought my attention slips into a new gear. I begin to alert myself to what is to come, something I have not given a thought to, because up till now all of my attention was reserved for the task of giving the paper. I begin to check my hair and put on some lipstick, in order to make a decent impression at the dinner. I shift into social

behaviour and I look in the side mirror as I dry my hands, where I can see my whole self reflected. My thoughts are drifting towards my companions for the evening as I am joined by one of them. We laugh about something, I clutch my bag, zip it up and walk out of the toilets with my colleague. When I enter the dining room, I check myself and mentally return to my previous point of checking myself when I went from my room to the lecture hall. I had a paper with me then to look after, as well as a handbag. Where is it now? A sense of loss and one second of panic, then a clear memory of posing it nicely on the window-sill in the toilets, where it fitted so well and relieved me so neatly. I hurry to collect it, pleased with myself both for the forgetting and the remembering, laughing out loud at my own clumsiness, looking forward to regaling my husband with the tale. When I return to the toilet after the dinner, I deposit the paper in exactly the same place, with a vengeance, chuckling as I do so and again getting absorbed in the water and soap and the mirror, then in thoughts about the Senior Common Room and discussions I have just had. I leave the room and in it, once more, the paper. It is a measure of carelessness which is directly in line with my shifting priorities. I want to discard the worry of the talk and I want to be free-handed and uncluttered for the social interaction in which I am now engaged. I am concerned with my appearance rather than with the academic paper. It is a total shift in focus that produces the predictable result of another abandoned paper. I literally am ready to leave it in the bin. Although I would accept that my consciousness shifted into a new direction, and that I therefore became unconscious of my paper, I would not accept that the forgetting had a deliberate and mysterious, wilful, unconscious element. Unconsciousness, in this case, is to be seen as the mere negative of consciousness, and the nub of understanding the event is that of my shifting attention and purpose, not that of some secret motivation. My intentionality had deliberately shifted from caring for the paper to wanting to be done with it and leave it behind.

When other people forget umbrellas or briefcases or books in my office, I do not conclude that they wish to inhabit my office, or attack me, or feel they owe me something. I merely conclude that they have been distracted by our conversation and that the intensity of the exchange has focused their attention on other matters. This keeps them from collecting their belongings. It is a phenomenon close to that of trance or hypnosis – the mind concentrates exclusively on one object at the exclusion of all others. The interesting exploration is to see what the mind is so focused on and why. The occurrence is still deeply meaningful and can be described and understood. Rather than it throwing light on some dark and secret motivations, it will reveal the person's way of being in the world and it will disclose the priorities in their life.

Therapeutic dialogue

All real living is meeting.

(Buber 1997: 15)

Introduction

If we accept that psychotherapy is about life, and that life is essentially mysterious and beyond the scope of absolute knowledge, it follows that we need to come to the therapeutic relationship in an open and questioning manner. As therapists, we need to foster an attitude of wonder about human existence. We should be willing to explore together with our clients the particular conditions of living and the specific responses to these conditions experienced by them. We should place as few obstacles in the way of this exploration as we can. We should make ourselves available and let ourselves be stretched beyond the limits of our own preoccupations and considerations. We should train ourselves to become more and more flexible so as to extend ourselves beyond the scope of our usual worldview. We should, in other words, bracket our prejudice about the world and come to the therapeutic relationship willing to be drawn into the world of our client and actively relate to it in order to learn to make sense of it. This is a collaborative venture.

It is not an easy option because it is unlikely that we will ever succeed in understanding exactly how our clients experience the world. Human beings always remain a mystery to each other to some extent. We should therefore not worry overmuch about getting drawn in too closely, for it is much more likely that we will find it hard to get close enough to fully appreciate the other's world. We should however always ensure that we are able to return to our own point of view after having approximated our client's. The objective is not to merge, but rather to understand to the best of our abilities what goes on in their heart, mind, soul and life. We should, in other words, be prepared to stand in the tension between the other's perceptions of reality and our own point of view.

Existential work is known for taking a dialogic approach to psychotherapy. Existential therapists talk with their clients: they enter into dialogue, even into philosophical discussion and argument. They venture into the exploration of the other's world experience as if they were going into unknown territory, and they are willing to do so without hiding behind theories, ideas, interpretations or ready-made solutions. This coming together with the client is what was referred to in previous chapters as co-presence. Such co-presence, when experienced to the full, has the capacity of transforming a situation and a worldview. It is a powerful use of intersubjectivity and provides the clarity of a shared intensity and in the round exploration of one person's predicament, until the significance of this is fully understood and absorbed. The therapist provides a fundamental attitude of availability for a concrete therapeutic interaction which gradually unfolds. We will now consider the parameters of this interaction.

Backdrop to the therapeutic dialogue

Classical forms of therapy have emphasised the problems that arise when clients get emotionally involved with their therapist, and also when the therapist gets emotionally involved with the client. There is much evidence from a century of psychotherapy that the realities of what is usually referred to as 'transference' and 'counter-transference' can be neglected only at one's peril. Even when we work mainly cognitively or try to maintain our distance we cannot neglect what occurs in the therapeutic relationship, since it gives us many clues about the client's experience and way of looking at the world and being with others. Existential work can be no exception to the rules of human relationships which dictate that where two people interact, specific dynamics between them evolve. To think of those dynamics in the narrow terms of transference and counter-transference is less useful, even though of course these concepts have been extended and elaborated over the years by many and varied authors. The issues have become so complex and confused (Holmes 2005) that it helps to look afresh at the dynamics involved, this time from an existential perspective. We shall then first look at the therapist's response to the client and call it therapist bias rather than counter-transference. Then we shall look at the issues surrounding the client's response to the therapist and call it client bias rather than transference. We shall see that each of these biases is a complex phenomenon which is composed of many facets.

Therapist bias

In the process of reaching out to our client, we inevitably interpose our own biases and distorted perspective with regards to the client's experience. We can use our response to clarify both our own and their point of view. The

old notions of counter-transference, as they have been explored by many different authors, are useful in understanding our contribution to the therapeutic process, and an existential therapist needs to study them in order to get a broad view of the subject. The concept of counter-transference can then be replaced with the more simple idea of therapist bias. This posits the principle that our relation to another is always biased in some way and that it is important for the therapist to be aware of this bias. It takes away the notion that there is anything wrong or pathological with us responding in such a way. It also eliminates the attractive but illusory notion that we could ever take a neutral stance towards any client, or that we could possibly ever clarify our own attitude towards others so much that we might be free of interference in our response to another. There is no doubt that our relationships and views will always be partial and biased. The notion of counter-transference is weighed down with so many controversial connotations that it seems unnecessary to burden ourselves with it. Phenomenology can guide our awareness of the bias we bring to the relationship. If we are willing simply to recognise that our work is inevitably selective and distorted by our own biases and personal perspectives on the world, we can usefully begin to make some distinctions between different levels of distortions.

We can distinguish the following components in the distortions that we experience in our relationship to our client, or indeed to other people in general.

Therapist's attitude

The first aspect of therapist bias is attitude. Attitude is the bias that we bring to a relationship because of the person we are and the experience we have had. The experiences that we have not had, and that we have missed to date, are in some ways just as important. Our attitude is constituted of the sum total of previous experiences that we have had, subtracted by the experiences we have not had. In this, it is the way in which we have responded to these previous experiences that determines our current attitude, rather than the experiences per se. Our genetic make-up and our physical and mental constitution greatly influence the way in which we experience the world and, no matter how rich our experience, we are always inclined to respond in particular ways to it. We also tend to assume that others will respond to the same experience in a similar way, but this is often untrue.

One of the objectives of therapy is for our clients to gain an understanding of their particular attitude, recognising the patterns of experience that are characteristic for them, as well as the ways in which these can be altered by new experiences and new understanding. It is always possible to gently mould and reshape our attitude as we learn new things about ourselves and the world. We can put our particular modalities of being in the world to better use by observing both ourselves and the world around us, and learn from

experience to adapt better to circumstances, making the most of what we have and what we are.

Reshaping one's attitude in a particularly flexible manner is the first requirement of being a psychotherapist. The fact that we learn more about ourselves and others with every client we work with is one of the most satisfactory aspects of being a psychotherapist. We need to learn to respect our strengths and weaknesses and find ways of expanding our repertoire and view of the world to make it accommodate to as many situations and people as possible. We need to increase our capacity for understanding continuously by experiencing and reading widely. There is little doubt that the best training on this score is that of having had a rich and varied life, while having honed one's ability to reflect on this experience. With maturity comes the ability to transpose one form of experience to another. We may not have had the exact experience as our client, but we may have had some experience that at least allows us to resonate with it in broad terms. It is important, however, to remain aware of the limits of transposition. No matter how experienced we are, we are always limited in our attitude towards others and there are always blind spots in our understanding of their precise situation.

Therapist's orientation

The second aspect of therapist bias is that of our orientation. Orientation is the bias that we bring because of our particular therapeutic beliefs and theoretical framework. It is often related to our temperament and attitude, as we choose an orientation that is particularly helpful in relation to our own preoccupations and difficulties, and that provides an explanatory system and belief system that satisfied our own queries and uncertainties best. This orientation of ours puts everything we hear and see into a particular perspective, which is necessarily selective. The views and beliefs that we hold are like a sieve through which we process all the material, letting some things slip through the net and retrieving others for greater scrutiny. Our own orientation can all too often become an excuse for colouring the client's experience in a particular way, disabling us from allowing it full play and display. An example of this is the bias of the existential approach, which seeks out the client's tragedies and dramas, values and opinions rather than focusing on the sexuality or the archetypes as, respectively, a Freudian or a Jungian might be inclined to do. There is no doubt in my mind at all that I have espoused this approach, as I have a tendency to see life in this light and because I experience things strongly and dramatically and feel compelled to find a purpose on my way in order to capture and make sense of this tragic-comedy of life. Ultimately I have opted for existential therapy because I have always found life rather hard and have wanted to figure out how to live better. Inevitably, I bring such a bias, such desire to frame other people's experience in this stark expressive manner and I find it easier to work with clients who

share my assumption that life is difficult, though I find clients who love life a joy to be with.

Therapist's state of mind

The third aspect of therapist bias is our state of mind. This is the bias that we bring because of the feelings we carry with us in relation to the particular events happening in our own life. Our state of mind is obviously influenced by our general attitude to the world, and indeed may be shaped by our theoretical appraisal of events, but it is a specific momentary expression of our particular feeling and orientation towards the world. To learn to recognise that we are fickle and reactive in this manner is important and sometimes difficult to do. We do conduct ourselves differently and take a different view of matters according to our own state of mind and the particular mood we are in, and we often underestimate this fact. To be a worthy existential therapist, we are required to be observant of the fluctuations that happen in ourselves during the course of a day, week or month, in relation to small and insignificant events and experiences as they occur, as well as in relation to the larger oscillations of our lives. Some of us have a more steady temperament than others. Some of us are more sensitive to changing atmospheres and influences, but all of us respond to our environment and take our new mood into the next moment. Consistent self-observation in a disciplined manner can tell us much about our responses, and in this way we can learn to read ourselves, as a barometer, to recognise the high and low atmospheric pressures to which we are exposed and respond to. We can use these self observations in our work since they allow us to be much more self-aware. It is also something we can usefully teach our clients to do for themselves.

Therapist's reaction

The final aspect of therapist bias is that of our current reaction to the client. This is the immediate response that we bring to bear because we are confronted with this particular client, who triggers off these specific aspects of our own experience and therefore this particular way of responding. Different clients have different effects on us and we can learn to recognise the particular effect each person has on us. It is in the interaction with each individual that we learn new things about our own response, but also that we learn to recognise the peculiarities of different individuals. Everyday each one of our clients surprises us and challenges our understanding of the world. We are drawn into a specific new atmosphere with every client who sits in our chair or lies on our couch. We respond in the way we do, not just because of what we are, but also because of what they are. The way in which we respond, therefore, can teach us lessons about the client as well as lessons about ourselves. The trick is to distinguish between what is part of our own response and what is

generated by the client. As the two are intertwined, this is by no means easy to do. It may be more useful to think of the interaction as taking place in a bi-personal field (Baranger and Baranger 1966). We need to ask ourselves whether the effect this client has on us is likely to be the same for another person, or whether it is largely a function of our own attitude, state of mind or orientation, or a combination of those factors. It is only after having attended to all the aspects of our own response that we are responsible for in ourselves that we can consider the effect that our client has on us, and it is only then that we can even begin to be open to the client's response and bias to us.

The client's bias

Clients relate to therapists in the same complex, layered manner in which therapists relate to clients. There is no reason to assume that there is any essential difference, apart from the fact that one might expect the client to be less experienced and expert at being aware of and reflecting upon the process of relating that occurs. Therefore, it will be one of the main tasks of therapists to be able to keep track of the intricacies of both their own relational process and that of the client. To gradually make this process accessible to the client and teach the client to recognise it, grasp it, and learn to articulate it, is an essential part of the learning in therapy. Clients will go through a similar process that the trainee therapist goes through: that of recognising and learning to work with the various forms of interference to open communication. These are essential lessons that they will carry forward with them for the rest of their lives.

The process of transferring, or rather that of displacing and generalising previous emotional attitudes onto the therapist, is a rather narrow focus for understanding the broad process of client response. We are better served by an overall recognition of the various aspects and components that go into the client's bias to the therapist.

Client's attitude

The first aspect of our client's bias is that of their general attitude. We need to work with clients to enable them to understand their own attitude towards the world. Every story that clients tell you is a mine of information about their overall attitude. The way in which they talk about other people is an illustration of their typical response to others. Every remark, no matter how insignificant on the surface, reveals new opinions, values and a general orientation towards the world. It is not easy for a person to observe her own attitude, let alone to acknowledge and understand it. It will be helpful, therefore, to use the therapeutic relationship as a vehicle for the recognition of such attitudes.

When drawing clients' attention to the attitude that they are exhibiting towards the therapist or the therapy, however, we must keep in mind that this attitude may be partially a reaction to our own attitude. It is never easy to determine what belongs where and we have to be open to the client's views at all times. It is not our job to impose our views of what the client's attitude is, nor to challenge or criticise it, but rather to help her observe and explore it for herself and learn to be in tune with it. If the attitude is out of tune with the world and the facts of life, then the client will be encouraged to reassess this in a gradual way. This may mean challenging the client's attitude and pointing out discrepancies in relation to the current possibilities and limitations of the situation. In doing so though we need to retain an inner flexibility and remain open to the possibility that we are misjudging the situation and assessing the client from our own perspective rather than from theirs.

Client's orientation

The second aspect of client bias is that of their orientation. It is always important to help clients to look out for their own ideology and become aware of the ways in which they underpin their perceptions of reality and shape their experience. It is easier to help them see first what their attitude to life is, but soon they will be ready to become aware of the way in which they approach the therapeutic situation and their therapist as well. Here, it is the general belief system of the client that we focus on rather than their personal characteristics. We look for the person's overall connection to the world, their intentionality and, in Sartre's terminology, their original project. It is the ideology that influences attitude to a large extent and, of course, ideology is often linked to particular genetic aptitudes and inclinations. For instance, it may be intrinsic to a person to need a great deal of order in everyday life, and this need may consequently become attached to a belief in a particular dogma that can underpin life with just such a structure. In addressing this belief system, we need to be careful not to dismiss it as unnecessary or, worse, as pathological. There may be excellent reasons why the client has such a belief system, and though we may draw attention to the impact it has on their overall quality of life, we should also respect the needs that are satisfied by it and that therefore justify it amply for the person. It is crucial for therapists to estimate any ideologies that are implicit or explicit in the client's orientation at their true value. They are often the backbone of a person's existence and should not be too easily dismissed or considered redundant.

Client's state of mind

In the third place and just as with the therapist, or indeed everyone else in the world, clients find themselves in a particular state of mind at any point in time and this forms part of their current bias. It is important, therefore, to

gauge that state of mind as they enter the session, and to monitor its alteration during the course of the session in relation to the events that take place and the material that is being discussed. Therapists should neither assume that the mood of the client is a direct reflection of the therapeutic relationship and the way in which the client currently experiences it, nor should they assume this not to be the case. It is most likely that it will be produced by a combination of internal and external factors. Helping clients to monitor their states of mind and their sources is an intrinsic part of existential therapy. It is crucial in getting a grip on one's experience. To learn to recognise and articulate a state of mind and to begin to unravel its components is an important step forward on the road towards emotional autonomy.

Client's reaction

Finally the fourth facet of client bias is their reaction to the therapist and the therapy itself. The reaction that the client exhibits in response to therapist interventions, or lack of interventions, must be recognised as such and must not be confused with the material that they came in with. Therapists gain much professionalism once they are able to acknowledge the impact that their own words, behaviour and attitudes have on clients. It is a good rule of thumb to begin every session with the expectation that sooner or later one will rub clients the wrong way, and to work with a constant awareness of one's own inevitable limitations. Clients are our supervisors, or even therapists, in this sense (Searles 1975; Langs 1978; Casement 1985; Smith 1991) and, if we are willing to learn from their comments and response to us, we can improve our work tremendously. However, it is equally important to recognise how our different clients use their emotional response to our characteristic failings in different ways. The challenge that our work represents for them can be taken up, rejected, engaged with or used as an excuse for fighting us. While we have a duty to try and overcome our difficulties in relating to specific clients we should at, the same time, be ready to see the client's response as instructive in terms of the client's usual mode of operating.

This leads us to considering the actual interaction between the therapist and the client.

The interaction: the in-between that we create

Only when we have begun to recognise the various obstacles to open communication described above, can we begin to hope to establish any valid contact with our clients at all. Once we unravel some of the threads that bring us together with others, we can begin to consider how these can be more artfully woven together. We can never afford to neglect therapist and client bias, but we should not reduce therapeutic interaction to these phenomena, which are no more than our conceptualisation of what is in fact an interference with

the therapeutic process. Having dealt with the interferences, we need to move into the dialogue itself, and this is where we realise that this, too, exists to a large extent of misunderstanding.

In some ways, all human communication is based on error and difference (Derrida 1967b; Lacan 1977). Mishaps and confusions bind us together as well as keep us apart. We transmit to each other our own version of reality, and we never mean exactly the same thing as any other human being. Much of the time we do not even manage to convey our meaning very well at all. So often we fail to appreciate each other's intentions. Our communications with each other are coloured in a certain way and have a particular tone and rhythm. The message that we try to convey never fully reaches its destination and is merely translated into compatible language by the other. In mutually adjusting to each other in dialogue, we create a relationship that is based on what we can give of ourselves and that is compatible with the other at the same time. With all its limitations, what we offer of ourselves therefore is both an obstacle and a favour. What we receive is both interference and gift.

It is very easy to let our limitations reach the other in an oppressive way. To some extent, we attempt to mould the other to our own experience, imposing our message upon them. As psychotherapists, we have to have the discipline of going out towards the other with the explicit intention of cooperation. When I do not rob you of your space and you do not rob me of mine, a new, more open, space between us is created and in this we can generate interaction. This is the in-between that Martin Buber spoke about so eloquently. If we are willing to see human communication no longer as a desperate attempt at getting through to the other in order to influence and convince, but rather as a mutual attempt at creating something out of what both parties have to offer, an entirely new dimension of communication unfolds.

I no longer have to strive to defend myself from being altered by you. I no longer have to aim for altering you. I can safely venture forward towards the new space that we inhabit together, and I can meet you there in order to weave a new world out of what we both have to offer. In the therapeutic context, this means that we must enable the client to be drawn out of the defensive bulwark from where communication is hazarded out on to the other in defensive or offensive moves. We must create a space and time where it is clear that we put our cards on the table in order to play with what we have got, rather than in order to observe, judge and attack.

Of course the in-between is created by default most of the time, and may be tilted more towards one or the other of the parties in the exchange. The territory occupied and cultivated by the interaction may be held by one of the protagonists and, in this case, the other may be only tolerated on it. We all have this experience of being drawn into another's space, being made to feel ignorant or defective in some way because of the other's masterful manipulation of the field on which we meet. The end result of such an encounter is often that we give in to the other's ownership of the space, giving up on real

communication, ending up merely relating in a submissive manner, as if we had nothing to contribute of our own. Alternatively, as Sartre observed, we may withdraw from the interaction entirely and content ourselves with a restricted space, confined to what we perceive as the space inside of ourselves, or alternatively we may move away all together and turn to a space occupied or created with others that are more congenial. Or of course we may refuse to play and remain alone. It is clearly unprofessional if such a situation should arise between client and therapist; it is an aspect of therapist bias, which clearly needs to be carefully monitored and examined. In principle, psychotherapists should be capable of recognising that the territory to be cultivated in the sessions is to be cultivated for the client's benefit: it is an experiment in relating from which the client is to learn about relating in the outside world. In all cases, therefore, it would be wrong for the therapist to interfere with proper joint use of the space. Any take-over bids coming from the therapist, attempting to impose certain norms and standards for what is being created by the client, should therefore be seen as therapeutic failings. The therapist, who imposes a worldview, or an interpretation, is abusive and in the wrong. The therapist, who forces the client to retreat into an inner world, rather than drawing the client out into the safety of the shared field, is missing the point of the encounter. The therapist who battles with the client in order to win an argument has misunderstood the objective of the work. The therapist who fails to challenge the client when he or she assumes that no communication is necessary or possible is equally wrong-footed.

Therapists must recognise the constant pull between clients hiding in separate worlds, venturing out to conquer the communicative territory, or coming to the therapist with the desire to be kept safe in the therapist's matrix and relationship space (Gill 1985). Therapists must equally recognise these forces as they manifest within their own part of the communication. Refocusing the interchange so that it gets pulled back into the intermediate arena, where true cooperative work can happen, is the constant role of safekeeping that the therapist must take on.

The therapist must therefore be real and open to the actual reality of the interchange between the two parties. She must use her abilities to examine the power relation between them and even out the power so as to enable the client as best as possible by retreating into silence, or else by challenging the client's brashness.

Silence

The first task of the therapeutic interaction is to allow clients to come out of their shell and venture into the in-between. After the psychotherapist has clearly defined the availability for this in-between space and has explained something about the way in which they will proceed together, it is crucial to leave the space open to the client. Welcoming silence will be one of the most

significant interventions that the existential psychotherapist will use, both before dialogue becomes possible, and as essential breathing space within established dialogue. Psychotherapists are there primarily to listen and be receptive, and they have to learn to be extremely disciplined about allowing clients the freedom to come forward and occupy the therapeutic space in the way they choose.

Many training courses focus far too much on making verbal interventions, and do not concentrate enough on the fundamental quality of attentiveness without which no discourse will make sense. There is nothing more simple than to ask lots of questions of the client, or make interpretations to the client, but very few of them are to the point and relevant in moving the dialogue on. We need to learn to be sparse in our interventions, and to restrict them to when they seem clearly warranted. Too much empathy and mollycoddling spoil the client's initiative and hard work as much as too many confrontations and too much probing.

Good and experienced therapists learn to play a session like a piece of music, following a natural rhythm and interspersing music and pauses. They learn to hear the client's discourse and silence, and appreciate the atmosphere created. Silence allows clients to collect their thoughts and get a sense of where they are, without being prompted in a particular direction. Mute being together is, therefore, the backdrop to much of what goes on in the interventions that constitute the dialogue on the part of the therapist.

Questions

In spite of this emphasis on togetherness, silence and understanding, existential psychotherapists are not required to refrain from asking questions. Questions are a natural part of any exchange between two people and they should not be avoided, but nevertheless they need to be restored to their rightful place. On the whole, it is more effective to point out to clients what they are already saying, but have not made explicit, than to ask them for more information or further exploration. This can be done effectively only if the psychotherapist is listening for what is between the lines and for what is implicit in what is said. We make use of maïeutic (midwifery) questioning to bring out what is already implicit in the discourse. Subtexts, assumptions and implications are lifted out of the client's words and noted. The implicit is stated explicitly, or teased out with hints, gestures, symbols or metaphors. Therefore, many of the therapist's interventions will be of the order of observations, often made with a question mark at the end. So we may say something like: 'You seem to be implying that it would be hard for you to face up to this situation?' or, 'So that is what you do when you panic; you turn to God?' or, 'It would not really be acceptable to you if they treated you like that, would it, even though you say you would stomach it?' These are not questions as such, but rather observations about things that are not immediately obvious in the

client's discourse, but that nevertheless are revealed by implication in what is said or the way in which it is said, and that are well worth exploring further. Asking more factual questions is often a way of avoiding the subtext of what already has been said. Most importantly all our interventions are couched in such a way that the client is made aware of their own knowledge, their own ability, their own capacity for drawing conclusions. Our Socratic questioning is done to serve the client rather than to show off our own prowess. It merely helps the other in finding the way towards self-knowledge and world understanding.

It is often useful to remember that, as the client's ally, many observation questions are a matter of guesswork: we do not know for sure that the client means what we suspect. Our observation is tentative and that is why it is put with a question mark – the question mark is an open invitation to further exploration, including that of contradiction of what we have said. Existential psychotherapists are open to such debate, rather than foreclosing it. There are few things that advance the investigation of the client's world as well as the therapist's venturing into an observation that leads to the client's correcting of what has been said and is then taken on into a new direction.

So in terms of asking questions of clients, we need to remember the basic rule: we ask the questions that are implied in the client's words, the ones already embedded in what they have said. We ask ourselves: What assumptions are implied in the statements my client makes? What are the themes? What are the values? What is the underlying worldview? What are the client's expectations? What is her attitude to this situation? What action is she taking or not taking? What hidden meanings does she take for granted? What mood is she in? What qualities of relationship are shining through her words? What contradictions are there in what she has said? What connections can be made? What consequences would follow if she pursued this course of action or thinking? What are the silent fantasies or unspoken dreams beyond all this?

Each of these questions, and many others, can be explored by hanging them on to statements that have been made and repeating them to the client for further examination. But we ask ourselves the question before we ask our client, so as not to have to bother our client with our ignorance and lack of sensitivity. We do not say: 'How do you feel about that?' but rather, 'That annoyed you, didn't it?' or better still, 'That must have triggered your old rebelliousness again?' We do not try to avoid closed questions to end up with empty open questions that leave clients at a loss. We say the things that connect us as closely as possible to what we deem to be the source of our client's preoccupations, and we do this by immersing ourselves in the process that they are describing, and that we respond to as lucidly and intensely as we can. And always we are ready to be contradicted, for as soon as the client takes up the challenge of thinking about their own thoughts and attitudes, we withdraw into a place of serving their thinking, allowing them to take the lead and set us straight.

Interpretations

There is a myth that existential psychotherapists are not permitted to make interpretations. It is true that it is not the objective to tie in a client's perceptions and experiences with a particular theoretical framework. We do not translate it in terms of particular pre-set concepts. So it would be as improper to state to a client that their concern is an expression of death anxiety, as it would be to suggest that it is the result of an Oedipal concern. Nevertheless, interpretations are an inevitable part of the therapeutic dialogue. As psychotherapists, we are constantly translating and transposing, connecting one statement to another, and making sense of the overall picture. Interpretation is the art of connecting individual statements and experiences to an overall story that makes sense of it all. The hermeneutic (i.e. interpretative) quest for truth is a search that never ends. It is also an active search that demands that we do not fear to take a stance. But there is a golden rule to hermeneutic investigations: we do not impose an already established and hermetically sealed circle of meaning, but allow the client to find her own meanings and create her own hermeneutic circle. The duty of the existential psychotherapist is to see to it that interpretations are made within the framework of meaning of the client, rather than within the framework of meaning of the therapist. The puzzle to be completed is the client's, not our own. As long as we keep that rule in mind, much of the literature on interpretation is useful to us. It is good to remember, therefore, that a successful interpretation always connects a statement with both its trigger and its implications. It shows the client how a particular action or experience made a logical connection between a triggering event and a desired outcome.

An interpretation is an explanation of the client's experience that makes sense of the connection between past and future:

You made that remark to your mother because you were exasperated with her for ignoring you, as she always used to, and in order to show her that you are now able to fight your own corner instead of letting her dominate you.

Such a making of new explicit connections, that are implicit in the action itself, is usually extremely satisfying to the client: it fits their experience into its proper place and makes room for improvement in their lives. If we make these kinds of connections by referring to theoretical entities, such as archetypes, or good breasts and bad breasts, or phallic objects, or the inner child or a particular schema, we interpose a new dimension of meaning and distract the client from coming to grips with personal experience.

Of course the employment of imagery and metaphor can be extremely useful and appropriate, but not if it comes from clichéd therapeutic concepts, applied without justification and pushing the client into conformity with

some pre-set notions of human reality. Interpretation should enhance a meaning rather than restrict or divert it. The use of stories and images and similes to illustrate the process that we observe the client going through is more effective if we draw on the client's own sources of imagination and expression, but it can be good too to introduce a new image, as long as this is not insisted upon too rigidly by the therapist and is let go of as soon as the client replaces it with a more appropriate personal message.

Dialogue as dialectics

Dialogue is only true dialogue if the participants work their way through an issue with intensity and proper consideration for what is at stake. The word 'dialogue' literally means 'to speak one's way through' (Deurzen-Smith 1992). Therefore, to conduct a proper dialogue would require one to uphold one side of an argument and then consider the opposite side and find a way forward that allows one to encompass both. The art of dialectics requires the therapist to be very steady and sure-footed, able to consider the opposite view of whatever the client asserts, and to systematically look for the missing link and the shadow side of an issue – the things that are not being said and the things that need considering still. To help the client tackle these things as well as their original position, and to find a way forward that helps them to include both, is a very important standard for the positive outcome of existential psychotherapy.

As has been argued in previous chapters, life is constituted of many complex strands, which can often be seen to be arranged in paradoxical oppositions. To encompass diversity and range in one's experience, gives solidity and flexibility and makes one able to be vitally concerned with the challenges of life and death. The existential psychotherapist, therefore, will monitor the therapeutic conversation in such a way as to include the implicit life issues that are being raised and contrast them with their opposites, their contrasting aspects, and their implications. The objective is never simply to reach some sort of middle-way or middle of the road compromise, nor to dilute the tensions implied in living, but rather to maximise one's ability to stand them, and allow them to span one's life from one end of the range we are capable of all the way through to the other.

The dynamic, multiple and changing self

Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

(I Corinthians 15:51)

Introduction

When a person specifically comes to an existential psychotherapist, it must be assumed that he or she is ready to face facets of life that have hitherto remained hidden. The very fact of entering into an agreement to reveal the most intimate aspects of one's life indicates a willingness to delve into oneself and the structures of existence. What is not so certain is whether the person is prepared to confront the less flattering and less reassuring aspects of life and self that will inevitably come to the fore.

It is all very well to want to take stock in the hope that someone else will be able to help you put some order in your life. It is quite a different matter when you discover during the stock-taking process that much of what you have accumulated has gone stale, and that even more is missing altogether or has never even been acquired. It is often tempting for people to seal their lives over at this point instead of getting on with the much needed reordering of what has been discovered to be lacking.

Evasion

This is precisely what existential psychotherapists will need to be willing to deal with: the general human reluctance to attend to urgent matters of life. Psychoanalysis refers to it as defence and resistance and recognises that the only way to work productively is to focus on the resistance itself. Resistance is too strong a word as it conjures up a battleground on which an attack is being warded off. Reluctance is a milder term that brings into sight the reasonable tendency to evade matters as long as they do not represent a direct threat to survival. Why should we struggle with complicated psychological and

emotional issues if we can get away from them by taking a shortcut, evading the conflict and ignoring the pressure?

Evasion is a sensible tactic that all human beings employ regularly, sometimes more successfully than at other times. If I can avoid looking at my own shortcomings – better still, if I can thrive on them – what is there to stop me doing so? As long as nobody says anything to challenge my tendency to slip to the front of the queue at the bus stop, I continue to do so. If, eventually, I am confronted by someone, I may pretend that I was entitled to be in this position rather than face up to my own bullying. My survival instincts tell me it is best to follow the path of least resistance. As long as I can get away with things, I will be inclined to do so. My self expands into every direction as long as there is space for expansion and does not meet undue opposition. There is no good adaptive reason for me to challenge my own habits and attitudes as long as these seem to serve me well. There is a process akin to inertia at work here: while we tend to expand into the world, we are inclined to take the path of least resistance and to stick to the pathways already developed, settling into complacency. This, of course, is often referred to by existential therapists as the process of sedimentation an example of which we have seen earlier. While the bus stop example illustrates the active component of this attitude of complacency, we live with many more passive sedimented attitudes that stand in the way of our progress, but that we allow to persist and fester in us for lack of courage to face up to them. We often hesitate to proactively create a new project, if it means having to self-reflect or take new action. Sometimes such sedimentation is temporarily useful and keeps us safe or even moves us on, but eventually it tends to become an obstacle as our attitude becomes rigid and counterproductive.

When we can no longer move freely enough or breathe deeply enough, when our very existence is threatened, when we are called into question, we begin to wonder again. And this wondering is always about reflection on what is right or wrong and it always has a component of self-questioning. These are the first steps towards transformation and transcendence. It may well be that these are the most important human qualities that take us way beyond biological advantage seeking towards dialectical living.

Those who come voluntarily for existential therapy have started wondering. They do know that there is something not quite right about their lives, but they will still tend to see this as the outcome of some kind of injustice that the world has committed in relation to them. If there is something wrong, it must be that something unfair has been committed. It is probably that our partner does not understand us, or that our employers do not give us a chance, or that our parents have fallen short in preparing us for life. Or perhaps it is simply because the world is too harsh and other people are too mean. We can think of many different reasons why our life has become unsatisfactory, and we hope that this therapist, whom we turn to for help, will be able to see through

the miseries that have befallen us, and will be capable of setting things right for us again, taking our side.

The principle of self-centredness

As organisms, we are primarily self-centred (May 1967, 1983), and it is in our nature and best interest to orientate ourselves towards the world with the assumption of our right and entitlement. Even the people who do not seem to believe in their own rights and entitlements, those who make themselves slaves and victims to others, those who live in an emotional ghetto, even those who live with a ghetto mentality that indicates that they feel that others have the right to use or abuse them. It has become their manner of operating to turn to the world with submission, but it is a self-effacement that is still predicated on the position of a self that is offered up to victimisation. The self they efface is an important, prominent self. The gift that they make of themselves is a calculated act of generosity, an investment on which they expect a moral or emotional return.

There is no point in regretting this fundamental egocentricity of humankind. Husserl showed that this is a pure fact of phenomenological reality: our consciousness is the point zero of all experience. Heidegger spoke of the mineness that makes us always the centre of the universe. Our point of view is essentially ours and everything else is situated around it. This is a given that cannot be counterbalanced by altruistic acts, for they are another expression of a selfish desire to be good and to be seen as charitable. Dawkins has shown quite convincingly how essentially this biological principle is written into our genes, whose selfishness is the sine qua non and purpose of our survival (Dawkins 1976). There is, however, a complementary principle to all this personal-centredness. As organisms, responsible for our own survival and adaptation to our environment, we are inserted into the wider patterns of nature and the universe. The principles that rule our own lives do not stop at the concept of selfish subsistence, but extend to that of the continuation and endurance of the systems of which we are a part. The principles of kinship and community, in other words, our sense of being similar to others and belonging with them, become more important as we gain more awareness of our role in relation to the overall context into which we are inserted. Our sense of individuality may be dependent on our ability to stand alone and defend our own interests against others, but, on the contrary, our sense of belonging and usefulness depends on the extent to which we can see ourselves playing a role in the global scheme of things. Adler's concept of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* refers to exactly these principles (Adler 1929).

Self-esteem and value

It is crucial for a person to have a sense of self-esteem, for without this it is not possible to stand up against the pressures around one. But mere subsistence or even expansion is not sufficient if our lives are going to be of value. Value can exist only in relation to exchanges between what is ours and what belongs elsewhere. Value comes from what I give up in order to gain something else. Value is determined by what the worth is of something. Value is generated in communal connectedness and inserts us into a wider pattern of society and, beyond that, to life. The limited value of our particular life is obvious to us from the start. Although we are, from birth onwards, firmly set in our own ways and centred in our own little world, we are also aware, right from the beginning, of the relativity of this centre of experience, and curious about the wider landscape of which we are a part. To become aware of the way in which we fit into the larger context, and to be shown the role that we play in it, can revolutionise our experience of ourselves. We come straight back to the importance of allowing ourselves a Copernican revolution of our emotional and moral existence. For much as we are centred in our own world, we are at the same time always only inserted into a much greater whole which was there long before us and will be still there long after we are gone. There is a kind of poetic justice in this recognition of the infinite that transcends us and there can be a great sense of relief in the recognition of our own limited importance, for it alleviates the strong sense of responsibility and guilt that come with our sense of self-importance.

Indeed it can alter people's outlook on the world when they realise, not in some kind of abstract manner but through personal experience that they are part of a wider pattern, which they may obtain succour and support from, or which they may vainly try to combat. Such insight may lead to recognising ways in which we can relinquish our strife and let essential principles of life define the contribution that we can make to the world. To discover our connectedness and the necessities that define us releases us from frantic and one-sided self-assertion and self-justification. In this way we make room for a less contrived and more organic recognition of what it is that we can and what it is that we cannot do. This is what Heidegger referred to as releasement and letting be.

Our culture is so anthropocentric and voluntaristic that people who come for therapy often assume that they have to take themselves in hand and with the help of therapy change themselves into super-people who are constantly on the go and who have to show their merit in order to deserve a place on the earth. This kind of driven mentality is the downside of existentialism. It is all very well to become self-aware and self-assertive, resolute in planning out our lives and prepared to make changes in order to prove ourselves worthy. But it is just as important to keep some perspective and to become aware that accomplishment alone is not the answer to the secret of good living. Existential

therapists encourage self-reliance and such determination and commitment to working hard at life can indeed bring about instant metamorphoses, because of the emphasis on personal responsibility and choice. In order to make life complete however we need to help people discover the other side of the equation as well and teach them to rediscover the awesomeness of the cosmos and the ways in which they need to learn to rely on and trust in life.

Existential parameters of working with the self

A broader overview of existential parameters, as has been shown in the previous chapters, does not focus so narrowly on the voluntaristic aspects of existence. Human living is inserted in broader frameworks of meaning and reality, and existential work worthy of the name will enable a person to widen their horizons beyond the narrow intra-psychoic and intrapersonal confines of their experience, connecting meaningfully to the world around them. This idea leads directly to a reconsideration of some of the concepts taken for granted in psychoanalytic, psychodynamic, humanistic and integrative work, namely those of projection, identification, projective identification and introjection.

Kinship and reverberation

All of the above concepts can be easily understood as variations upon the same theme – that of kinship and human universality. As soon as we abandon the idea of an intra-psychoic self, we no longer need to invent concepts such as projection, to understand what may be no more and no less than the phenomena of mutuality, connectedness, resonance and recognition between people. Psychoanalysis has quite rightly noticed some mysterious processes occurring between people and has explained these as best it could, given its premise of the intra-psychoic. From the perspective of human kinship, the phenomena look rather different.

To understand projection, which is the alleged reading of one's own material, issues or traits into another, we only have to remember that we constantly operate in the in-between. When we read things into another person, these are neither entirely ours nor are they entirely theirs, they are rather the co-created reality of the two of us that holds us together and defines our momentary kinship. The way I resonate with the other determines the aspects of myself that I bring to bear on the situation. I put forward those aspects in myself that fit best with the other, or rather, with the aspects that the other person brings out to fit with me in turn. Therefore, there is a process of reverberation between us that draws us into a certain state of mind. This is often a shared state of mind, though each of us may experience or interpret it rather differently. We fit together and sense that we are altered by each other. We can either take cognizance of this phenomenon or ward it off by claiming it is all in the other person's mind. We can deny that we have any part in this

process and reject the idea of our own behaviour as our own. We can even conjure up the notion of introjection or identification or projective identification: seeing our response to the other as an alien thing we pick up from elsewhere, or even an alien thing that has been forced on us by the other. This strategy denies our active part in the situation and makes us a passive victim. It also denies our belonging with others and our being always determined and formed by the relationships we are in. It posits the illusion of our separateness and of the desirability of the impermeability of our selfhood. This is a very Western, pre-Copernican notion, and it needs to be challenged in order to become more open to the mystery of interaction and intersubjectivity.

We can then no longer hide behind the mystification of something like projective identification, which is so often used by psychotherapists to allege manipulative behaviour on the part of the client, something preventing us from looking at the magic that is passing between us in all directions. If we allow ourselves to become more aware of how we fuse with others and how we let ourselves be drawn into the magic circle of their influence over us, we gain more mastery over that process. Equally this allows us to become more aware of how we influence others and impact on them and bring certain sides of them to the fore. As well as taking account of the principle of fusion we need to be alive to the need for fission. At times we need to regroup ourselves: redefining ourselves in relation to different people and cutting ourselves off from influences that have been harmful to us. In this way, our identity is constantly shifting and being reshaped by letting ourselves move towards or away from certain relationships.

Psychotherapy is a time and place when and where we create artificial fusion and we should not deny the effects that this has, nor should we pretend that the fusion happens on the part of the client only when, primarily, it is a phenomenon of interactive mutuality. As existential psychotherapists we lend ourselves to a process of catalysis. We allow our clients to temporarily merge with us so that they can rediscover new aspects to themselves. We are the catalysts of their transformation, temporarily totally available to be absorbed and merged with, only to retrieve ourselves from the process, often unaltered, but often also ourselves transformed. The important thing to remember is that our clients may reject us when their transformation is complete. From an existential perspective, therefore, it is proper to remind ourselves of the principles that guide us when working towards the client's transformation of self.

The principle of transformation

The primary principle is simply that of transformation itself. This is the discovery that life equals change and that individuals do not need to force change and personal transformation, as they are nothing but a process of transformation and change. Existential therapy is therefore a time to begin to describe what you used to be and what you no longer are, and to recognise the

many ways in which you already have abandoned what you once knew and now have lost. It is also a time to speculate about what might be, and what could come about from the ways in which you are currently connected into your world. One of the objectives is to get a sense of the global process of transformation of which you are a part, and within which you rest, and to begin to be able to move with the changes that happen in and around you, steering your little vessel over the rapids of life and keeping it going in the overall direction into which you have set out. In order to be transformed, all we have to do is relinquish our reluctance to be changed and altered and give up the effort to remain the same. This becomes possible when we achieve a sense of peace in the process of change of which we are a part, and when we tune into the moods and emotions that show us where we find ourselves. To accept the temporal aspect of our life is perhaps the hardest, but also one of the most gratifying, things to do. It releases a great capacity for tranquillity and inner stability to know that we are part of a much larger organic system for which we do not need to carry any responsibility and in which we can trust.

Accepting limitations

It is possible to set one's sails to the winds of change in this way only if we also have a basic faith in our own consistency and temporary durability. This can come about only by coming to terms with our inner facticity in the shape of our physical and personal characteristics, which are inherited genetically and which form part of the givens that we have to work with in this world. Accepting our heritage does not amount to being fatalistic.

Recognising that we are strong-minded is not the same as accepting ourselves to be stubborn or obstinate. On the contrary, it is about learning to value that particular quality of persistence – that need to drive through a point or a position – and apply it in a way that is beneficial to ourselves and those around us. A strong-minded person who puts this trait to use in a humanitarian campaign will educate that very quality and hone it to become useful. A strong-minded person who allows the energy of assertion and rightfulness to become obstructed in a dead-end situation will become frustrated and will develop unbearable obstinacy in a counterproductive manner. Existential psychotherapists strive to help clients to discover the nature of their particular characteristics and limitations in order to make the most of them and turn them to good use, but this does not always mean turning negatives into positives, it simply means to discover multiple aspects of the same quality.

Coming to terms with lack

It helps to be aware of the impact of the early experiences of childhood. The circumstances that we encounter in our early life undoubtedly bias our

connections to the world around us in a particular manner. There is a vital interaction between the givens of our genetic make-up and the opportunities for the unfolding of these givens. It must be remembered, however, that in every situation there are many more windows of opportunity than are being used. Total deprivation is a rare situation. Even Kasper Hauser, who grew up in a basement in total isolation and without any human contact, found ways of employing the givens of his particular human abilities. In spite of the lack of stimulation and language, and given the most restricted physical environment that is humanly conceivable, he developed remarkable abilities and a deep personal understanding of life.

Our cultural outlook makes us inclined to want to discard the givens of our education and replace them with something better, of superior quality. We are used to the consumer orientation that tells us it is time to replace a product when it is faulty in the slightest manner. Our attitude is one of wanting our money back or of desiring a superior product, instead of using what we have got and learning to mend it and improve it, reshape it or retune it instead of discarding it. Most of us receive decent care and sufficient stimulation and opportunities for us to turn these fundamental elements into a worthwhile life. Many of us do not think that this is the case and, instead, are acutely aware of what was, or is, missing. Being human, as Sartre pointed out, is about lacking and we are condemned to live with a feeling of need and constant yearning. To elaborate intricate theories of what is exactly lacking and how it came to be lacking can occupy us for a long time, but it amounts to wasting our efforts at living in an inverted and backwards direction. To live deliberately, rather than by default, does not mean to want to alter things and impose our demands on the world, but rather to learn to open our eyes to what is there and learn to use our gifts and talents in order to make the most of what we have. To make the most of our sense that something is always missing is to allow ourselves to go out of ourselves in order to seek to be fulfilled. It also entails the recognition that, by being generous of ourselves and by emptying ourselves, we are more true to our real nature than by trying to fill ourselves up artificially. Discovering the essential lack and nothingness within us leads to the discovery that we are empty so that we can be filled again. Keeping ourselves empty and open allows us to become the place for the ebb and flow of life. Great satisfaction can be found, not from being either empty or full, but from knowing that we can pulse with the flow that constantly leads us from one state to another.

Playing with different versions of reality

It can be enormously freeing to recognise that all human experience is composed, in part, of interpretation. The stories we tell ourselves about our childhood and our present predicaments and future possibilities are equally loaded with interpretative factors. The behavioural, the humanistic, the

systemic, or the psychoanalytic versions of our reality are alternative ways of conceiving of our experience. All of these interpretations make some sense and some make particular sense at a particular time in one's life, but none have the absolute truth about our experience. The existential approach does not claim to have a greater degree of truth and it should therefore wield its hermeneutic powers modestly. Nevertheless, the existential version of reality attempts to take manifold interpretations and possibilities into account and open out a person's vista until it includes a possibility of movement that was not available previously.

It is important to understand that the client's own interpretations of reality are competing with those of the therapist and that there is much to be said for the therapist's willingness to explore the client's interpretation, instead of imposing one that relies on a particular theoretical conviction. Many forms of psychotherapy impose frameworks of meaning on the client. It is the claim of the existential approach that it attempts not to do this. There is a paradox here, as it must be clear by now, that it is impossible to free oneself of a particular perspective on reality. The existential therapist, like everyone else, comes not only with judgements and interpretations, but also with a commitment to question those and be questioned on them by the client. It matters to make a distinction between judgements and value judgements in this respect. I will be constantly assessing and monitoring my client's experience, and I will make judgements about what this experience tells me about the client's position in the world. I need to communicate these judgements to the client in such a way that the client can engage with the idea, rather than feeling attacked or manoeuvred by it. Our communication about our observations of what goes on in the client's life will have to be made in a tentative, playful or questioning manner, rather than in a definite or interpretative way. The final interpretation can be made only by the client. It is quite a different matter for me to decide which interpretation is the right one and to impose my assessment of what is good and bad in the process. The case will illustrate the constant need for negotiation between my own and the client's perceptions of reality and interpretations thereof. It is an art form to evoke new engagements with meaning in your client, by showing your willingness to reflect, state and consider what might be the case, without imposing your truth, but always eliciting the client's truth.

Making value judgements

But let us not fool ourselves. We are inexorably drawn to making value judgements as therapists, no matter how person-centred or neutral we intend to be. It is a bizarre and unrealistic stance to pretend to be able to abstain from having a view and having convictions. Our clients search for values, and we need to be able to discuss the relative merits of different ways forward in life with them in an open manner. What we should try to avoid is to present

values as abstract and definitive. We do not impose values, but we do explore them. Sometimes we need to make values concrete to a client's specific situation. In this sense we might say, 'If you want to achieve self-reliance, then of course your getting a job is a step in that direction.' This is very different from saying: 'It is good for you to get a job, for that makes you self-reliant.' Taking this same issue to a further level, I might have to discuss next the relative merits of self-reliance or indeed encourage my client to consider whether self-reliance is something he or she wants for him or herself.

It is the purpose of something that assigns a value to it and that determines how much it is worth sacrificing for. Indeed, it is the context of the client's actual life that determines whether something is desirable or useful or, on the contrary, disagreeable and harmful. If the client has not been able to establish self-reliance at any time yet – for instance, if the client is a teenager – then the value of the first experience of such autonomy may be great and important. At the same time, other principles such as the harming of the relationship with the parents, or with the siblings, or with society at large, will have to be measured against this desirability. There will be a cultural context, too, that provides the person with a particular margin of freedom to achieve such self-reliance or not. One needs to be sensitive to as many parameters as possible, and throw light on this intricate network of dynamic values and interpretations that the person is linked with and within which he or she needs to make decisions. Working within the relative values of a cross-cultural context is a challenge that can be met if we take a broadly philosophical stance, rather than buying into the ideology of our own culture or of our own particular system of psychotherapy. It is the best reminder of the relativity of values and the need to evaluate them within context.

Decision making

The self could be defined as the centre of decision making. The objective of existential therapy is not to encourage the client to make new decisions, but rather to become cognisant of the decisions that are being made by voting with the feet. It is not for the therapist to lead clients to make certain types of decisions, but to become aware of the inner orientation towards the complexity of givens that makes certain decisions possible or impossible. The objective is to become conversant with the parameters and context of the client's particular situation and in light of universal givens. Doing so consistently makes it more likely that the client will find a way around the obstacles encountered. A sense of satisfaction will be gained from being able to read situations and have an adaptive sense of how to best employ our abilities in relation to them from a perspective of value. Different clients will have very different parameters of life, according to the different situations they are in, the different abilities that they dispose of, and the insight and perspective that they are ready for or capable of.

The overall outcome of existential therapy is that it does not necessarily offer dramatic results, as it does not impose clear routes for new decision making. It does not seek to indoctrinate the self of the client, but rather to help this self to orientate itself in the world by finding its own bearings in relation to its surroundings. Existential therapy is directional in nature, neither directive nor non-directive. To find the direction of one's destiny is to take charge of life. Minimal changes in direction now can have enormous impact in the long run. Certainly, to find a new level of self-respect and recognition both from therapist and from oneself for what one is capable is a revealing, affirmative and strengthening experience. To learn to think for oneself about the complex and contradictory experiences in one's life, and to learn to trust that one can manage one's own process of making sense of the world, is a more reliable outcome than to get instant gratification or a clear idea of what one should do or how one should think.

Self in relation

In all this, it is crucial to remember that people are centrally based in relationships, not only in relationships to people, but also to things, themselves, and the overall meaning of their own actions. Existential therapy seeks to enhance a person's ability to see him or herself as a centre of relating, and not to seek to isolate him or herself with an alienated view of self as an item in its own right. Even in isolation, and in sleep, we still relate. The connections that we express are always centred in the source of our experience, and the therapist needs to emphasise the place where this source and focus is generated. Yet the source and focal place is nothing if we do not see what the connections and commitments are. The world orientation and the engagement with the world of things, other, self, and meaning in all its paradoxes, is in the final analysis what enables the self to exist at all. To acquire the discipline of observing and monitoring one's posture, one's position, one's disposition, one's attitude, one's orientation, one's mentality, one's mood, and the general atmosphere that one is creating at any one time, is to become an artist of living.

It is up to the existential psychotherapist to draw a client's attention to the use of the self as a medium and to enhance a person's existing ability, not only to observe and monitor these things, but also to make fine adjustments to what is more conducive to vital living.

Consciousness as the centre of self

And all of these aspects, known or unknown, visible or invisible, are part of our consciousness – that is, of our ability to resonate and be attuned to the world. Our consciousness is what makes us open to defining ourselves in relationship, and it is because we are open that we remain mobile and alive rather than turning rigid and dead. Consciousness is often manifest in very partial

and limited ways and very little of it is reflective or self-reflective, as discussed previously. To help our clients to become more conscious is not necessarily the proper objective of existential psychotherapy. Life is so much more complex than reflective consciousness would allow for. Yet it would be sad for us not to expand our mind's abilities for consciousness and not to hone, then transcend mere survival mode. Human beings are capable of a broader and deeper range of experience than that which most of us allow ourselves. Many of us are content just to survive and have some good times in the process.

We can only explore the intuitive and meditative fields of our clients' experience if we are well versed in this for ourselves first. When we do open up to the implicit, the instinctual, the moral and the spiritual dimensions of experience, our therapeutic work improves dramatically. It is less certain whether we should always articulate, or attempt to articulate, our observations about these dimensions of reality. We need to respect our clients' needs and not everyone is ready to plunge into these greater depths of consciousness. Nevertheless it would be arrogant to think that we can simply ration our insights or time our interventions to coincide with 'kairos', the right moment, when the client is ready for the truth (May et al. 1958). We do not know whether our view on clients' predicaments and attitudes is true, and therefore we should not withhold it, but put it to the test. It is only when we hazard our own views that the client can respond and check and correct them in line with their own perceptions of reality. At the same time, it is obviously important not to impose our views on the client's world when they are already doing a good job exploring it. Whenever possible it is the client who takes the lead and who draws us into their reality. We follow and familiarise ourselves with their version of the world before we add our own take on it.

The existential therapist is therefore required to be restrained enough to let the client's changing self manifest itself in all its forms and shapes, as freely as possible. Yet the therapist needs to have enough perspective and enough capacity for interactive challenge to enable exploration of the wider shores of the client's world. The therapist's self is not in competition with the self of the client and it does not have to jump in for the client, but it should at all times be prepared to leap ahead towards the horizons that the client has shied away from in that most human of habits: reluctance and shirking. The therapist can help the client to reveal reality as the client finds it and to retrieve out of that reality a sense of self and meaning in relation to the world that is so discovered.

Emotions as the compass for finding direction

It is by working with the emotional dimension of clients' experience that we can most effectively draw out these hidden and deeply felt levels of their selfhood that betray their original project and that give them a sense of direction. Sartre has shown how human emotion can be read as a much more

significant source of deliberation and action than is usually acknowledged. His work, in turn, was based on Heidegger's claim that we always are in a certain mood, as we sift our world connection through a particular filter, and in turn get attuned to the world by whatever it throws in our direction.

We have already discussed what it means to become cognisant of the constant flow of moods and emotions. We have looked at their significance in terms of the position we take in connection to the world and to our project. We have also seen that sensations, feelings, thoughts and intuitions all have a role to play in learning to grasp the subtle play of our changing moods. It is not only emotions that reflect our deepest meanings. When we sharpen our awareness of sensations, feelings, thoughts and intuitions we become more able to articulate our sense of who we are. For what we are is always defined in relation to the world we are in. It is only when we become clear about our world connections and our world design that we gain an overview of our possibilities and opportunities as well as of our limits and limitations. In so doing we become more active participants in our own lives.

Emotions, feelings, thoughts, sensations and intuitions constantly shift and change. They also come in cycles. There is a simple rule to our emotional life which posits that what goes up must go down and vice versa. When we experience elation, we know that we shall have to pay the price later with a sense of disappointment or depression. When we are depressed, we should know that we can expect to find hope and joy again later.

These cycles of emotion arise in large and in smaller waves and undulations. We respond in a broad sense to the way in which our overall environment is disposed towards us. There are wide undercurrents of emotion in relation to cultural, social, seasonal and climactic changes that affect us all. To learn to notice the effect of such sweeping general situations on us personally is an important part of becoming existentially aware. We can spend a great deal of time coming to grips with our response to the books we read and the newspapers or television programmes, the plays and films that we sample. We will soon become alert to the fact that those external influences determine our moods, in the same way in which small interactions and not so small relationships affect us constantly as well. As we become more observant we become aware of the extent of the impact of all these forces that surround us. We learn to manage them more carefully and will then also become attentive to the way in which we affect others in turn. If we do not let ourselves be swamped by these macro-influences, it becomes easier to monitor and respond positively to the micro-influences of our everyday relationships as well.

Recognising emotional direction

At any point in the day we vibrate with more or less recognisable emotional sensitivity, which sets us on a particular wavelength in relation to the world and the objects, people, experiences, situations and ideas in it that matter to

us. Sometimes our moods build to a pitch that allows them to become less subtle and more pervasive: they become e-motions – movements that take me out of myself towards the world that has taken me over and has drawn me in and that may even take me out of control. The way in which I move out towards the world emotionally is either in a movement towards something, or away from something. Sartre has suggested that emotions are a magical way of moving towards or away from the world: they are an attempt at altering the world and its impact on us.

The movement towards something (Horney 1942, 1950) is experienced as one that requires a certain effort and engagement: it is the movement that connects me to something and makes me want to move closer to it. This requires an active, upward swing in energy while I attempt to fulfil myself, to achieve completion, to make myself more than I am, to fill my inner emptiness with whatever it is I move towards. Any towards movement comes with the sensation of anxiety or excitement, which is the fundamental flavour of the engagement of our system and of the summoning of the necessary energies to achieve whatever it is we are after.

The away movement (Horney 1942, 1950) is experienced as a retreat, as a protective and dismissive move, a giving up of whatever it was that we valued and were connected to. It is a movement that depletes me and that takes me from fullness to emptiness. It can be experienced as release and as abandonment, but more usually, especially if we are feeling the loss of what we are leaving behind, it is experienced as disappointment, depression, decompression and deprivation (see Deurzen 2009).

If we can become aware of the phenomenology of our emotions and the significance of each of their particular modalities, we can gain better understanding of our desires and fears and our engagement with the world. Emotions are our most sensitive barometers, and they give us accurate information about what we value, and what strategies we are employing in order to achieve what we are currently after or are having to give up.

I have systematised this cyclic understanding of emotional experience in a theory of emotions, first described in my book on existential counselling (Deurzen-Smith 1988), and have shown the four levels at which such emotions can be experienced in Chapters 14, 15, 16 and 17. As promised there, here are some of the detailed descriptions of the various flavours of emotion (Tantam 2002): see Figure 34.1.

Pride

As soon as we have climbed the mountain of fulfilment we become somewhat complacent as we experience a sense of pride. This is the emotion of extending ourselves towards and over what we have achieved with self-satisfaction, confidence or even smugness. It can easily lead to arrogance. In this very movement of possession, we are already abandoning the struggle to achieve

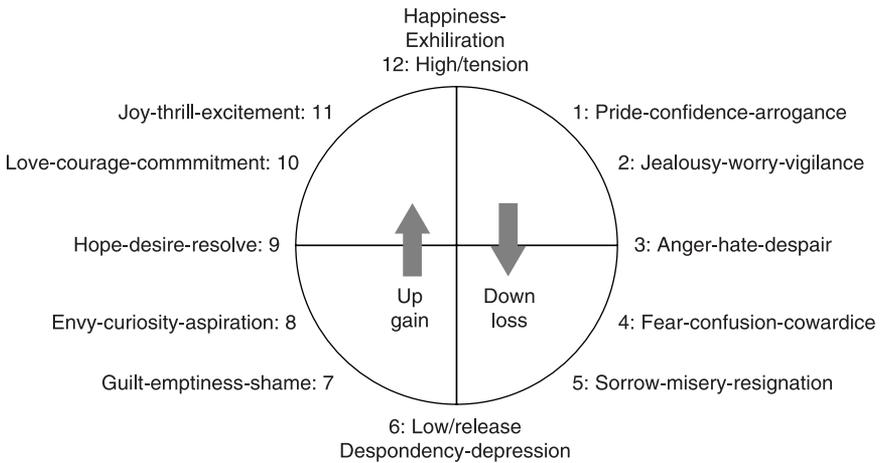


Figure 34.1 The emotional cycle.

and, in doing so, we are beginning our downward descent – hence the saying, ‘pride comes before a fall’. In extending and relishing in what we own, we risk letting go of it by not tending to it properly but taking it for granted. Pride comes with dignity and confidence. It also goes with arrogance and vanity, and it leaves us open to the dangers of attack from outside that are elicited by our very attitude of complacency. These, too, prepare us for a downfall.

Jealousy

Jealousy is the next step down on the ladder towards loss of what is valued. Here we get the sinking feeling that we are in danger of really having to let go of that which we prize. We sense that others may take it from us, or that it may escape from us by its own accord, usually because we have not heeded the dangers that come with possession and because in some ways we have not been up to the challenge of looking after what we had got. Jealousy like every other emotion is a useful indicator of where we are. We should always take it extremely seriously and observe what brings it about, as we can learn from it what our position in life currently is. We may experience it as worry instead, when we feel that we can control our losses by thinking our way towards safety. We may also experience this as heightened vigilance and perceive this as a positive.

Anger

Anger is a dangerous emotion, which comes a little further down the slippery slope of loss. We get angry when we feel that our treasured possession is

threatened, be it a thing, or a person, a situation, or an idea. Something or someone is obstructing our access to what we value. The world is threatening to take it away from us, and the threat has become so real and so definite that we see ourselves already in the role of being deprived for ever. This inspires us to make a last-ditch attempt at retrieving what matters so much to us. We conjure up all the strength and desperate fighting that we have in us and we let rip. We lay into what is threatening our peace and quiet, and with all our might we blow ourselves up into summoning the energy required to win back what seems nearly lost. Sometimes this works and sometimes it does not. Sometimes anger drives us to hatred or violence. Sometimes we can command our anger in a calm way and manage a kind of self-assertiveness that gets results. On the whole, anger is a panic response that demonstrates our position of loss and weakness. We often end up losing what we fought for and go down another rung on the ladder. Because of this it may be tainted with a sense of despair.

Fear

Fear is when we know that we are fighting a losing battle and have already gone beyond the place where we can protect our interests. Anger will not serve us any more for we have already gone too far down; there is no confidence left that we can sustain that which we value. Our very subsistence is threatened, therefore, and we have to do what we can to save ourselves, rather than going under with the loss of what we valued. We run away in fear and this gives us some relief although it may also feel like lack of strength. There is a weakness and cowardice in fleeing to this position as soon as we are under threat and it is often mixed in with a sense of confusion. But equally there can be a gentle and gracious movement of surrendering, as when we let go of the day and let ourselves flee into sleep, or retreat to some other, safer, place.

Sorrow

Sorrow and sadness represent the final position, when we have really lost what we valued and feel miserable about this. We are bereft of what mattered. We have been entirely deflated and the sorrow expresses this deflation by the letting of tears and of blood. The feeling of aliveness drains out of us and we let ourselves be depleted, emptying ourselves of all holding-on. This resigned abandonment can be extremely gratifying. Many people actually feel a great sense of release when they can give in to their grief and mourning. At other times, the sense of loss is so great that we simply cannot let ourselves fall into it wholeheartedly, as the shock would be too great. At those times, sorrow takes a longer time to ripen and get a hold of us. We need to deplete ourselves fully and let the emptiness be, otherwise we shall never be ready to be filled again.

Despondency

Now we find ourselves at rock bottom, since we have not only lost but also given up on that which brought us fulfilment. We feel emptied out, useless and energy less. We cannot conceive of ever fighting another day, nor certainly making an effort in achieving what we have just failed to achieve or have just let go of. It can be strangely restful to feel this low and despondent though it takes a kind of committed despondency to remain this deflated for long. Most often people who call themselves depressed make small efforts to climb up the hill again only to feel like they have to give up over and over again. This carves out a niche at rock bottom, which may become hard to abandon after a while. Depression is always mixed with some anxiety if the person is ready to make some effort to climb out of the relative safety of the low. They have to take a chance on the world and themselves again if they are to succeed in energising themselves to re-engage with the world.

Guilt

Guilt is the first emotion at the low end of the spectrum when an upswing towards a desired value is experienced again. Guilt is the emotional colouring of having failed to achieve or obtain something that is important to us, so that we now feel deprived of that which is valued. We feel entirely depleted and empty and sense that we fall short still, but instead of feeling depressed about it we feel we ought to have done better. We may feel responsible for our failure or lack, in actual guilt, when it is related to something we have done wrong. We may also experience it as neurotic guilt, if life experience or the admonishments of others have somehow convinced us that we are not good enough. Finally, it may be experienced as existential guilt: a sense of our own failure to have lived up to what we are capable of – a fleeting awareness of what we still wish to undertake. In every case, guilt has both a negative and a positive side to it in that it reminds us of having fallen short, and in that sense prods us on to experience sufficient anxiety to push us into action and undertake whatever is necessary in order to fulfil ourselves and achieve the goals that will pay our debt. It may be mostly experienced as shame if we are acutely aware of falling short in the eyes of others. Shame is intrinsically linked to the other's look, the other's evaluation of us as insufficient. It may be argued that shame is the equivalent of neurotic guilt, and as such it also prepares us for a possible swing upwards, but only if we are willing to feel the lack acutely and allow it to make us anxious and move into action. This is only possible if we have the confidence that we can set the record straight.

Envy

Envy is sketched out as the modest starting point of desire. In envy we long for what another has rather than for something of our own. In this sense envy keeps us once removed from awareness of our own aspirations and capabilities. Nevertheless, envy is often an extremely useful vehicle for clarification of our own aspirations. Envy of others is an experience that makes a concrete claim for what we want. We can know almost with certainty what it is that we really like in what others have obtained for themselves; as such it can be a much more graphic illustration of what we want to work towards than empty yearning. Envy is therefore an excellent instrument for our upward movement towards new action. Though often painful, it should not be condemned, but valued as an indicator of our life's direction.

Hope

Here we find ourselves moving even further upwards on the emotional cycle. We now have achieved a clear sense of what we aspire to and desire. We know what it is that we are after. We have such a clear picture of our objective that we can even imagine achieving it and eventually fulfilling ourselves. The object of desire is still out of reach though, and we do not feel secure in our attempts to obtain it. We simply know that we stand a chance to succeed and this gives us heart – it literally sustains the beating of our heart, pumping more adrenaline, so that we can continue our efforts to achieve what we want. Desire in all its shapes and forms, such as longing and aspiration and ambition, is the emotion that sweeps us to the next level on the emotional upward cycle and that fuels our hope. We actually want something, whether something old or new or just something more, we are aware of our lack and aspire to fill it in some way. As long as the emotion is unspecific it may be difficult to tolerate. As soon as we can pinpoint what the object of desire is and make it concrete, we can begin to really give in to the sense of longing and yearning, with all the activating anxiety that comes with this, helping us to ready ourselves to achieve what we aim for. Courage now becomes accessible, though doubt is always a part of hope as well.

Love

Love, defined as an upward emotion just beyond hope and doubt and just before joy, is the movement towards the object of desire, knowing the obstacles that must be overcome – it can therefore aim to embrace what is longed for. It has not been fully achieved yet and we are still straining. In love there is effort and a going out from oneself towards the person or the object; there is reaching out in appreciation and a sense of beginning ownership. It can be experienced as devotion or care for the other or for a thing. It can also be

experienced as an effort to achieve gratification from it and possess it in some way. The intention with which love moves us towards what we desire makes all the difference here. Love requires commitment and action. It is hard work to maintain such an attitude of openness and dedication. It is hardly surprising that people find it both extremely important and satisfying. It is not surprising either that love is so hard to maintain, especially in the face of opposition or separation or any other threats.

Joy

Joy is the *summum bonum*. It is what we experience in that last sweeping up movement that achieves total completion and union with what we wanted and which fulfils us. In joy we make the object our own, or rather we merge with whatever it was that we were after. Suddenly there is the sense of oneness, and with that comes the experience of bliss and, often, that of gratitude, which is the awareness of things being good. Joy can be experienced in a very pure sense or with total abandonment, and then it can easily lead to drunkenness and forgetfulness in the throes of excitement. It is perhaps one of the most absorbing emotions and, therefore, a very rare one. It is difficult to follow one's upward striving and to achieve exactly what one was after, and even then of course the moment is usually very short lived though thrilling. Joy is the top of our ability come true, but it is experienced just before the final achievement: it is itself still the movement of completion.

Happiness

The very feeling of happiness is that of being on top of the world, on living with a high. Happiness is defined by the complete ownership and enjoyment of whatever it is that gives us a blissful feeling of total satisfaction. Such feelings are wonderful and worthwhile, but almost always short lived. The idea of continuous happiness is a strange figment of human imaginations that denies the realities of the ebb and flow of life (Deurzen 2009). But this should not stop us enjoying our happinesses when we find them and polish the luck that brings them about. There is no problem in glorifying in success and achievement of whatever sort, as long as we are aware that we are already on the way towards the first point, pride, and the possible loss of what we value, so that the whole cycle will start all over again.

The entire cycle of emotions is like a movement of breathing in and breathing out (see Figure 34.1). We can become better at living our emotions as we practise emotional awareness and emotional devotion. Life can become more full and colourful when we let ourselves experience the full range in a natural movement around the cycle. It becomes much more possible to climb back up if we let ourselves slip down. Climbing up is less strenuous if we allow our

anxiety to excite us, and falling down is more pleasant if we allow our depression to deplete us. Each emotion has positive and negative aspects; they are the colourings that give life flavour and depth. The art is to learn to use these colourings to the best effect, and to use our emotions to show us where we are. Existential psychotherapists will help their clients to gain such emotional awareness and articulate their new understanding in order to complete the sense of their being moved by the values and meanings of their life.

Illustration

A case study

Rita's grief

Experience, it is said, makes a man wise. That is very silly talk. If there were nothing beyond experience it would simply drive him mad.

(Kierkegaard 1938: iii)

Introduction

In working with clients from an existential perspective, we need to keep in mind that we do not seek to eliminate their problems nor specifically try to cure them of any pathology. We aim to help them describe, clarify and unravel their relationship to the world in all its different dimensions, and to make the most of their particular way of being. We enable them to question their assumptions and investigate their values and get a sense of where they are and where they want to be. But most of all we endeavour to be fully present in our therapeutic relationship in order to draw our clients out of their hiding places and enable them to start relating to their own life and themselves in a more real and lucid manner. Work can be short, medium or long term, but in no case should we hold on to a client beyond the time period for which the client wants to be committed. We should not expect to see any dramatic developments or sudden changes, for these are not within the scheme of this approach which contents itself to be a reflection on life and living. Of course paradoxically, such a lack of hurry and such full attention to what really matters often has the effect of facilitating amazing transformation. We should not count on this happening and it does not always happen. Some people persist with their worldview no matter how much we try to help them to question it or see it from different angles.

No matter what happens with our client, the existential golden rules are to accept adversity, anxiety, confusion, paradox and life's dilemmas and to find the courage to face up to these and learn to tolerate them. No interpretations are made about the causes of discomfort or unease in the world, but the person's resources to cope with these effectively are summoned and harnessed

as best as possible. Symptoms are translated into a search for a breakthrough. New avenues are constantly explored for the possibilities and limitations that they might bring. Learning about life and how to live it better is the objective. The consequences of our client's actions or potential actions are considered openly, both in positive and negative terms, and the client is encouraged to take an active role in learning to live more deliberately, no matter what the predicament and the difficulties. Above all, existential therapy does not seek to become an alternative to life itself. Therapy can never be but a rehearsal for living and it is to life itself that therapy should refer the client rather than to the intricate and seductive self-contained universe that is artificially created in the therapist's office.

The following illustration of an entire course of existential therapy will show the presenting problems, the interaction that occurred in the sessions as well as some of the concrete interventions that I made and the effects that they had. The client came to see me in a state of almost incapacity to cope with her life and over two years of hard work on both our parts, she had gained a totally different outlook on the world. The client was very happy to have this material published and indeed she was so proud of her own prowess in tackling this terrible life event and the devastation and wreckage it created in her that she initially asked me to use her real name and circumstances. We agreed this might not seem quite so wise in the long run. Even though the client was on the edge of existence for a long while, I never thought she would not make it through, because I have faith in life's healing power and I trust the human capacity to transcend trauma and learn from whatever comes on our path. My client was in regular consultations with a doctor alongside the therapy she had with me and had some help in coping by initially taking antidepressants and hypnotics, as per prescription, but she soon began to lessen the dosage and face life in the raw, as she became stronger and annoyed at the haze and passivity the medication left her in. I always point out to my clients how some of their symptoms may be medication related, but I never interfere with their medical treatment; instead I encourage them to keep discussing it with their doctor and negotiate a gradually smaller dose when they are ready to do so. I do take the view that life is best when lived on one's own terms and directly with as much consciousness as possible. I accept that too much consciousness can be hard to bear at a moment of crisis or devastation, but am acutely aware that it is tempting to remain under the spell of artificial aids, rather than retrieve one's own capacity for coping with life. I do think psychotherapy needs to problematise this tendency and help people to question it.

Similarly I deliberately chose to encourage my client to reclaim her independent way of living and to leave therapy as soon as was feasible (in this case a bit over two years), with my usual recommendation of spacing the sessions increasingly until she came to see me once every six months and then yearly. Though a full existential analysis of her particular way of being in the world

would have taken many more years and would even then remain incomplete – I would usually only reserve such long-term analysis for self-development or training purposes. Existential therapy can apply to all sorts of clients – those in crisis, in transition or with any form of emotional, relational or existential discomfort or dilemma. It also applies extremely well to those who, like Rita, are severely traumatised and have suffered extreme losses.

The client: Rita's grief

Rita is a young woman of 33, who is referred to me by her doctor for clinical depression. She has had twelve sessions of counselling in the general practice but it is clear that this will not be sufficient. Rita looks very striking, dressed all in black, with long dark hair, olive-coloured skin and deep worry lines that give her a worn out, intense and troubled look. She wears baggy clothes that hide her emaciated body and she obviously uses no make-up. Her hair is pulled tightly back in a ponytail, but she has a heavy grown out fringe that shades her eyes effectively apart from when she brushes it away, angrily. She averts her gaze most of the time in the initial interview, but when she looks up, invariably there are tears rolling down her cheeks. They drip over her face and off her chin, without her seeming to notice, as she weeps soundlessly. Her voice does not betray these tears and she speaks in a monotone, frequently supporting her head with her hands.

Rita tells me that she has been totally depressed for nearly a year since the accidental death of her husband and 5-year-old son in a car crash. She is currently living with her mother- and father-in-law and does not find this arrangement particularly satisfactory. She says that she does little else but sleep or sit and watch television. She considers the atmosphere to be gloomy, which is not surprising since her in-laws have, like her, suffered a severe double and sudden bereavement losing their son and grandson. Although Rita does not really like staying with them she appreciates them looking after her and protecting her from herself. She has made a number of half-hearted suicide attempts that her in-laws have been able to abort. She cannot face going back to the flat where she lived with Steven (her husband) and Ralph (her son) before the tragedy and she has left the place more or less as it was when she was first told of their deaths. Her own parents live abroad and she is a foreign national by birth, but has British nationality by virtue of her marriage to Steven. She does not consider going back to her birth country an option. Her parents would not understand her situation and she would feel as if she had abandoned Steven and Ralph. Her parents, for business reasons, did not even come to England for the funerals. She is fairly dismissive of them as she is of most other potential sources of help. She has not seen any friends in the past months and feels they are avoiding her because she is a pain. She is not sure what she wants from therapy. She doubts whether it will make any difference and she does not want to be made to do any more 'grief work'. She

sounds quite vehement when she objects to the idea of going back to her country of origin and when she ridicules her previous counsellor's obsession with 'grieving'. She briefly comes across as a very wilful and dynamic person who has clear views and strong opinions of her own, but quickly goes back to the monotone detachment afterwards. When we explore her resentments a little further we discover that she does not want to be made to let go of Steven and Ralph, who mean the world to her. We establish quite quickly that grieving to her is synonymous with giving them up and she does not want to do that. They are everything that is of value to her and if she lets them go she will have nothing left. She perceives people who want her to grieve as wanting to force her to let go of those she loves so much. She cannot understand why she cannot just be left in peace to be upset and depressed. Although she is aware that the arrangement with her in-laws is not good for her, she prefers to stay with them out of a sense of commitment to her dead husband and child. She still senses Steven and Ralph's presence very acutely. When prompted, she acknowledges quickly that she talks to them when she is on her own. She has been on antidepressants and sleeping tablets for nearly a year and although she could not envisage doing without the medication, she feels very dull and out of touch with herself. She does not think these pills are doing her much good at all. She is unmotivated to make any positive changes in her life, including changing her medication or putting energy into psychotherapy. She describes herself as pretty desperate and wryly remarks that she was told that I am supposed to be a last resort therapist. There seems to be a kind of challenge in this and I ask her whether this is the case. She acknowledges that deep down she would like to think it would be possible to find a way out of her cave. She would like to enjoy life again, but she cannot imagine how it could be done. Her appetite for life has gone, she says. She feels it isn't really safe or right for her to even think about enjoyment anyway. Somehow that would mean a betrayal of Steven and Ralph. I note and remark to her that she views the challenge as her own rather than as mine and that for now it might be sufficient to do some work together to find out whether or not she can take up this challenge without hurting or betraying Steven and Ralph. She agrees readily to work with me to this effect and to explore ways of doing right by Steven and Ralph that are not hurtful to her and perhaps even find a way to do right by herself that is not hurtful to Steven and Ralph. We agree to aim for the time being for her to find the best way to bear or endure her grief and learn to live with it rather than to overcome it. This modest goal seems to give her some confidence and so we agree to work for a couple of months and then decide whether the process is worth her while. In the event we end up working together for two and a half years on a once a week basis, with a short period of twice weekly sessions from month two to month five.

First few sessions

In the first session after the initial interview Rita seems desperate to get her story off her chest. She looks at me much more than last time and she is keener to talk. In the intervening week she has come to realise that it is a matter of life or death for her to sort herself out and talk about her pain. This is quite a switch from her previous reserve and scepticism. She has thought a lot about me saying that she needs to find a way to look after Steven and Ralph that is not at her own expense and has realised that if she is to survive her tragedy, she will have to make a real effort to sort herself out. She has also concluded that when she went to see the counsellor before, she was not really ready to talk yet: it was too soon after the accident for her to comprehend what had happened and she could only sit and sob for much of the hour. Since then she has basically tried to keep her pain at bay. This week has clarified things for her and she realises that she needs to take stock of her situation, as I had apparently said to her in the initial interview. She then tells me her story, without much prompting on my part. She describes herself as an intelligent and capable person who has lost all her self-determination and zest since losing her husband and son (who she calls 'my baby'). She volunteers then that if she is honest about the situation there was already something of this depression in the air before the accident happened. She had stopped working as a senior bank clerk when she got pregnant and had stayed at home to look after Ralph, but had become rather frustrated after Ralph went to nursery school. In fact she had missed being a career woman from the moment she gave up work and she had, sort of, resented this, without ever mentioning it to Steven, for fear of seeming ungrateful. Ralph had just started primary school when the accident happened. She had been so proud of him. She sobs for a long time when she tries to describe how grown up and radiant Ralph looked when he went to big school on his first day, only months before the tragic event. Her pain is raw and unremitting. It is hard to watch her being so wretched without becoming tearful. She is glad of my strength when I encourage her to talk about how Ralph is here with her now. She has a box full of his drawings and Lego constructions in the flat, but cannot manage to look at any of these yet. This is one of the reasons she stays with her in-laws: the flat is haunted with memories. She also cannot bear to be in touch with any of the other parents in Ralph's school. She has, once or twice, had the misfortune of running into one of them in a shop. She froze inside when seeing their children, now six and so much more grown up than Ralph when he died. It all just seems too much to bear. She talks a lot about the unfairness of life. She wonders why this has hit her rather than anyone else. She has begun to try to understand, but cannot. She realises that her avoidance of confrontation with reality is a problem and she wants to break out of the shell she has been hiding in while she was in shock. She is desperately trying to keep the threads that attach her to Steven, and especially to

Ralph, intact. Her entire identity is based on her connection to them. She feels she cannot unravel her attachment to them unless she is prepared to give up her own existence. It seems to her that she has a choice between holding on to them and keeping herself alive or let them go and die with them. I remark that at the moment she seems to have opted for letting herself die even while devoting herself so totally to their memory. She cries softly but audibly for the first time and keeps nodding her agreement with that statement. I point out that these are tears for herself rather than for her family and that she is finally beginning to care for herself again. She seems to gain some relief from being given encouragement to be concerned for her own well-being and over the next weeks begins to balance her preoccupation with the deaths of Steven and Ralph with a growing interest in understanding her life experience.

Rita had arrived in the UK ten years previously on a foreign exchange programme with the bank she was employed by. She had fallen in love at first sight with Steven, who was her senior in the bank she was working in. He courted her with great enthusiasm and fervour and she had felt quite rushed off her feet when they got married within a year of her moving to the UK. Steven was besotted with her and he wanted them to marry quickly so that she could stay permanently when her work permit ran out. It did mean leaving her family and friends behind 'at home'. I notice that this first reference to home is reserved for her home country, not for the flat she lived in with Steven and Ralph, which she refers to as 'the flat', and not for the place she lives in at present, which she tends to call 'at my in-laws'. When I remark on this she tells me that this is true: she somehow lost her home when she decided to stay in the UK. She also lost her parents, who did come over for the wedding, but spent most of their time touring the country and warned her that they would not be able to afford to visit again. She had wept uncontrollably after the wedding, knowing that she was giving up so much and wondering whether she had made a mistake marrying Steven and choosing the UK as her residence. She had felt as if she might perhaps never see her parents again. I point out that it sounds as if the marriage had led to a kind of bereavement: it had certainly involved a great sense of loss. This makes her cry uncontrollably and she weeps for quite a while. When I gently ask her to put some words to the tears, she mentions a sense of guilt over that loss, which she felt was self-inflicted. We come back to this guilt over the next weeks, until she eventually dares to connect it to the guilt she feels currently over the fatal accident.

Crisis

It is in month two of the therapy that Rita appears one day, determined to tell me about the worst of her grief. She warns me that she has not mentioned this to anyone before and she is still hesitant to talk about it to me as well, but she

feels as if there is a big shadow hanging over her sorrow, which she has somehow to bring into the picture she has thus far painted for me. I encourage her to speak her fears and bring the horror out in the open rather than let it haunt her in silence and solitude. The story of her guilt on the day of the accident now comes out. She and Steven had a row on the morning of his death. It was a row about control, she says, one of many over recent years. She goes on a sidetrack telling me about their disagreements about how often they should visit Steven's parents and over whether or not they should have another child. She feels guilty because she generally tried to stop Steven seeing his parents whenever she could. She can see that this probably had something to do with her resenting him living near to his parents while she has practically lost her own, who are so many miles away. She realises also that her not wanting a second baby, while Steven was always keen to have another child, was something to do with her wishing not to feel so stuck on her own at the flat any more, wanting to recover her freedom to work once Ralph went to school. She had in fact started making enquiries about possible job opportunities when Ralph had started in school a few months before the accident. Even Steven had not known about this. Somehow she felt he would not have liked it because he preferred her to be at home, looking after the flat and Ralph. She is afraid she was not a good wife and mother for wanting to get out of that tight spot and create her own world outside of the house again.

We do a little work around all these fears and hidden guilt feelings and take some of the pressure off this background atmosphere of imagined wrongdoing. She eases into a sense of greater security and agrees that it is understandable that she should resent Steven's parents if she cannot have access to her own and that her not working was a major obstacle in getting to feel at home in the UK. How could she feel at ease if she was locked into such a small space and had so few contacts of her own? She becomes very quiet and says that she was just waiting for her life to begin again during that time, even though she was quite busy with Ralph and loved him so much that she had lost track of herself. Somehow she needed to give birth to herself before she could give birth to another child. It all feels like real work and progress and Rita is very much there and transforming in front of my eyes into someone more confident and more able to know what she wants.

Yet somewhere in the background a shadow is lurking. I have the impression that we are still working only just below the surface and that something is still not being addressed. I voice my sense that somehow there is something bigger that triggers guilt in her about her loss. She pauses for a moment and then responds by very calmly telling me that on the day of the accident, the row she and Steven had was about driving to his parents. She had refused to go because of the thick freezing fog and ice on the roads and Steven had gone off with Ralph, angry with her for failing him once again. The last thing he had

said as he left was something like: 'You will use any excuse not to let Ralph see his grandparents. That fog is nothing at all. Ralph and I are not afraid of a bit of ice, are we Ralph?' She had felt very angry about his manipulation of her son and had shouted something like . . . , and here her voice falters and comes to a halt as her anger turns to sorrow once more. She looks at me to check whether I am reliable and I nod consent slowly but firmly and then calmly close my eyes, indicating I shall wait and abide as she takes charge. It is clear that she is struggling to let herself accurately remember what happened and I know she needs space and time and safety to summon up the courage to do so.

Encouraged by my silent support and trusting my presence, she now shuts her own eyes, which start flitting about anxiously below her closed eyelids as tears start forming and hang on her lashes. She goes over the dialogue that took place between them on that final, fatal day and when she comes to her own repartee, she hesitates again, until she finally whispers: 'I actually said . . .' and then her voice breaks into sobs and she weeps heavily and with heaving breaths and waves of tears for what seems like a century but is actually no more than a dozen minutes, while I sit quietly, patiently and unobtrusively witnessing her grief, waiting for her sorrow to articulate itself and transform into language, as I know it will eventually. She looks at me almost gratefully as she continues to sob, before finally, nearly choking on it, admitting: 'I said to them: go then and I hope you slip on the ice'. She looks appalled at the enormity of what she has just said and her eyes are wide, brimming with tears, her face red, wet and swollen, her nose leaky. She sits as if frozen, but the sobbing has stopped. It is as if she has just faced down her fears. For, this is precisely what did happen on that day. Another car slipped on the icy road and careered into them in the mist soon after they set off from home. It took both cars into a spin and Steven's car was catapulted down a fairly steep embankment where it rolled over several times. Rita is stone cold as if frozen in horror as she tells me these details. I feel deeply touched and in awe of the enormity of her experience and summon up all my calm and composure to hold us safe in this moment. I can see that she has removed all feeling from herself in order to cope and she sits very still as if she might bring about another misfortune by moving a muscle. The mucus drops from her face in a steady stream and she does not reach for the tissues, for she has become completely un-self-aware and is in a daze. It suddenly occurs to me that she actually feels responsible for what happened and I can see that she is waiting for me to pass judgement on her.

I know it is important now to hold on to the open space we have created and stand with her instead of jumping in with comforting remarks. We sit together in silence for a while, both aware of the seriousness and heaviness of the moment. My inner composure is mostly made of past courage and utter determination to be by her side in facing down her ghosts and help her find the peace she needs and deserves. I am certain of her innocence and want to

release her of this martyrdom that is slowly destroying her. I smile encouragement and acceptance of her grief until the silence becomes a little softer and warmer and until I have found sufficient foothold to help her face the horror. Then I venture gently: 'It seems to you as if the accident is your fault.' It is not a question, but an affirmation. It is what she has just told me and she nods imperceptibly in agreement, her head bowed. 'Your sense of guilt is what makes the grief so unbearable, isn't it?' Again she nods and the tears begin to flow and drip into her lap. First she weeps very quietly and then it builds into a loud sobbing and wailing, which continues for perhaps ten, perhaps more like fifteen minutes. It is as if time has stood still. Her sorrow is finally exploding instead of imploding inside of her.

I almost experience relief in her ability to visibly and audibly express her pain, though it is hard to bear it with her. It is much more concrete and profuse and real than the tension and terror she was previously cloaked in. It is her here with me in all her raw experience rather than some storyline or watered down version of reality. Yet, I am also aware that she is at the limit of her ability to endure and that she feels overwhelmed by her grief and this sudden outburst of pain. As she howls and wrings her hands, she cries that she will never be able to pay enough for wasting their lives. I sense she is now building a crescendo of emotion on a basis of fantasy. I have to decide whether to encourage this, or merely go along with it or try to stop it. I intervene forcefully in order to set some boundaries to this uncontainable sorrow and help her to begin to find her way through the massive mountain of pain in a fair and constructive manner. I tell her she does not do anyone any favours by taking blame for something she is not to blame for. She looks at me tentatively with hope and in deep concentration. She is wide open and studies my features in an almost psychotic and puzzled way. I gently assure her that she is ready now to begin to face the reality that she has run away from for so long and that she will discover that it is not quite as nasty as she is experiencing it just at the minute. My voice is firm but also soft and soothing. I am taking charge and showing her the way out of her pain. The cloak of guilt she has wrapped herself in for all this time is not a good protection any more. Now that she is allowing herself to confront her experience, she will be able to gain some perspective and find out for herself what is actually the case and what is not. She may be guilty of all sorts of things, but not of killing Steven and Ralph, nor of wasting their lives. As I state the case as I see it, she is suddenly calm and peaceful. She can easily agree with the voice of reason, even though her fear still tells her she is guilty and she asks if we can meet again that week to continue the process of uncovering, for she now feels it may lead to her recovery if she can get help. The time is ripe to start unravelling and disentangling the mess in her heart and mind. She comes twice weekly for the next few weeks.

The process of uncovering

The work continues apace during this period and during every session sees the repetition of a cycle of reluctance and restraint followed by growing emotional expression, weeping and working through her worst worries and fears. There are torrents of tears and oceans of regret to be expressed and collected. We work on her relationship with Steven, real and imagined, as if it were still current, since for Rita at this moment it is current. Gradually she is more able to address the disagreements between her and Steven and stop idealising him or take all the blame on herself. It is sometimes as if we are doing posthumous couple therapy and it often feels as if Steven is really there with us in the room. Rita has started to begin running things by Steven in her mind and she can argue with him in the sessions and imagine his likely response. I help her to reformulate Steven's side of things in an affirmative and understanding manner. Gradually she becomes able to hear a more positive response from him as she begins to realise that he would have been able to help her address her frustrations and solitude, her sense of homelessness and uselessness if they had had the time to discover about all these things together. It is a terrible tragedy when people die before the promise of a relationship can be realised or its challenges confronted, but there is no reason that those who are left behind should suffer unnecessarily for the failure of time to provide opportunities to work things out. Just because Steven has died does not mean that her experience of herself in the relationship has to remain frozen in the fearful state of guilt and shortcoming. She owes it to herself and to Steven as well as to Ralph to come to terms with what has been and might have been and to find a place of serenity for her love for them both. Over the weeks she realises so many things about herself, her marriage, her motherhood, her relationship to her in-laws, to her own parents, to her career and to her aspirations for herself that the focus gradually, imperceptibly, shifts away from grieving for what has been taken from her to an exploration of what is still possible for her. Then as she becomes more able to face all that she feels went wrong between her and Steven and work out how it might have happened and where she might go from here, her sorrow over Ralph's death finally comes more to the fore.

Her sadness in relation to Ralph is much softer and open than her complex and paradoxical grief for Steven. There is a wistfulness and devotion in her when she speaks of her little boy that carries her forwards in spite of herself. She learns to relish remembering a lot of the good things she shared with Ralph and she talks of him with tenderness and with a kind of bittersweet joy. As I elicit information about him, as a character, as a person, she tells me the words he liked, the games they played, the grimaces he made, the ways in which he could be naughty, all the things that she feared she had lost when she lost him and which she dares to bring back to life again now that she is

determined to live on. She comes to accept that those years she had with Ralph are still hers to keep and to cherish and I encourage her to claim them and make the most of them. This becomes a pleasure to her and she relishes making me a witness of her past happiness in him. She harvests all that was precious in those five years of his life and she allows herself to treasure it. She is still bitter about having had to give up on the fantasies she had about his teenage years, his adulthood. Losing his future seems like a loss of her future self. But these unravelling threads connect up with her own thwarted plans to reclaim a professional future and slowly, but surely she begins to think about the life that she has nearly lost herself. She, first hesitantly, then more surely begins to formulate her wish, then her desire, then her decision to build a new life now and live it for Steven's and Ralph's sake, as a sort of memorial to them. I am not sure that I like her sacrificing herself so much to their memory, but if this is her way into restoring her life, then so be it. Seeing her beginning to weave the old strands of her life back into a new pattern of future is a pleasure and a half.

Recovery

Rita continues bravely onwards with her work to redesign a life for herself. There are so many ramifications in her story and the way in which she experiences her sudden losses, that it would take many long pages to do it any real justice. Every session is like a heroine's journey, every discovery made reveals new ground to uncover and then dig over. Rita takes much heart from my repeated confirmation of her courage to do this work and she becomes increasingly steady in her explorations and confident in her capacity for survival and recovery. The sobbing returns every so often when she breaches or bridges a new gap and has to face a new abyss of sorrow over some other thing that has been lost forever. But each time we face this down we transform it and she gains in confidence. She has a rapidly growing understanding of the inner strength that her battles with misfortune have brought her. I teach her to look for a kernel of truth about life and about herself in every sorrow she experiences. She accepts that she has to make her tragedy into a meaningful event and that the best way to safeguard Steven and Ralph is to do justice to her relationship with them by making it real and making it count. Rita also learns to go through various rituals of her own making to move forward through her grief. I encourage her to find concrete ways in which to reconnect her mourning to the outside world and find resting places for Ralph and Steven that are not just hers to carry. On the second anniversary of the accident she is able for the first time to contemplate spreading their ashes, which she has held on to for dear life up to now. This becomes a big creative enterprise and she begins to take pleasure in arranging a memorial service for them. This allows her to deal with Steven's old colleagues, several of whom are her own former colleagues. She reconnects with them and feels

supported by more and more people. She also enlists Ralph's school in the process of remembrance, when she realises how important it is to find support in one's bereavement and to let the dead reconnect with their old lives, rather than keep them isolated and tied into one's own wretchedness. This means that she revisits the old places she used to go with her little boy and that she meets up with some of her old friends, including their 7-year-old children. She realises she is beginning to let go of something as they do not remind her so much of her own little boy any more, since they are so much older and different somehow. The school rallies round and the headmaster organises a ceremony to plant a little tree for Ralph. She is very moved by this and it allows her to feel supported and acknowledged in her role of bereft parent. She also realises that he has a place of his own now, outside of her heart. Moreover it is a place where he grows. She takes great comfort from visiting the school occasionally and watching the tree shoot up over the summer. She comes to a session one day saying she feels a twinge of desire to embrace life without Steven and Ralph and start growing again herself, like Ralph's tree in the playground. She no longer feels that she has to protect them as much as feeling that she can claim her right to feel protected by them. It is quite a miracle for her to find that now that she has made peace with the past, she can face Steven and Ralph's ghosts without feeling afraid or guilty. They become like good friends to her in the subsequent months and she feels more peaceful in what she comes to think of as their benevolent wish for her to do well.

There are many further practical steps that aid her progress. Leaving her in-laws and giving up the wish to make up to them for stopping Steven visiting them is an important and decisive move forwards. Going back to live on her own in the old flat and start to sort out her husband and son's belongings are landmarks on the long road of recovery. We often discuss the concrete steps she is able to take and sometimes she decides to speed things up or slow things down according to what seems right to her when she ponders on it.

Sometimes progress suddenly seems to be in jeopardy when new events occur that temporarily interfere with her carefully managed process of recovery. There are confrontations with her in-laws that start out as possible catastrophes and setbacks but with a little assistance turn out to be boosts to her growing self-esteem. At this point she claims back her right to look after Steven's estate, of which she is the executor, but which her in-laws have thus far managed. Rita needs a little help in remembering her own financial skills but when she does remember, she thrives on the rediscovery of her efficiency and she begins to flourish as a semi-professional person again. Before too long Rita is ready to find a job again, in spite of the fact that Steven's death has left her fairly comfortably off and she does not strictly speaking have to work. She is reluctant to claim the benefits that are now coming to her, but

finds that if she thinks of this little income as Steven still standing by her and encouraging her to get her own life together for his sake as well as hers, she immediately feels a new freedom. He would, indeed, not like seeing her being so sad and wasting her life. Her tender remembrance of Ralph teaches her that her maternal feelings should not be wasted either and she eventually admits to wanting to become a mother again one day, in spite of the loss and pain she knows motherhood would surely bring again as well.

Two years after the beginning of the therapy Rita has re-established a life of her own. She has started a new professional training, which will lead to a much more senior position in finance, and she has redecorated the flat and claimed it as 'her home'. There is still a room for Steven and Ralph in it, where she keeps her mementos, but all the rest she now considers hers. Her work brings her in contact with lots of concrete human relations and everyday concerns which are troublesome and which increasingly take up the space of the sessions. She is, in other words, learning to live again instead of hiding in grief-stricken isolation and terror. Quite soon after she renews her professional career, she hesitantly starts a warm friendship with a male colleague, who has been very supportive to her over the months, but who she anxiously kept at bay, for fear of offending Steven's memory. In the final months of our work together we focus quite a lot on this new relationship and all it brings up for her. She spends a lot of time trying to be more honest in this relationship than she was able to ever be with Steven. She is learning to be a fuller and more open person. She is quite proud of her achievements and on the strength of this begins a correspondence with her parents to try to work out what went wrong in her relationship with them. She tries very hard to be fair to them and begins to work on some of her childhood frustrations and traumatic experiences in the therapy as well. Each time a new bit of awareness is reached, she brings it immediately into play in her correspondence with them. Her new boyfriend, Adam, is very helpful to her in relation to the problems with her parents and they decide to travel to her home country together to meet them. Upon her return there is much to process, but she is now determined to learn to tackle all this mostly by herself and with the people around her, rather than in therapy. Of course she also feels it is important to devote herself more to her new friend, who she now, somewhat reluctantly, calls her boyfriend. Soon he becomes her partner as they decide to move in together and she wants the therapy to end at this point, since she knows she has made the transition and feels she needs to stop talking to me about Steven and Ralph behind Adam's back. It is a question of commitment, she says, and she seems aglow. She is full of energy and quite a different person than the Rita I first met two and a half years previously. She has a clear sense of what she wants and a much stronger image of herself than she has ever had before. She realises that the tragedy will always be a part of her and that Steven and Ralph will always have a place in her heart, but she does not want them

to overshadow the rest of her life. She wants to opt for life, not for death, and she believes that she has been blessed to overcome something that she thought was un-overcomable. She now thinks that what has happened to her has wounded her deeply and in this way opened her up to herself and made her come to life. I cannot resist the temptation to say that it is death that has taught her about life and she smiles in agreement. Although our regular sessions stop at this point, Rita comes back for a couple of later sessions to renew her sense of direction, but also, as it transpires, to purge a remaining sense of occasional guilt towards her new partner, for thinking so much about Steven and Ralph.

Therapeutic connection and communication in the early stages

The therapy was an important part of Rita's triumph over her trauma. She needed someone to help her heal the breach that death had made in her life. The connection between us made it possible for her to face up to many things she could not have even known about let alone face alone. But it was important that our connection and communication changed over the weeks and months in line with her position in the world and state of mind. It took mental and emotional agility on my part to make myself available to her just in the right manner, week after week. I had to gauge her openness, her resilience and her capacity for communication at all times. First I had to win her trust, then I had to earn her respect and then I had to convince her to start trusting life and herself. Eventually I had to begin the process of becoming a witness, followed by becoming a mere road companion and then a benevolent stranger she was soon going to be ready to leave behind.

When I work with a person, I know that I have to take on their troubles in a very total and real way. I cannot remain outside of their world and make clever interventions based on theory or technique. I let them affect me and infect me with their fears, regrets, worries, doubts and pain. Then I let myself find the strength, the courage, the capacity for bearing this so as to show them how it can be done. Together we then find a way, always patiently and painstakingly moving forward, sometimes taking small steps back, but going slowly enough to keep pace with each other and with the demands of their lives, so that not too many setbacks are necessary. To be on the same wavelength and to be willing to resonate and respond profoundly, in co-presence and in total seriousness, is not an easy task and is very demanding of my own moral and emotional energy. It helps to remain sometimes humorous and light as well. As a therapist I assume it is my task to know about life and to oversee a person's plight after carefully exploring it in the round. I also take the view it is my job to show the way and to create a sense of sacred silence and respect and wonder for what life can offer even when all

seems dark and the person is forlorn. I need to remind the person of their own capacity for finding direction and for searching for truth and they need to see that I am committed to their well being at all times. All in all it is not a soft option to make oneself available for the depth and breadth of existential therapy.

When I initially speak to Rita, the words that I say to her at first hardly reach her. She is in a place of relative safety deep inside of herself, in a state of suspended animation behind the facade that she turns to the world. She barely engages with people at all. At first it is not my words that make the link to her world, but the consistency that I can offer in being attentive and careful to not hurt her further or push her too hard. In an early session I spend nearly half an hour in relative silence with Rita, at times tentatively formulating her fear on her behalf, gently, carefully checking for verification by noting her response. Mostly the early work consists of me letting myself be touched by her suffering and learning to tolerate her pain with her, so that I can offer descriptions that resonate and strike root in her, so that she can begin to formulate and articulate rather than merely experience her grief and drown in it. My descriptions are deeply emotional, intensely coloured, matching her emotional state as closely as possible. I aim to help her connect with me by resonating and absorbing her pain. Gradually my words slip from resonance to reformulation. I sketch in the wider context and add different highlights in her situation. I remind her of the horizon of life, her path through her life's landscape. I help her remember the things that are of value and help her reconnect actively, directly to her life's purpose, not lost, but in transition. My words are more sober now. I provide some solid stepping stones that help her move forward to a place where she can find solid ground to walk on. Only then do we get ready to begin to face what has happened to her, so shockingly out of the blue. In this process she guides me and exposes more and more of her nightmarish universe to me as she perceives me as capable of venturing further into it with her. At first I am safe in my personal assumptions of a reliable world. Gradually I become more and more live to the strange and horrific experience of seeing all of one's points of reference destroyed in one day. Occasionally I have thunderbolt flashes of insight into the inner destruction and havoc that has been wreaked. I have to be willing to let this experience affect me rather than retreat. It is my task to find a way to integrate it into a feasible world view that can encompass all the lost longings and all the devastation without giving into it.

At first I can only hesitantly approach her experience. I say, softly and enquiringly: 'You are keeping the pain at bay by hiding inside of it'. This is an observation; a modest approximation of what I surmise is going on in her. I have no certainty about what I observe and so I constantly verify my observations. But at the same time I know this, in my bones, because I recognise

her deep concentration, her total absorption in something unnamed and unnameable that holds her entirely. I am aware of the necessity of not assuming too much and of the risk of infecting her with my own visceral knowledge of pain, so I let myself rest and lean into my hard earned capacity for remaining entire and I tune back into life and trust it will rally around. My heart beats strongly but calmly and I know I will be able to walk beside her patiently and without promising too much but also without tiring till we have gone through her hell of darkness and re-emerge into the light. I know I cannot quench her unquenchable thirst for lost love and that I cannot provide relief or repair. She needs endless space and limitless time. But I also know that is just exactly what she has: for time slows down and stands still when you are grief stricken and in the midst of disaster and despair.

So I draw back a little from my immersion in her world and make contact with my own world, briefly reminding myself to constantly verify my observations and gauge the situation she is actually in. All the while I carefully watch her response, checking whether my words are accurate or not and when she nods, gently from behind a closed curtain of withdrawn reluctance, I may engage slightly further and say: 'This works for you, you are safe inside of the pain, aren't you?' In this process I am trying to establish Rita's location in the world. I try to ascertain what her true position is and how able she is to deal with her own pain. My impression is that she is managing somehow, in spite of the terror and the agony and I want her to build from the little bit of strength that she seems to retain. When she nods again, this time a little more emphatically, we have established a kind of togetherness and a beginning of understanding. We have also agreed that she knows what is right for her and that I will respect her position.

She hesitates, but looks up at me, wondering. There is a half-minute silence between us, in which I feel a strong sense of rallying with her and being able to contain her pain. She volunteers, obviously reaching out to me in a kind of desperate way: 'You are so kind', and it sounds like a reproach. She weeps silently then. I feel for her. She cannot even bear ordinary human kindness and does not expect to find it. She has just then come out of hiding. She has told me in fact that she feels I am beside her and that the kindness is right and allows her to let some of her tense withholding melt away. I let her cry a bit and follow her lead. 'It's hard to share the pain.' I half ask, half assert, trying to engage her further, searching for what is her experience rather than mine. She hesitates again, but this time corrects me, which means we are working, we are in connection: 'It's hard to get across it,' she says in a whisper, smothered in tears. I can hardly hear. At first I think she might be trying to say it is hard to express herself, get herself across, but following my intuition I sense that she means it differently. I am following my own experience of her reflected pain in me, when I say: 'The pain gets in the way of

saying what you want to say?' She moans in full approval. Then, after a pause filled with tears: 'I want to get through it. I want it to be over. I can't move or talk.' Now I reply more quickly, for she is making contact and asking for comfort. I feel she needs me to reach out to her and throw her a lifeline to get out from behind the paralysing grief she is trapped in. 'You want to get out of this place of unbearable sorrow and talk to find a way to make sense of it.' It is more of a suggestion than a question. She looks at me with tear-filled eyes, but at least she looks at me, for the first time, eye to eye. 'Is it possible?' she asks with as much eagerness as doubt. 'To get through it?', I check, because I do not want to impose the idea of her having to find meaning in it. 'To make sense of it,' she replies. 'Is that what you want to do?' She nods. I feel a little burst of joy welling up inside of me. We seem to have an alliance, an agreed project, a joint plan for the future. I hold her gaze steadily. 'We shall work at it.' And that is a promise. Then I scan softly: 'It-will-take-time, lots of time.' She nods. I nod back: 'But you have time, plenty of it, and if this is what you want and decide to do, yes, you can and will make sense of it and emerge, all the stronger for it.' I am making a definite pledge about our work. I feel confident in the knowledge of experience that people can and do survive horrific life events and losses like Rita's. She responds to my certainty not only with complete faith in me, but also with a fantastic sense of reality that brings us back to what we are dealing with at present. She looks grateful and hopeful when she says: 'I just want to survive for the moment.' She almost smiles. I laugh a little at my own therapeutic zeal. 'You are right,' I say smiling, 'that will be quite enough for now.' She has just taken charge of the process and I gladly let her find her own way and indicate that I will follow and be right beside her when she needs me to be strong. The reins are firmly in her hands now. It is important to remember that from where she stands the idea of coming out stronger is not an option and it is not even important. Strength is out of sight, improvement a seeming impossibility. From where I stand I know that her suffering will season her and make her softer and yet more solid, more mellow, more malleable and flexible, more compassionate and most of all more real, providing she is equal to it, manages it, absorbs it, distils it and overcomes it. I know that equally if she does not tend to her grief or does not have the right support through it, she may falter and fail and fall into long-term depression and mournful dysfunctionality. I know the commitment I am taking on, to stand by her, and go all the way through her darkness, till it is transformed into light. My knowledge will carry me forward with her in the difficult process of accompanying her on her painful journey. But I also know how rich an exploration it will be and how privileged I am to be able to visit such scary places second hand, at a safe distance and learn to lay some of her ghosts while facing my own fears in the process. It is her need and her current ability, at any one moment, that will set the pace and it is my task and duty from now on to keep that process safe. As I lay out the project, for the first

time she responds with tears of relief as she releases herself into the process of discovery. She expresses her gratitude, as she will do many times during our journey together. There is much to be grateful for when we find a sure-footed companion, who has a map of the territory and who is an experienced traveller and who sticks by your side showing you the way out of your wilderness, come fair or foul weather and with intrepidity. It is enough to take heart to know that this is possible. So, when her tears abate she begins to tell me her story slowly but fairly surely. Our work has begun.

Therapeutic communication in the later stage and working towards disconnection

Of course the work shifted enormously over the months and years and the quality of my resonance and co-presence changed as Rita became more confident and able to reclaim her autonomy. While I often felt as if I had to protect and shield her at first, I gradually withdrew this protection and let her find her own ways to both protect and challenge herself. In the later stages of our work together our interaction slowly shifted towards equality, as I aimed to make myself redundant from my job as Rita's therapist. Therapy with those who are traumatised is always about this process of gradual withdrawal. I find it easiest to deal with this if I allow myself to gradually become more of an equal and a friend to the client. The process reminds me very much of that of relating to teenage children when they become young adults and they fly the nest. It is a process of gradually withdrawing protection and initiating equality. When people respond to this process by clamouring for more care, it usually means that the ending is premature and needs to be slowed down. With some clients this process is completely natural and they crave their newfound independence, with others it may take longer, since they are not so keen to let go of their special place and time where they can remain focused entirely on themselves and the problems in living they still experience. The factor that makes all the difference is whether or not the client has succeeded in making an intimate relationship with someone outside of therapy. With clients who have not found a soul mate, there is a reluctance to let go of the companion in their life travels and they may initially become a little resentful and clamour for further attention. A good transition for such clients is to join a therapy group instead and broaden their intimate connections to others in a way that helps them diversify and learn to be more confident about sharing themselves with others.

In Rita's case that did not happen. She reclaimed her own authority quite happily along the path, without necessarily noticing that she was doing so. She had a feisty and self-assertive character that quickly reasserted itself as soon as her grief became more absorbed and understood. It was not difficult with Rita to let her do more and more of the work and abstain increasingly

from making interventions, as she became quite capable of making them herself. This often is the case with intelligent and capable clients: they learn the ropes within months or years and become their own therapists. I find it gratifying when this happens. But not all clients are that self-reliant or certain of their own authority and they may need longer to learn from example. It is important not to underestimate their capacity for transcendence, but it is equally important to be able to continue working with them for as long as is necessary. Eventually the moment always arises when the therapist can begin yielding to the client's authority, when the client is ready to take charge of her life regardless of the ups and downs that arise on their path. When self-reflection, understanding and courage have become a habit, the client is ready to move on. At that moment we go into a phase of collaborative work which is enjoyable and instructive in a myriad of ways. The therapy has then turned into life supervision. I am quite happy to continue supervising people occasionally, on demand, for many years after, without regular sessions, perhaps seeing them only once or twice a year.

This is also what happened with Rita. She was happy to end the therapy as soon as she felt her strength return and it became obvious that she was starting to feel real and competent enough to strike out on life by herself. Even then she was pleased to know she could always call to make an appointment to see me for a one-off session. She continued to see me occasionally in this way for a number of years after the end of our regular sessions. Our therapeutic dialogue at the end of our work together and in the years since that ending has been about exploring the ideas and the experiences that challenge her still. She has continued on her search to learn to live better all the time. The discussions we had at the end of her therapy were similar to the tone of these one-off sessions. They are to the point and review current events and their meaning in a quest for the best way to tackle them. Here is a small extract from one of the later sessions Rita and I had at the end of her regular therapy. It will be clear that she is getting able to manage her life well by herself.

Rita says: 'I went to the school today and Ralph's tree had new leaves on it. Suddenly I thought that it was as if my own life has grown new leaves too.' Her eyes are moist, but she is not weeping, just moved. I acknowledge the rightness of her remark with a light nod of my head. I know it is good and she is doing all right. She says: 'I went to the park with Yvonne and Mike after that. Ralph and Mike used to play so nicely together with their Lego. Mike is not into Lego any more. He prefers computer games now. I wonder whether Ralph would have been the same. I felt envious of Yvonne for having her big boy with her, but I also felt a kind of relief at not having to lose my little boy.' 'Your little boy is yours forever?', I say. She smiles and says: 'No, I think I will have to learn to let him be in peace.' She is quiet for a moment and

I say nothing. She looks almost radiant when she remarks: 'I realised today that Yvonne has also lost her little boy in a way, when we chatted about the way they used to play. She seemed quite sad about the way in which Mickey has changed. Kids change. You lose them, no matter what, don't you?' She looks to me questioningly. I nod approval at her philosophical attitude, but with a slightly raised quizzical eyebrow at her levelling of her experience to that of Yvonne's. She notices and picks it up immediately. She has learnt so much about the subtleties of human communication over these years. 'I know it is not the same. She still has Mike, though she has lost Mickey. There is still a difference, isn't there? I will never know what it is like to see Ralph grow up,' she says, smiling sadly. I nod again, vigorously. She says: 'I know for sure now that I want this again. I want to have more kids with Adam. I want to feel that love again, that closeness, that tenderness. I really knew it when I envied Yvonne when she hugged Mike.' I smile my understanding at her. 'You really have learnt to know what your own emotions tell you, haven't you? And you know what you want in life, too,' I say, feeling some pride in having taught her. She beams at me, like a good pupil: 'I am teaching everyone around me now!' she says proudly, 'even my parents, when Adam and I were over there. I showed them it was fine for them to be angry with me for having chosen to stay in England. They were pretty amazed that I did not get angry back, too! We just talked about my future like grownups. They accepted my point of view in the end.' She then tells me the story of her interactions with her parents, which indicate her understanding and care as well as her capacity to be lucid and vigorous in challenging unfairness or unclearness. She knows how well she is doing. She relishes it. She goes on to tell me of the wedding she and Adam are planning: a year from now. Then she laughs: 'We might change our minds if I get pregnant before that. We are both in a bit of a hurry'. I could challenge or admonish or caution care or suggest she thinks through the consequences of rashness. I could impose my authority and try to reclaim my position of wisdom and authority, but what good would that do? I choose not to and let her be her own woman. I smile and tell her what a pleasure it is to see her move on. We discuss the end of the therapy then. She feels strong and is able to reflect back on the hard times she has been through and the work we have done together. She says spontaneously: 'I will miss you, but it will be a bit of a relief in some way to stop coming here.' 'Yes,' I say 'and leave behind the last vestige of your terrible tragedy.' 'I will never forget what you did for me, you know,' she says, worried to offend and be too eager to leave. I wave my hand breezily: 'Remember what you learnt, that is all that matters and let go of the rest'. She beams a smile at me and looks contented. She has a future, she has strength. It gladdens me to see her like that. My heart nevertheless feels somewhat heavy, when she happily skips out of the room. I am sure she will be fine, but it will take me a little time to let go, as ever.

Diagram of Rita's therapy

<i>Starting point: worldview at the outset</i>	<i>Therapy: what I aim for with Rita</i>	<i>Breakthrough: things that move her on</i>	<i>New life: worldview at end of therapy</i>
<p><i>Umwelt</i></p> <p>Physical world and relationship to things and the body</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Objects in the world have become a threat and are unreliable. 2 Own body has become frozen in fear. 3 Other people's bodies are dead or disturbing. 4 Nature is dangerous and she avoids it. 5 Houses are tombs and prisons, but it is all she has got. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Face the threat to understand it and not evade it, to make is safe. 2 Pay attention to own needs: cry and feel deeply and find comfort in this. 3 Take time to attend to the dead and take care of them. 4 Talk about dangers and accept them: discover peace in nature too. 5 Hide for as long as needed, but look for green shoots. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Relearns to see objects and to make them safe again. 2 Respects own body and looks after it with some pleasure. 3 Lets the dead bury the dead and recovers curiosity for live people. 4 Goes into nature and befriends it: courage comes from trust. 5 Reclaims own space in flat and makes room for self. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Takes pride in certain objects (old toys but also new clothes). 2 Pleasure in grooming and own body's aliveness and play. 3 Rediscovered sex with a new lover. 4 Travels to home country, relishes space and freedom. 5 Moves in with lover and makes new home.

(Continued Overleaf)

Rita's therapy (Continued)

	<i>Starting point: worldview at the outset</i>	<i>Therapy: what I aim for with Rita</i>	<i>Breakthrough: things that move her on</i>	<i>New life: worldview at end of therapy</i>
<i>Mitwelt</i> Social world and the relationship to people and the public dimension	<p>1 The social world is dangerous: I have to hide from it.</p> <p>2 The others that I loved are lost. No other people can be trusted now.</p> <p>3 Human culture has produced cars and other lethal instruments.</p> <p>4 Parents are a disappointment and are not here.</p> <p>5 In-laws are oppressive and do not understand.</p>	<p>1 Face fears of others, one at a time. Uncover own tendency to hide.</p> <p>2 Take time to relate to the lost loved ones and reflect on these relationships.</p> <p>3 Consider the dangers of the public world and how to manage them.</p> <p>4 Rethink relationship to parents and mourn their absence.</p> <p>5 Live with in-laws' protection until ready to claim own space.</p>	<p>1 Discover longing to be part of the world. Meet old colleagues and friends.</p> <p>2 Find a safe place for dead husband and son to continue loving them.</p> <p>3 Remember own contributions to social world: job and past skills.</p> <p>4 Acknowledge desire to confront parents and see them again to talk.</p> <p>5 Find courage to establish distance from in-laws.</p>	<p>1 Takes pride in making new relationship and starting again.</p> <p>2 Finds safety in commitment to her lost loved ones, but wants to relate to the living and love again.</p> <p>3 Takes pleasure in establishing new career and enjoys learning new skills.</p> <p>4 Discovers she can understand others and alter relationships.</p> <p>5 Retains what is good from both parents and in-laws, but has separate world.</p>

Eigenwelt

Personal world
and the
relationship to
the private self

- | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | Thinks she is a
useless person: lost
to the world. | 1 | Understand why she
feels useless and lost. | 1 | Comes face to face
with herself in
talking about her
past and present. | 1 | Sees herself as a
valid person with
much experience. |
| 2 | Finds her inner
world oppressive. | 2 | Recognise her
alienation and the
reasons for it. | 2 | Sees how hard her
life has been and
understands her
plight. | 2 | Values the way in
which she has
overcome her
terrible losses. |
| 3 | Hates her own
feelings and
thoughts. | 3 | Get to know and
respect her inner
experiences. | 3 | Learn to have
compassion for her
life story. | 3 | Feels confident and
almost intrepid in
taking on challenges. |
| 4 | Thinks she is a bad
person, a bad
mother and bad wife. | 4 | Learn to respect
and appreciate her
past contributions. | 4 | Retrieves a sense of
self-respect. | 4 | Recognises her
capacity for loving. |
| 5 | All individuality is
doomed to turn
out badly. | 5 | Welcome the
possibility of
perfectionity of
character. | 5 | Builds confidence in
meeting life's
challenges. | 5 | Has faith that she
can do good things
in her life. |

(Continued Overleaf)

<i>Starting point: worldview at the outset</i>	<i>Therapy: what I aim for with Rita</i>	<i>Breakthrough: things that move her on</i>	<i>New life: worldview at end of therapy</i>
<p><i>Überwelt</i> Spiritual world and the relationship to ideas and meanings</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Life is rotten and the world is a place of doom and gloom. 2 There is no meaning to anything once you have lost what you love. 3 The God of her childhood has deserted her or perhaps has punished her for being a bad person. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Explore the depth of despair and go into the abyss together. 2 Retrieve the meaning of the love that has not been lost but is hers to keep. 3 Find the ultimate source of being that she used to trust and retrieve a sense of safety in the leap of faith. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Discovery of her own capacity for suffering. 2 Harvesting the love that is far from lost and remembering the precious moments of the past. 3 Finding a trust in life with all its downsides and all its possibilities and realizing she still wants to take a chance on it and live again. 4 Realizing the strength that comes from not just wanting good things. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Life is full of ups and downs and we can stand it. 2 Knowing that love is everything and that it is never lost if you keep loving. 3 Dedicating oneself to life and discovering how it works is worth it. 4 Not trying for happiness, but for the fullness of living and knowing you can do this no matter what. 5 Feeling fortunate having learnt so much and having survived fate.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4 There is nothing that can redeem a person, there is no hope and all is darkness 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Learn to face darkness and discover that light reappears at the end of the night. 		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5 People who haven't had catastrophes in their lives have no idea of truth. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Value the insights and maturity harsh experience can bring. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5 Prizing her own resilience and letting it mellow rather than harden her. 	

Conclusions

Although existential psychotherapy has been practised for close to a century, it is in many ways still in its infancy. It has never gained the sort of recognition that would have made it flourish and it has remained the province of a handful of devoted practitioners. In some ways it has remained a kind of arcane secret, for insiders only, and there is a self-selective process among those who turn towards it.

To work existentially you have to be prepared to think deeply about life and human relations in ways that require you to make your own tracks rather than follow in the footsteps of great gurus. There are no shortcuts for existential work; there can be no definitive existential technology or theory. Life is too changeable and uncertain for that. The lack of guidelines has made it difficult to formalise the approach and this has, in turn, stopped it from being easily taught.

It is only since efforts at popularisation of existential ideas by some humanistic psychologists that the approach has been taken seriously at all. This has not done the approach any favours or justice, as the popular light-hearted versions of it have often betrayed the seriousness and deeply felt personal immersion into existence that it requires. The true spirit of philosophical investigation of a person's struggles with existence will undoubtedly remain a rarity and a privilege. Such is the nature of life. Ever since Socrates paid with his life for his claims for philosophical freedom, there has been a long tradition of philosophical contemplation and dialogue being seen as marginal and dismissed as too controversial and idiosyncratic. It is not likely to become a manualised approach and if it does it will have lost its integrity and intensity.

It is comparatively rare to find practitioners who are both trained philosophers and psychotherapists and who can offer the full range of existential analysis in the true sense of the word and this is not likely to change for it involves long, arduous and onerous training. But there are now excellent existential therapy trainings available and the existential approach is flourishing all over Europe and internationally. In a world of technology, evidence-based practice and skills training, the existential approach is an essential

antidote to established practice. I also believe that the field of psychotherapy and counselling, as it is currently conceived, would benefit greatly from more existential input across the board. To insert some existential doubt into the procedures, and to make fully analysed or highly functioning persons a little less certain of their right to tell others what they experience and how they should think and live, will be much for the better. More attention to human limitations and a greater focus on the hardship of the human condition is particularly important at a time when we are becoming more and more keen on positive psychology. Unfortunately philosophy is not a popular field at the moment and we have a long way to go before existential therapy with an emphasis on clear thinking and philosophical understanding becomes established in the mainstream. It may well be that this is an advantage and in some ways the *sine qua non* of its purity and ongoing commitment to freedom of thought.

What I fear the most is that by writing down my thoughts about existential therapy, and by drawing together these strands of my personal experience of its practice, I have conspired in giving credence to the idea of an existential approach to psychotherapy that can be taught and copied like a technique. I do not believe this to be the case, for any existential psychotherapy that is turned into a school of thought and a dogma will belie the challenges of an approach that is true to life. Discussion, dialogue and debate will always have to be part of the growing movement of existential therapy, especially intercultural debate, to take differences into account rather than to set in stone the way in which the approach should be practised. It is far better in the end, to stick to the notion that all one can ever do is to try and provide food for thought on the existential dimensions of psychotherapy, which can then be applied to work of all sorts and in all kinds of settings. The objective, then, is to add a deeper, wider, broader, more intense, dimension of existential meaning to the work one does in one's own way. If this becomes possible for some of the readers of the book, my work will not have been in vain.

In the end, of course, I cannot prevent the book from being used in the way in which people see fit to use it. I certainly hope it will be of benefit to the students of the existential approach who come for training at the existing institutes. They will have the wisdom of using my work in juxtaposition with that of others, and they will be able to apply a critical reading of anything I have affirmed with too much certainty.

I hope that I may trigger some passion for life here and there, rather than an unholy imitation of existential methods that turn into another form of prescriptive practice. Most of all, I hope that no one will use these methods to condemn, ridicule or obstruct another human being, and that some will see their way to using these ideas to understand and liberate themselves, and maybe even cooperate in the liberation and recovery of others.

So let me try to summarise what it is I hope to have achieved in this book. It is to shine a new light on the predicaments that make people consult

psychotherapists. What I would like the reader to retain from it is the realisation that the stories we tell ourselves about the human psyche are always, and necessarily, limited and limiting stories. I hope to have opened up Pandora's box, which contains so many more complexities, possibilities and adversities than we would usually take into account. I hope that there will be many psychotherapists who, having read some of the alternative, philosophical accounts of the human condition, will remember their own struggles to live decently and will cease to fit these into some mould of psychopathology and insufficiency, but rather begin to look at their battles with self-respect and wonder about the complexity of life.

It takes considerable effort to make new spaces for oneself in the world and many of us do not even feel entitled to attempt to do so. Human culture provides a myriad of ways of dispensing with the effort of expansion. We let ourselves easily be soothed into conformity, even if that conformity takes away our dignity and freedom. Security, belonging and acceptance are extremely important motivations that sometimes keep us willing to be reduced to less than what we are capable of. Finding new ways into the jungle, or around the globe on stormy oceans, or into space, takes courage and evokes large amounts of anxiety. Yet human curiosity, vitality, adventure and expansionism are important counterweights to this tendency to settle for the known. Over the past century, the professions of psychotherapy and counselling, which started out as a new exploration of unknown continents, have become somewhat formulaic and are settling into complacency. Dogma is taken for granted and followed with excessive conformism. It is also imposed on the clients and patients who are in search of an understanding of their own conflicting and conflicted realities.

Psychotherapists need to wake up from their slumbers and their dreams of control over the human mind and soul, for while they have slept their dreams have turned into a nightmare. Psychotherapy is in danger of governing the entire sphere of human relational experience in such a way that we will end up conforming to the images that psychotherapists have invented to explain some of our difficulties away. While some of this has been useful, and all of it needs to be retained as part of our heritage and exploration of all that the human mind is capable of inventing for itself and about itself, it is time to revise the theories and the practices that it has generated.

It is no longer necessary or constructive to let ourselves be confined by our own misunderstandings in the way that we have. It is possible freely to observe and describe our experiences in all their diversity and all their similarity and to conclude that human living is far more complex and conflicted than therapists sometimes would like to believe.

We have been so afraid of the intensity of much of our experience that we have tried to normalise and confine it to a small range of what is possible. We have labelled each other pathological for more things than are necessary or useful. In doing so, we have deprived ourselves of the exploration of the

creative potential of humankind, and we have boxed in a great number of people who are capable of pioneering new ways of being. It is time to open our eyes and see what is there, without making too many value judgements about it all. It is time to lend our ears to our clients' preoccupations from a position of recognition and resonance, instead of with the purpose of analysing and reducing them to a state of despair and degradation.

These tools of psychotherapy have to be used in a more gentle way and this can be achieved only by learning to use them for ourselves in a gentler manner first. Psychotherapists should be brave enough to start talking about their own explorations of life and their personal suffering and joys. Why have they always been so secretive about these apparently so important analyses they go through? For the simple reason that, in such an analysis, the trainee is brought to the realisation of inferiority, which then leads to the desire to conform to authority in order to be approved of in spite of all one's now so obvious shortcomings. Having come to terms with one's faults and pathology, then, does not lead to the realisation that these faults and pathologies are also one's strength and an intrinsic part of our nature, rather they lead to a secretive sense of deficiency that has to be hidden and overcome well enough to begin playing holier-than-thou with others from the superior position of the analyst or the psychotherapist.

It is time that someone should expose these lies we psychotherapists tell ourselves. Of course, we are all full of error and fallibility, and impermanence, and unfairness, and misunderstanding, and everything else that remains taboo and unspoken about ourselves. Of course, it is possible to live with such sins. It is what makes us human. The challenge is not to perfect ourselves, but to get better at living with our imperfections. When we work as psychotherapists, what we provide for people is a time and a space to begin to work out how life fits together for them, and how they can put themselves more at ease, so as to benefit from life rather than suffer from it. We can do this by relying on pre-set notions of what life is like and what people should be like, interpreting their ways of falling short of the ideal – but this is likely to have the effect of oppressing the person. Or we can do this by helping people to express and articulate what is alive for them, and thus get a grip on their own position in the overall context. And we can also do so by trying to follow creatively the source of the person we work with, enabling them to get tougher on themselves, capable of challenging their own complacency about life.

That is what this book has tried to promote. It has provided the reader with some pathways into everyday reality. It has left much unsaid and unfinished, for the simple reason that everyday reality still remains largely mysterious and can never be described completely. In finding that this book cannot solve any of these mysteries, the reader is thrown back into a personal investigation. It is only when we are ready to bring our multifarious realities together, that we will begin to get a larger picture of human reality. Such a larger picture

will allow more of us to recognise our own experience as valid and not contemptible. Life is hard enough as it is. We should not make it any harder by setting ourselves and our clients impossible tasks.

To live with simplicity and humility in the awareness of the vast range of our human possibilities, and the tragic limitations that come with them too, is enough of a challenge for anyone. To help people do so more effectively is enough to fill a human life.

Appendix: Four dimensions of existence

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Social</i>	<i>Personal</i>	<i>Spiritual</i>
sphere	earth	world	man	gods
domain	material	public	private	ideal
mode	sensation	feeling	thinking	intuition
medium	materiality	spatiality	temporality	causality
centre of reference	body	ego	I	soul
motivation	survival	affiliation	identity	meaning
relation	anonymous	plural	singular	dual
aspiration	life	love	integrity	serenity
absolutes	omnipotence	omnipresence	omniscience	immortality
ideal	health	success	freedom	truth
minimal goal	safety	acknowledgement	autonomy	wisdom
threat	death	rejection	confusion	absurdity
wisdom	cycles, seasons, waves	cooperation, mutuality, reciprocity	flexible self, transformation, adaptation	dialectics, paradox, transcendence
principles	assumptions, facts, presuppositions, givens	standards, principles, opinions, values	attitudes, characteristics, talents	beliefs, ideals, meanings
time	past	present	future	eternity

poles	active/passive, expansion/contraction, up/down	extroversion/introversion, give and take, accommodation/assimilation	authentic/inauthentic, strong/weak	good/evil, being and nothingness
person	It, third	You, second	Me, first	We, plural
key	work, labour, dedication	negotiation, compromise	determination, application	surrender, transparency
excess	greed, addiction, compulsion, bulimia	bullying, sadism, socio-pathy, borderline	boasting, narcissism, egocentricity	zeal, fanaticism, mania, paranoia
lack	psychosomatic, phobia, anorexia, hypochondria	neediness, masochism, hysteria	self-harm, suicide, schizophrenia	apathy, depression, melancholia

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