

# PROLOGUE

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## IS THE EXISTENTIAL ENOUGH ?

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by

John Rowan

What I am trying to say in this article can be summed up very briefly: it is that psychotherapy divides into the Existential, the Regressive and the Transpersonal, and that the Existential on its own is not enough to carry it out through therapy.

In thinking about how to teach people humanistic psychotherapy, it seems to me as though it also splits into these three basic streams - the Existential, the Regressive and the Transpersonal.

In the Existential stream we find things like existential analysis, daseinsanalyse, person-centred therapy, gestalt therapy, psychodrama, focussing, experiential therapy, logotherapy, meeting therapy, reality therapy, phenomenological therapy, and in general any therapy which sticks for the most part to the present and does not have any theoretical structure which emphasises the importance of digging up the past.

in the Regressive stream we find things like primal integration

therapy, bioenergetics, neo-Reichian therapy, Radix education, postural education, biosynthesis, bio-dynamic therapy, past lives therapy and so on - all emphasising the body and early experience. In these therapies there is a big emphasis on digging up the past, on getting back to the roots of the neurosis.

And in the Transpersonal stream we find things like psychosynthesis, transpersonal psychotherapy, some Jungian therapy and a number of specialised approaches.

Now the Regressive stream is obviously closer to psychoanalysis, or at any rate more compatible with psychoanalysis, particularly in its more optimistic forms, such as object relations therapy (Winnicott, Fairbairn, Guntrip and s on), self theory (Kohut, Kernberg) and parts of Lacan.

The Existential stream, and even more, perhaps, the Transpersonal stream is incompatible with psychoanalysis. Now Psychoanalysis says, and the Regression therapists

agree here, that therapy which does not go back into early experience into the roots of the neurosis, is not going to do the whole job. In other words, therapists and clients in the Existential stream can do good work, and interesting work, and worthwhile work, but for the real business of bringing an end to the neurosis you need to go back to where it came from. The Trans-personal stream is usually more dismissed by the psychoanalysts. Where the Regression stream disagrees with psychoanalysis, apart from various differences about structures and psychodynamics, is in criticising it for not going far enough back. But Maybe (guessing here about the future) the day will come when some great theoretician will gain the respect of both camps enough

to remove this difference, and bring psychoanalysis and the Regression stream together.

With the Existential stream, however, no such rapprochement seems possible. There is a real incompatibility, centred around a non-acceptance of the notion of what Freud called system lies - the Freudian unconscious. People in the Existentialist stream don't like talking about depth psychology or depth interpretations. And they don't like talking about reliving or even reconstructing the past. It is not considered necessary to take a history or make a diagnostic assessment, It is not assumed that therapy will need of necessity to deal with childhood events or the trauma of birth.

#### Quotes from Sartre: Being and Nothingness

Psychoanalysis substitutes for the notion of bad faith, the idea of a lie without a liar . . .

How could the censor discern the impulses needing to be repressed without being conscious of discerning them? How can we conceive of a knowledge which is ignorant of itself? . . . .

The resistance of the patient implies on the level of the censor an awareness of the thing repressed as such, a comprehension of the end toward which the questions of the psychoanalyst are leading, and an act of synthetic connection by which it compares the truth of the repressed complex to the psycho-

analytic hypothesis which aims at it. These various operations in their turn imply that the censor is conscious (of) itself. But what type of self-consciousness can the censor have? It must be the consciousness (of) being conscious of the drive to be repressed, but precisely in order not to be conscious of it. What does this mean if not that the censor is in bad faith? . . .

Existential psychoanalysis rejects the hypothesis of the unconscious; it makes the psychic act co-extensive with consciousness.

pp 380-381

Maurice Friedman (ed) **The Worlds of Existentialism: A critical reader.** The University of Chicago Press. London and Chicago.

Now the question I am trying to raise is this: can the Existentialist approach enable a client to deal fully and completely with a neurosis - for example someone who was not wanted as a baby, who grew up unloved in childhood, who tried to commit suicide several times, who entertains bad feelings most of the time and who at present uses eating as the main way of dealing with her problems? Or someone who set up as an early project to get revenge on his mother, married someone who he could use as an object for this project, hates women generally and often makes them suffer, but is under the impression that he is the fairest of men and quite OK in his attitudes to women - his only problem is that he works too hard?

In the Institute where I work, we ask people to be in therapy during the threeyear course. My position has always been that a gestalt therapist would be just as good for this purpose as a psychodynamic therapist. But what we have found over the nine years we have now been running the course is that the people who do gestalt therapy don't seem to develop so deeply or so maturely as the people who are in Psychodynamic therapy. In other words, they don't deal with their neurotic trends so well or so fully. Their work is and remains relatively shallow, and so do their personalities.

Now there could be various reasons for this, which it would be interesting to go into. But the fundamental question again is - does this always happen, and is it a necessary feature of the gestalt

approach? And would it apply to any approach within the Existentialist stream, just because it avoids the depth issues of the unconscious, of childhood and early experience generally?

Now someone with the existential approach might say in answer that whatever the client comes up with has to be dealt with in the here and now, and one of the things the client may come up with is a memory from the past - or even a reliving of the past. So nothing is excluded and nothing is omitted.

But it seems to me that either such a therapist is going to help the latter to happen, believing it can be an important turning point in the therapy, or is going to be neutral or even impede it because of not believing it to be particularly significant. If the former, then there is hardly any difference between such a practitioner and a regression therapist: if the latter, then the existential therapist could be getting in the way of the client's process.

For example, there is a marvellous case history by Brian Thorne, in the book *Key Cases in Psychotherapy* which Windy Dryden edited recently, where in order to stay with a particular client, he went into some very deep regression work, which, considering he is a noted Rogerian, was a bit unexpected, to say the least. Now what I am interested in is this question - in order to do real justice to what the client needs, is it in fact always or nearly always necessary to go down into these kind of depths? And are the

approaches which do not touch regression merely avoiding this?

Obviously I have stated all this in rather stark and black-and-white terms just to bring out the main lines of the argument, but I hope at least this does make it clear what the question is about.

I speculated, in relation to the Regressive stream, that it might find common cause with the psychoanalysts. Could it also be the case, I wonder, that the Existentialist stream could eventually find common cause with the paradoxical people, the systems people, the cognitive-behavioural

people, the strategic people, all of whom have a similar approach to the unconscious? If these things happened, humanistic psychotherapy could disappear altogether, and we would have just the Go Back to the Past school (dominated perhaps by the psychoanalysts), the Stay Right Here in the Present school (dominated perhaps by the cognitive people) and the Go Forward Along Your Spiritual Path school, dominated perhaps by psychosynthesis. This is a day I hope I never see, but it haunts me.

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### COFFEE

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Words, cohesion,  
Coffee cup keeps returning,  
Voices talking,  
Too loud, too confused,  
Late, I wake,  
Her face keeps returning  
On the pillow,  
She wakes, she talks,  
Her voice is liquid crystal,  
It runs over me  
Covering me with warmth,  
Coffee, taste is sour,  
Kiss, taste is sweet,  
Sheets I melt under,  
White,  
Coffee, coffee, coffee,  
Waste so much time,  
Time is mine,  
Time is ours,  
She is reality,  
A dream of reality  
Come to fruition,  
And it keeps growing.

**Adrian Tomkinson**

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