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EXISTENCIA

10

ANIVERSARY

EXISTENCIA

REVISTA INTERAMERICANA DE ANÁLISIS EXISTENCIAL



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Anniversary number editorial

Michèle Croquevielle¹

Dear Readers,

EXISTENCIA is celebrating its 10-year birthday!

I had been teaching Existential Analysis seminars and postgraduate degree classes for nine years at the Chilean Institute of Existential Analysis (ICAE)... but I felt that it was not enough. I wanted to expand our reach to more people, in order for a broader and more diverse community to be able access the theoretical and practical treasure of EA, that Dr. Alfried Längle had developed.

This is story of how, in 2013, I invited some (in those years) students of our postgraduate degree to carry out this communication project: an electronic journal, in which we could write and share about a variety of EA and logotherapy topics, from the standpoints of our respective fields of activity, including psychotherapy practice, consulting, and research.

However, none of us had experience in this. This notwithstanding, Carolina Erber, Elisa Broussain, and Pamela Lorca joined with enthusiasm and generosity. More would come later, including Pilar Marín, Alejandra Fonseca, Marcela Mesías, Martín Maturana, and more.

In 2017, we wanted to expand the scope of the publication to all the Existential Analysis communities in the Americas. This meant not only greater coordination between groups, but also translating it into English, since Canada became involved along with Argentina and Mexico.

This is how we have reached 10 years. Thirty-six issues with more than 200 distinct articles, essays, editorials, and interviews, among other types of entries.

We always wanted there to be images as aesthetics and harmony belong to the spiritual dimension of the human person. We also felt that the lens of EA in book reviews was essential. Indeed, there have been significant developments over this decade of life of Existencia.

Juan Pablo Turén has offered patience as well as an attitude of opening and listening, to put our dreams into action by creating a space on the web to welcome and host our journal.

Mabel Muñoz, for her part, has contributed greatly to academically systematizing the material that has been published in Existencia, which is why the articles now include "double-blind" reviewers. We have become more structured and rigorous, without losing the closeness which is essential in EA.

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Throughout this last decade, some have joined and others have had to leave for their lives that call them.

In that first issue of 2013, with a photo provided by my son (later we would use professional images from an image bank), and in regards to our name (EXISTENCIA, live resolutely), I wrote the following in our first editorial:

"Existing is not the same as living, because for the first thing I need to be able to look at myself from a certain distance (think about myself). It is not enough to be or be alive (an animal, a plant cannot do that thing of 'exist'-ing). It is not enough to breathe, nor is it enough to just feel. To exist is a distinctly human capacity, but one that we do not always fulfill.

Existing implies transcending; it is leaving oneself to encounter the other, from the other, the world, and oneself. And that is what we want this journal to be: an encounter between Existential Analysis and the world that surrounds us, an encounter and a dialogue between the beings that we are (on a daily basis) and what surrounds us, touches us, matters to us."

This is how, from the personal positions of each of the Existencia collaborators, we decided that this would define us as a magazine: "to transcend and meet the other", and the world that surrounds us, with its pains and virtues. We wanted to "read" and interpret what was happening around us and inside us, from the perspective of EA.

In these last 10 years, major socio-political events have occurred in Chile and in the rest of the world: In our country, 2013 commemorated the 40th anniversary (now it is 50th) of the military coup in Chile. Over the years, other issues have also burst onto the public agenda, including as the 2015 approval of the Civil Union Agreement (legal protection especially aimed at homosexual couples), the social outbreak of October 2019, the pandemic declared in 2020, feminism as a broad social movement that took over the streets of the world in 2018, the Mexico earthquake of 2017, as well as the tragedy of the students in Ayotzinapa that fateful September of 2014. All these events were addressed and reflected on in depth and sensitivity through the lens of EA in these issues of EXISTENCIA.

In this special issue, we have selected several samples from our large and varied library of compiled writings, representing EA's dialogue with reality and its own theory (always in development). This is why, in addition to the painful theme of dictatorship in Chile of 1973, the editorial noted, "Life: A journey that is also painful." The painful tragedy of the youth who disappeared in Ayotzinapa (2015) is also addressed in the article by Silvia Gómez, "Feminine energy to ward off fear."

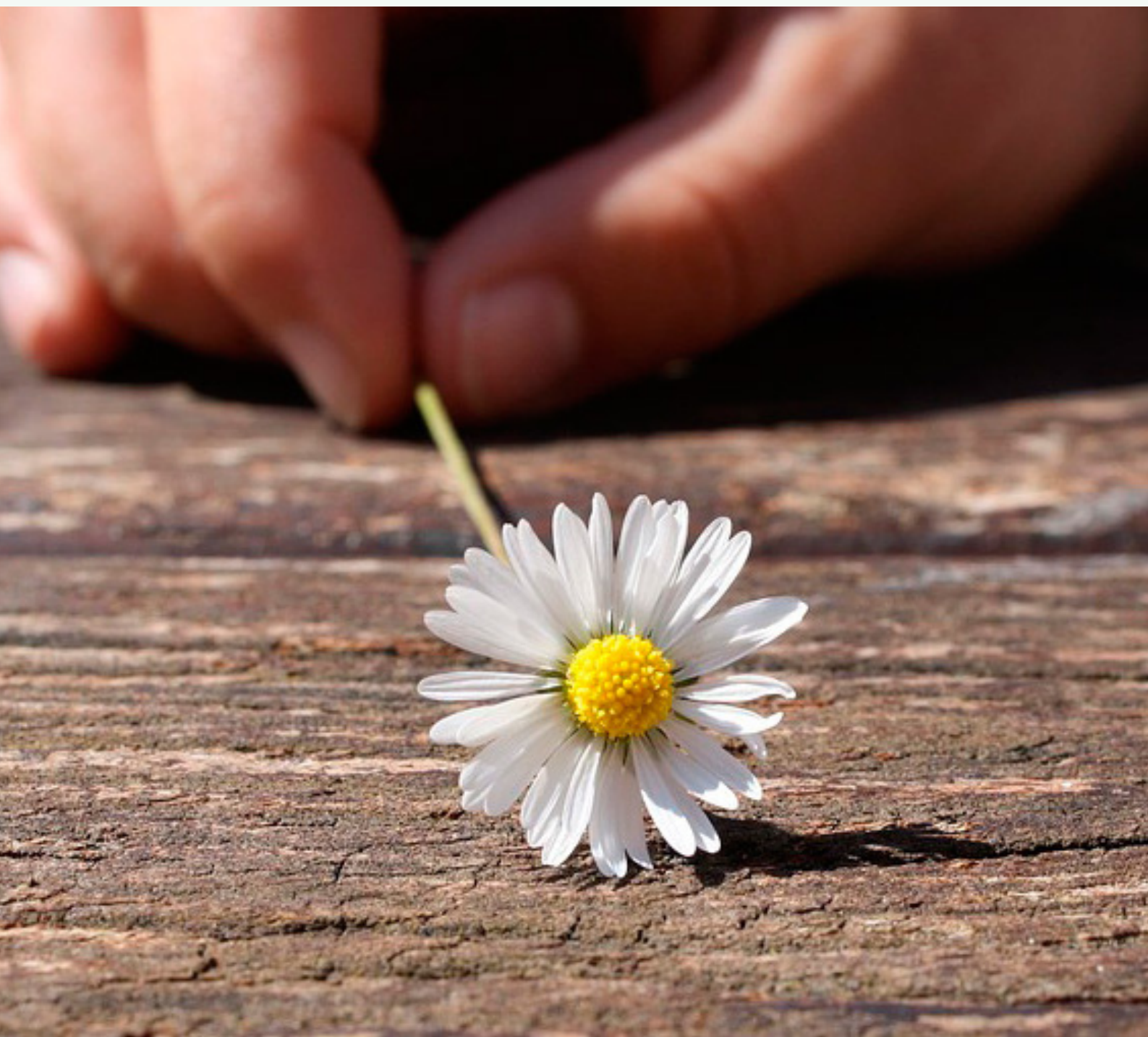
In this commemorative edition of the 10 years of Existencia, additional writings that address existential themes such as Death, Freedom and Responsibility, and Meaning, were also included. Other unfortunate topics such as sexual abuse (in a beautiful review of the book "Like fresh water in the crystals") and the Russia-Ukraine war (in an interview with Gabriel Traverso), are also included.

Dear Readers, as director of EXISTENCIA, I thank you very much for reading and trusting in our vision. And I also thank all those who collaborate with us as part of the team that we are, and those who have contributed their writings and interviews.

And my special gratitude to Carolina Cabrera, for her essential support and generous dedication over the last few years.

An affectionate greeting,

Michele Croquevielle
Director EXISTENCIA Magazine



Life: a path sometimes also painful

Michèle Croquevielle²

Dear readers:

In this third issue of our Existencia magazine, we want to honor an aspect of life, perhaps the most painful, and that we often want to avoid... to make a shortcut so as not to go through it. However recently, as a country, we have witnessed that this part cannot be avoided: I am referring to the anguish, suffering and feeling of finitude that life often brings us, especially when we do not have the equipment required to go through it.

How intense these last few months have been! 40 years are commemorated from that fateful day when our beloved country broke. Forty years...quarantine. Have we been in quarantine all these years? Have we been disconnected from ourselves, from our fears, pains, anxieties, unbearable memories? Is it that we had to isolate ourselves from them?

And is it that now "we are out of quarantine"? I try to explain to myself what has been happening on TV, on the radio, in newspapers, in conversations, and this is the only way I can explain it to myself: in order to have the capacity to bear something (yes, it is a capacity) as tremendous as the stories we have heard about, we needed to feel strong and supported so that we could later say: Yes, that's how it was, that's how it happened. How brutal the impact... what heartbreaking and painful stories...

Those who suffered directly or indirectly, how could they bear something like this? And how can we as a country now accept it? I must clarify that "accept" does not mean that I like it or that I agree. Accepting is only the confirmation that this happened, that it was real. Only after accepting I can do something with it, change it, and apparently, we are doing that: tell (rather shout) the four winds: Never Again!

This month, we are being visited by our dear friend and professor Alfried Längle (see interview), who will give a seminar on Anguish: the place it occupies in our life, and how it is showing us that there is something that is very important to us existentially, is at risk (health, maintenance, love, etc.) Also, what are the necessary conditions to be able to bear it and its therapeutic approach. I think he will provide us with important keys to be able to understand anguish and understand ourselves.

However, in all this, there have also been other types of victims: victims of themselves. Or is it not so when we make mistakes – small or huge – and do not consider the consequences on others? It is very painful when we face ourselves against the pain, we cause to another and, as I describe in the article "Repentance and Forgiveness, My Choice", it is a painful loss only recoverable through repentance and if possible, forgiveness. Only those who have themselves, very close to

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them, feel the suffering caused by acting in a way that is foreign to them, incorrect. In this case, repentance is a recovery, like a "return home", a re-appearance essentially in front of the other wounded.

These months that follow will continue to be very moving. We have an election *ad- portas*, where we must decide what we want for the next four years. In each election, I also choose something of my own. I choose what represents me most, even if it is only the fact of voting or not, because with that act I am also saying, making clear something of myself, in front of me and in front of others. ¡Once again, the "dialogic" appears to us! Nothing I do is neutral, it always has consequences, it always affects both sides of existence (hence the dialogic): the personal, personal, internal, and the other side, the external, the world. I choose what represents me the most, even if it is only the fact of voting or not, because with that act I am also saying, revealing something about myself, in front of myself and in front of others. Once again, the dialogic appears to us! Nothing I do is neutral, it will always have consequences, it will always affect both sides of existence (hence the dialogic): my own, personal, internal side, and the side of the other, the external, the world.

When it comes to facing a frightening diagnosis, for example, or when the year and its possibilities are ending. Besides elections comes the end of the year, the end of a cycle.

For the vast majority, finitude can also be somewhat distressing. When it comes to facing a frightening diagnosis, for example, or when it is the year and its possibilities that ends. How do I travel this vital path? Damián offers us a moving account of his accompaniment in cancer patients ("Walking through Uncertainty"), where the humility of accompanying, patience and openness will be essential for this journey to be meaningful.

But finitude also connects us to rituals. Constanza develops a very enriching re-look and re-signification of the rites that summon us so much on this date ("New Year's Eve and Rituals: A Pause on the Road"). Recovering the meaning of rituals (whatever they may be, shared or personal, pre-existing, or created by each one) I think it can help us end this year with a beautiful closing, necessary to be prepared for the new cycle that begins.

"Lovers and enemies", by Rosa Montero, is the book that Rita reviews, and that will help us end this year with the awareness of the meetings and farewells for this end of the year and beginning of 2014. How and what is that ritual that we carry many times autonomously, unconscious, which is to greet and say goodbye, congratulate or regret and with another, writes Rita.

Finally, I want to pay a humble tribute to those who were victims during the dictatorship, with this flower taken from the garden, which from its simplicity, every year reminds me that life is there, always waiting for me, always allowing me to reunite with you and myself.

Friends, I invite you to go through the pages of this magazine, and to prepare the body, the psyche and the spirit so that we can reach the end of the year without pending accounts, without dragged pains and with strengthened legs and clear forehead, of those who walk straight. Empty but fertile, prepared, open for what will surprise us 2014.

Best regards.



Meaning: A question with your name on it

Janelle Kwee³

Dear Readers:

If you are like me, you have probably spent some time in your life wondering and perhaps worrying about questions such as, “why are we here?” and “what is the point of life?” These questions arise sometimes out of the curiosity of a philosophical mind, and often emerge out of situations of crisis, loss, and devastation. I also suspect that asking these questions for yourselves may have led you down a path of greater confusion or mystery rather than one of clarity. For me, I remember even as a child that I felt, deep down, that questions of ultimate meaning would remain a mystery to me. I was raised in a faith community where narratives of meaning existed. However, it hurt my head and felt futile to ask ultimate questions about why. At the same time, I could often feel in my subjective knowing a deep inner sense of being here for something, such that living my life felt meaningful.

A sense of disillusionment that life doesn't make sense is a common theme presenting in my psychotherapy office. For example, I meet with a 40 year-old man whom I will call Marco. Marco is an intelligent and educated individual with strong credentials and a likable personality but has experienced serious mental illness since his days in university and has never held a job for more than a year. Before his first delusional episode in early adulthood, his life had seemed to him to be on a straightforward path. He did not question what it was about or why he was here. He had a career he was preparing for, a religion he practiced, and the unquestioned expectation that he would marry and have a family. Marco now finds himself grieving the loss of these expectations. He is also wondering, with anguish, if life can feel meaningful without a wife and children, without the career he used to imagine for himself, and without the feeling of certainty he used to have about his religious devotion.

I also work with Sandra, a 22 year old bereaved woman who lost her only immediate family member, her mother, several years ago when she was an adolescent. Sandra has survived this loss and has been supported in her grief by various extended family members and a grief counsellor. Presently, many aspects of her life seem outwardly stable. She has been in school to become a nurse. She has an apartment to live in. She has some friends who wouldn't suspect how much Sandra is suffering. However, Sandra is despondent and questions the point of her life. She tells herself she wants to help people and that's why she *should* become a nurse. Yet inwardly, Sandra confesses that it feels meaningless. She is preoccupied with the questions: *How could life do this to me? Is life even worth living? Why would I become a nurse when people just die anyway?* Sandra

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has not re-engaged her former hobbies of painting and baking and finds the company of her classmates and extended family members to be annoyingly superficial.

In the existential-analytic framework, we as human beings are seen as fundamentally enabled for dialogue, with ourselves and with life. We do not only ask questions of life, but life poses questions to us as persons, including the question of meaning. Frankl referred to this shift in our dialogue with life as the Existential Turn. In this shift, we are able to move from asking, ontologically: *What is the ultimate meaning of life?* to allowing ourselves to be asked *by* life. We are free to give our answer in our being. In any given situation, to find meaning, we must discern the most valuable possibility. Existential meaning is the personal meaning that emerges in the specific situations that we find ourselves in.

In our work together, Marco began to reflect on his enjoyment in volunteering in a mental health awareness organization. He first connected with the organization as a client in a support group and now is working toward being a facilitator and community educator. Although it doesn't fit with his previous assumptions about what a "good life" would be for him, Marco has begun to sense that it is valuable and fulfilling for him to be engaged in this work, which is personally important and meaningful. In a surprising turn from an outsider's perspective, Sandra has paused her nursing studies for the moment. She realized that it felt forced for her to pursue the profession. Instead, she is working at a local supermarket and taking time for art and baking and to reconnect with friends. Paradoxically, in letting go of her logical goal to become a nurse, Sandra is beginning to feel that her life can be meaningful in the context of relationships with others. While still unsure about whether she will complete her nursing degree, she knows inwardly that loving and being loved gives her a sense of orientation for now.

This issue of *Existencia* offers many opportunities for reflecting about the experience of meaning: This includes a review of Frankl's seminal book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, based on his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp; an inspiring case study about addiction and meaning in psychotherapy; an opportunity to encounter the possibilities of value following the recent devastating earthquake in Mexico; and an exploration of meaning and spirituality in aging.

As you peruse this issue, I invite you to reflect on your own sense of lived meaning as you discern what is most valuable in each moment. Allow yourself to be asked the powerful questions: *What is life asking from me? How can I contribute? Is something needing me? What is this day for? Where do I belong?* Life invites our contribution, our presence. Do you experience yourself being asked? Where are you being asked today?



Intimacy and that which is Public (Editorial)

Michèle Croquevielle⁴

Dear Readers:

Looking out for Spring in the Southern Hemisphere and Autumn in the North, I want to connect you with the two poles of existence, in which we move and relate: the pole between ME and YOU, the private and the public.

In Autumn preparation to hibernate, to guard and protect ourselves from the cold spells of Winter, we prepare to walk into the sacred space where **intimacy** is sheltered and protected. In the opposite pole (Spring), we find the Otherness demanding **openness**, giving and receiving, and of exposing oneself to the gaze of You, of the other.

But who am I, and how do I get to the place that differentiates me from the others? This is the adolescent search of identity. However, it is not only of adolescence...

A patient (35 years old) tells me with pain that she should change, that how she is is not good. She tells me that she sees herself as strange and has always tried to change herself to be how others expect her to be. I tell her as a therapist that I don't see what she calls strange in any of my patients. That if I am not able, it is because I really don't see it. What she defines as rare or strange, are actually the peculiarities that make us essential, distinguishable, unique. After this, she weeps. She tells me that to hear it from me (and not just from logic) moves her and relieves her pain.

The pain of not being able to be as one is, and the constant search of that, is what we see increasingly in our society. Regrettably, this search is at the cost of intimacy, that sacred space that only belongs to me, and that can become my lifesaver, my place of protection against the blows of others. Others' acceptance is also a great protection. However, when one's own, the most essential, is reviled and thus we are not accepted, we often adapt, trampling on our own selves over that which is our own, unique, essential. Many patients deny their feelings, preferences, positions, in order to join the circle and to not be marginalized. In other words, to be accepted at the cost of one's own self.

Years ago, when we entered adolescence, sometimes we would be given a "diary" with a little padlock that would keep our secrets. In it, we would write our pains and joys. The diary was like a confidant. Nobody should read it without our permission, and we would choose who and when and what to show. That little diary, without our or our parents' knowing, would develop our "sacred" space (of intimacy), and also be our "guardian angel" (and Modesty).

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I think of intimacy like a treasure chest, bigger or smaller according to what is kept in it. And what is treasured there, like delicate little flowers or wings of a butterfly, if it is treated roughly, mistreated, it is destroyed. If the most intimate is shown and offered, but trampled, it hurts. A lot.

Such a crucial part of identity development is the development of intimacy: that which is private, that I don't want to share with just anyone, or with nobody. But what often happens in adolescence? Parents are terrified by not having access to the thoughts and feelings of their children. Parents invade their spaces, blocking their child's privacy... How is it possible to develop intimacy and consequent sense of modesty that protects it?

Making it more difficult, now we add social networking. On one side, young people need to be seen by others to know more about themselves, and parents are no longer enough, but...facebook can be deceiving. There one can share publically, impertinently...

The less the person knows of him or herself (emptiness of self), the more being seen by others is needed. But most of the time, this is deceiving, as true encounter requires being in front of the other. Social networking exaggerates the gaze but this "seeing" stays outside...and in this way, the hysterical features of youth are accentuated, along with the loneliness and emptiness of self. The private diaries of yesteryear are now public blogs.

Many abuses are made possible by not having clarity, boundaries, and guardedness of what is intimate, without strengthening a sense of modesty and privacy (and the personal conscience that guides it). It can appear in some cases that there is consent from the one who is abused; however, this person does not have the capacity to be aware and consent. He or she has not established the "sacredness" of what is intimate, of what belongs to one's own self and nobody else. Consequently, the capacity for clear boundaries is also lacking. When somebody of a higher status "invite" or "threatens" the person to do something (without which one would be made to feel badly, uncomfortable, or vulnerable), this usually is abuse: a crossing of borders without the abused even perceiving these boundaries clearly.

Our support as therapists, becomes focused then on the person **not losing** oneself, but instead becoming **responsible** for oneself. This is our existential homework, which results in spiritual pain when it is not achieved. The development and protection of personal intimacy is fundamental for the development of the self, and a personal world to dwell in.

Regrettably, this intimate space doesn't commonly exist anymore. Everything is disposable, exposed. The pole of intimacy is not a familiar theme to develop and take care of.

In this issue of EXISTENCIA, we invite you to observe yourselves with respect to the conditions that **allow you to be as you are**. To train and deepen the capacity to *perceive yourself and to take yourself seriously* with whatever appears (feelings, thoughts); and finally, to know how to *evaluate yourself* (in what you appreciate that is good as well as to identify what is not enough).

In this way, not only our identity (with its private and public poles), will be developed more sharply, but our self-esteem is also strengthened. Self-esteem is based in considering well one's own existence (my life) and behavior (my capacities, how I use them, how I give of myself), and that **I am someone, because I am capable of living and generating valuable things.**



AYOTZINAPA

Ayotzinapa: feminine energy to conjure fear.

Silvia Gómez⁵

Ayotzinapa is the name of the locality of the State of Guerrero in which 43 young “normalistas” disappeared the past 26th of September in Mexico. Between different stories, versions, investigations, and little transparency about the facts, I live with the pain of the loss of these lives that have vanished in front of the brutality of those that fight for pieces of power in the war against the “narco.”

Ayotzinapa has been a harsh lesson for a country fragmented by corruption and impunity. At the same time for those of us that still look at the future with hope, it is an opportunity to find something valuable that appears because of a society that does not want to remain silent regarding this tragedy, and that speaks with a language of distinctiveness and solidarity.

This language forcefully marks with Existential Analysis what could be seen as the differences between feminine and masculine. It does not refer to an answer of a society guided by the use of force, violence, or power from a masculine perspective, but from a new way that receives differences and embraces them. In today’s contingency, the feminine comes through the dialogue that has been created between different parts of the population that were previously unknown or ignored.

Feminine and masculine do not counterpose, they regulate each other. This gives, as a result, not an exclusion of the capacity of citizens of making use of their power, but the utilization of this force guided to the value that may be lived thanks to the listening of the necessities of others. We can’t answer with the same violence and in a reactive manner, we must open spaces of dialogue from which true solutions emerge, in which people recover their dignity by being recognized on their unique way of being.

I have been a witness of the protests that have accompanied the parents of the “normalistas.” Between the things that most move me, there was one protest where in front of it a group of parents carried their children in strollers, firmly walking ahead with a message that seemed to say that these kids weren’t any different from those that now were missing from other families.

The protests, in many cases have had the characteristics of a ceremony that accompanies the pain of the loss of lives under the argument of the absurd, that is little more than the fear that it pretends to overwhelm the strange based in imposition of force. Existential Analysis realizes a difference between a decided and approved action personally facing what is happening, and the violent and blind reaction to the value that offers reality and that is repeated every time that a threat to the establishment is detected in the horizon.

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Ayotzinapa has awoken in many the capacity (indubitably from the feminine) of feeling pain for the other, the one that carries that sadness. Looking at the pictures of the 43 youths, prints of their credentials have circulated through social media or are found in public spaces, it is a form of closeness with those faces from what cannot be anymore.

It is not a pleasant type of closeness; it is painful and full of reality. But in front of this horror have disappeared notable differences in our society between our city centres and the indigenous communities most remote and affected with most rawness by the violence. Then there are those men and women that suffer. "We are Ayotzinapa," is the motto that pretends to embrace the demand for justice from those families, but that also challenges us with embracing the feelings that naturally occur from such a despicable and inhumane act, because yes, we all are Ayotzinapa.

This capacity of perceiving the pain of the other and feeling it, requires openness of the person, of their possibility to link themselves to the other because they are moved, they are touched, they are alluded, and they can live their own emotions and bring it to the territory of a valuable and personal answer.

The anthropological approach of the Existential Analysis highlights the capacity to dialogue of people and, in this particular case, in front of the sorrows of desperation from the victims that we do not stop looking at, it stays as a testament that the internal dialogue is a fecund source of solidarity.

Facing the voices that favour a more radical and violent solution, facing the voices that strive for the confrontation with the authority and the dissolution of institutions, raises the energy of the feminine that manifests as pure art that is found in the streets, in the voices of the youth that express in the only way they can to conjure fear.

The search for justice has been evident by different means than sheer strength, than confrontation. It is not about imposition; it is about accomplishing true change that finds different paths in which it is easy to identify the necessities of others. It is the strength of the masculine dialoguing with the creative possibilities of the feminine.

Right now, as I write these lines, I feel shame for my country and the paths it has taken. Even so I submit myself to the embrace that many countries have given to our pain, and I trust in the strength that this solidarity has had to put us in the eye of other nations that search for the voices of the "normalistas" and their terror to be heard. I feel comfort looking at their faces seeing the light of day in other places, I feel more secure in the comfort that they give us with their attention to these events.

The indigenous Mexican society knows the figure of tequio or communal work that is the contribution that is made voluntarily for the benefit of all. The events of Ayotzinapa have been an invitation to retake that fundament and contribute voluntarily to the solution of the conflict. We are witnesses of a great tequio that is manifested in the massive concentrations to express pain and discontent.

From the Existential Analytic proposal, this communal experience highlights the liberty of the person and the possibilities of response to which it has access, and that reflect the reality of who

we are. For this reason, it is especially important seeing that when putting in this world the communal work of those that participate creatively and freely in the solution to these conflicts, the doors are closed to violent reactions, as power, in the eyes of the world, is incapable of surviving if it squishes the force of inclusion.

The unequivocal path of the masculine has brought disastrous consequences to many societies as it poses a logic of warriorship, rigid, based in power and the application of brute force. Under this lens, only a few can have access to the decision-making process; the authority that is conferred to them gives them the power to upend dialogue and squash the dissidents.

The path of the feminine, on the other hand, is not the easiest, implies touching the livelihood usually threatening of the vulnerability in front of the other, of the fragility of life, of the emotions that shock. Nonetheless, it drives to a warmth of closeness that allows inclusive flexibility in a society that claims for justice.

Existential Analysis proposes looking at reality and approaching an acceptance of it that allows the person to decide and to act. Facing conflicts such as the one from Ayotzinapa and with the subject at hand, this perspective opens up the scene to confront things from the warmth, the closeness, the solidarity of the feminine with the strength of action, the accomplishments, and objectives of the masculine.

From my point of view, the existential analytic proposal trusts in the possibility of the person of transforming history, not with great fuss or particularly notable actions, but with the constant work from the decision-making in which it may be seen and be recognized, with the feminine and the masculine included.

Alfried Längle said once: "Our job is to make the person shine." With many of his lectures, this phrase touches me deeply, because the 43 disappeared youths shine constantly because we dare to look at them, not only them, but the hundreds of victims of violence. Their trail shines, that they have left as a testimony of their life, not as heroes, but as a reminder of how beautiful the existence of a person is and how fragile it is facing the blindness of power.

I trust now that all of this may be able to change.



Reflections on freedom and responsibility: An existential-analytical perspective

Mihaela Launeanu, PhD⁶

One of the intensely discussed topics of our present times across countries and continents is what has been framed as the tension between individual freedom- often conflated with the notion of individual rights-, on one hand, and the civic duty or responsibility towards the others, the public good and society at large, on the other hand. Echoes of this tension and especially of the intensified polarization perpetuated around it have showed up often in my therapy sessions over the past few months. For instance, some clients revealed in shock that their best friend broke up with them and shun them from their friends' circle over this dispute. Others decided to sever long lasting friendships or committed relationships over similar disagreements. Some people mentioned that they were scared to go to work as they felt either unsafe or blamed for their decisions. Regardless of their specific situation, they were not just shocked, scared, angry, hurt or betrayed but they were also struggling to find some ground and orientation in their predicament as they were convinced that they did what felt right for them and yet they felt misunderstood, punished, or simply discarded.

This situation motivated me to reflect more intentionally on how Existential Analysis (EA) understands freedom, responsibility, ethical decision making, caring for one another, dialogue, and openness. In line with my intention to revisit these concepts, I hope that this article could be also an invitation for the readers to reflect on these themes and their relevance for the therapeutic practice in our current context.

Freedom and responsibility

From an existential perspective, freedom and responsibility are fundamentally interconnected. One without the other is hollow, devoid of value, and potentially dangerous. Freedom without responsibility may lead to arbitrariness and anarchy, whereas responsibility without freedom is mere duty, obligation, or coercion. We cannot act responsibly or be held responsible if we are not free. At the same time, we are not free unless we exercise our ability to respond (response-ability) and to stand by our responses, including assuming the consequences of our choices. We are responsible only to the degree that we are free, and we are free only to the degree that we exercise our response-ability. Any coercion or pressure on freedom takes away responsibility and minimizes our personal capacity to respond and remain in dialogue with the world and ourselves. Similarly, any refusal to be responsible transforms freedom into a potentially

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dangerous mockery. In both situations, we are losing touch with ourselves and instead of arriving at a personal response we simply react to a perceived threat or to coercion. Thus, there is little value and much peril in opposing freedom and responsibility since the question is how we can choose responsibly and experience ourselves as free in being responsible.

Although as human beings we are free persons, our freedom is not exercised or claimed abstractly. Rather, we make free decisions and act freely within specific contexts. We actualize our freedom when we respond to the demands of a particular situation by assessing and taking into consideration everything and everyone involved in that situation (e.g., the accurate and pertinent information about the situation, our own values, all the values in that circumstance, other people, the larger context). We are not free in a vacuum but in specific, concrete situations that are bound by everything that is at stake in that circumstance. Also, we are not free in isolation but in relationships: with a situation, with others and with the larger context in which we exist. Therefore, our freedom is always limited and exercised within these limitations. This is the birthplace of responsibility: how do I respond to what these limitations are asking of me? How do I respond in this particular situation by considering the information that I have, all the values and everyone involved, and assuming the consequences of my free choices? How can I stand by my choices? Understood in this manner, responsibility is losing its moralistic or coercive connotations of external obligation or duty and is truly an expression of freedom.

In times of intense upheaval or crises, this fundamental connection between freedom and responsibility tends to fade away, leading to artificially radicalized and rigidly polarized stances that tend to oppose freedom misrepresented as exercising individualistic rights and responsibility reduced to an externally prescribed social duty or obligation. Unfortunately, this polarization leads to loss of freedom, and, subsequently, to a loss of responsibility. Unfree people cannot be responsible, and the less free someone feels, the less responsible one will be. Succumbing to being dutiful or looking up to perceived authorities to tell us what to do while bypassing ourselves is as much an escape from freedom as it is the insistence on ignoring the demands of the situation and aggressively claiming one's individual rights above all other considerations. In each of these circumstances, we relinquish our freedom and decline our responsibility. We are not acting from a personal stance, but rather we are re-acting to a perceived threat.

The "right" choice

Even if we accept this deeply intertwined understanding of freedom and responsibility, an important question remains, and comes up often in dialogue with my clients: how to choose freely and responsibly? If there is no authority which can ultimately tell us what to do, if we are fundamentally free and responsible, how do we make the "right" choice?

Existential Analysis confers a central role to our moral conscience in how we make decisions that we sense to be right and justified. In EA, the moral conscience is defined as the sense for the hierarchy of values in a situation regarding what someone perceives as overall good and therefore finds to be right. In other words, following our moral conscience means finding the resonance

between one's own person and the values involved in a certain situation, in order to detect what is overall good and right in a situation. Practically, it means asking oneself: what do I sense to be right or the right thing to do in this particular situation? As I draw closer to myself and listen intently, what do I sense that it is right in this situation?

To hear the voice of our moral conscience and to sense our innermost sense of rightness, the noise of our emotional reactions and affects needs to be toned down. If we are angry or scared it is unlikely that we could hear what our moral conscience tells us and that we could sense what is right. Strongly feeling one way or another is a sign that we are still far away from ourselves and from our moral conscience, and that the decisions that we want to make under this emotional pressure are not yet personal responses but reactions to our own emotional triggers. Hence, I always encourage clients to fully experience and process their raw, primary emotional reactions and impulses to understand their message so that they could get to a quieter, more balanced inner space where they could begin to hear themselves and sense what is the right decision in a given situation.

A paradox of the moral conscience is that the more I am in touch with my own person, the more I can relate to the other as the other or the one who is not me. From this place, I can see, hear, value and care for the other rather than feeling threatened by differences and otherness. Although deeply personal and intimate, moral conscience does not look selfishly after individual's rights or privileges at the expense of others. On the contrary, following our moral conscience invokes a deep responsibility for the others. The more one is in touch with oneself and senses what is right for them, the more one cares for the others. Sensing what is right and acting accordingly is not an individualistic affair or a moralistic imposition but a felt caring stance.

Hence, in following our moral conscience, we face the question: what do I sense to be right for me in this situation, which would be right for anyone else who would be in this exact same situation? This way, our moral conscience is not simply about what feels right for me only, but it rather connects me with the humanity and does justice to our inherent relationality as human beings. Although deeply personal and distinct, our moral conscience is a reminder that I am fully myself to the degree that I am fully responsible to the relationships in which I find myself.

Practically, the question about making the right decision is: if this is what I sense that it is right in this situation, how do I act in such a way that the value that I am choosing upholds the other's dignity and does not harm the other. Doing justice to oneself is inextricably connected with caring for and doing justice to the others. What is bad or harmful for others cannot be good for me, and what wrongs the other cannot be right for me, even if sometimes it may feel that it is.

Openness and dialogue

It is virtually impossible to experience ourselves as free, and, thus, responsible or to act morally or ethically when we are beset by intense emotions, contradictory information, and constantly polarizing discourses. In these situations, we tend to react quickly and there is little space to engage in dialogue and self-reflection. We become radicalized, loud, and pressured in defending

our premature position on a topic and this narrows our openness and capacity to dialogue with both the world, including others, and with ourselves.

In EA, the double openness and dialogue are hallmarks of how we engage with the world and ourselves in a free, responsible, and ethical manner. In these exceedingly demanding times, I have been reminded more than ever about the critical importance of remaining open and making space for authentic dialogue where we can meet the other as a way to honour freedom and responsibility together, and to cultivate trust in our inner moral compass.



foto: Rodrigo Astaburuaga

Regret and forgiveness, the choice of oneself

Michèle Croquevielle⁷

If I look at a picture of myself from 10, 20 years ago, or from even younger, or from yesterday, do I recognize myself? Do I know it's me and not my sister or my neighbor? And how do I know it? If I recognize myself, it must be because at least I know something about me, I can "draw" some sketches of myself. Some may know very clearly who they are, others not so much. But with certainty everyone can recognize a stroke, something that defines and identifies us. And it allows us to say, when we look at photographs, "that girl isn't me, but that one is." There is an identity. Either way, when I do something, I know and am able to do, especially if I can do it well, it is a great sensation of affirmation of who I am.

But sometimes I make mistakes, errors, that I only notice after I make them (sometimes even while I'm making them, impulsively, and I feel I can't help it). How do I notice? Well, there are two indicators that may help, and here I utilize one of the core proposals of Existential Analysis: being "human being" is coexisting, it is dialoguing between two realms: the self [my mind-body-spirit] and the other, the one in front of me. Then, when I make mistakes, it's my 'self' that resents it (something "makes noise" physically -my stomach tightens, or something becomes uncomfortable in some place of the body or the psyche-); or, referred to the realm of the other, I realize given something happens to the one in front of me, something changes in their face or more clearly, they lash out against me verbally or physically. Who has not accidentally hit someone on the street due to being distracted? Or, after a conversation with someone, going back home staying with a sensation of strangeness, uncomfortableness: *I told them something I shouldn't have, I have hurt or offended them, and even if it wasn't my intention, I did it.*

Doing psychology classes in university, a student asked me something about depressive patients. The question surprised me as it had a very derogatory tone towards them. My answer was accidentally "Instructive," with the goal that there no doubt was left in him, nor the other students, in how to proceed with these people and their infinite pain. On the way home, a very unpleasant sensation accompanied me, an *internal narrowing*, the opposite of what I am used to (I always end up happy and satisfied after finishing my classes). Revising what had happened and myself, I realized that, if well the content of my answer was correct, the manner was not. That student did not deserve to be put in the exposed so emphatically in his mistake. I felt very bad with him and myself. Why also myself?

What I know about me is that I am not a cruel person, I am not a hound, I do not hurt people, deep down I am a good person that does not search to inflict pain in others, and even (due to my profession) I try to help others. Definitively, the one that did that **was not me, it was not like how I**

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am. That person made that young person feel bad (even though he didn't say anything, but I felt it) does not resonate with me. "I don't recognize myself in that picture."

Aching pain of my own being! Because of a situation that became threatening-not being a good teacher, or at a least sufficiently clear one, for the alumni to comprehend such seismic error-, I reacted impulsively to eradicate the threat, without considering the sensibility, the openness of the student that only wanted to learn more. Great pain, because for a moment, I abandoned myself.

What is lost when I make things that are not my own? "I" get lost in myself, the self is lost, I become a stranger to myself.

For Existential Analysis, regret is similar to grief: the loss of something valuable: myself. That is why it hurts so much, that explains the sadness, the sorrow.

But... Not everything is lost! There is still the possibility to recover, to recover myself. And it requires from **decision** as regret is a personal act: a forgiving of oneself. And what do you obtain in the act? Nothing more and nothing less than restoring myself; go over, re-draw **my own outline**, of myself: for me to feel and see what I truly am, what goes well with me and what does not. And for the other, for the other, for the community, because -even with the mistakes, the guilt, the infringement of the limits of others- regret allows me to newly find a meeting point.

In regret there is an attempt to **replenish self-value** and the limits, in the cases that oneself is the cause of damage to another and/or oneself.

One recognizes and **admits** that it was not fine to do that, that it was a mistake. And the usual impulse is the sentiment of "I would've rather not done it!" Regret is realized, firstly, through **internal dialogue** with me about oneself's way of acting.

Kierkegaard proposes that in regret I choose myself. In that way a restructuring surges of the self in the sense of the person, and in the "forgiving oneself," is established the willingness to "liberate oneself" to do it better.

Next class, before starting, I saw the student again and asked for silence to speak. I publicly asked for apologies (I thought it was important to do it that way, as I had exposed him in front of everyone). I told him the manner in which I answered to his question was not correct, and even if I embraced the contents of it, the manner had been incorrect. The youth said, "I accept your apologies," and then he confirmed he indeed had been affected. His expression changed (now lighter) and my being with myself did too.

But regret is only possible if I see you. If I direct myself to the person that was hurt. I say this as it is very painful when I am offered apologies and they feel as a formality exclusively (they didn't see me again, they passed me by again). And it deepens the wound.

Regret surges to recover the relationship with myself, with my own persona. I lay that bridge to "go back to me," and then, when I express my regret (to you), I lay it towards you, to recover our relationship.

But what happens if I was the one hurt, the one infringed, whose limits were trespassed? The most likely thing to happen first is that a reaction surges (fight or flight) towards the offense in question. However, I'll remain with resentment that only forgiveness may alleviate.

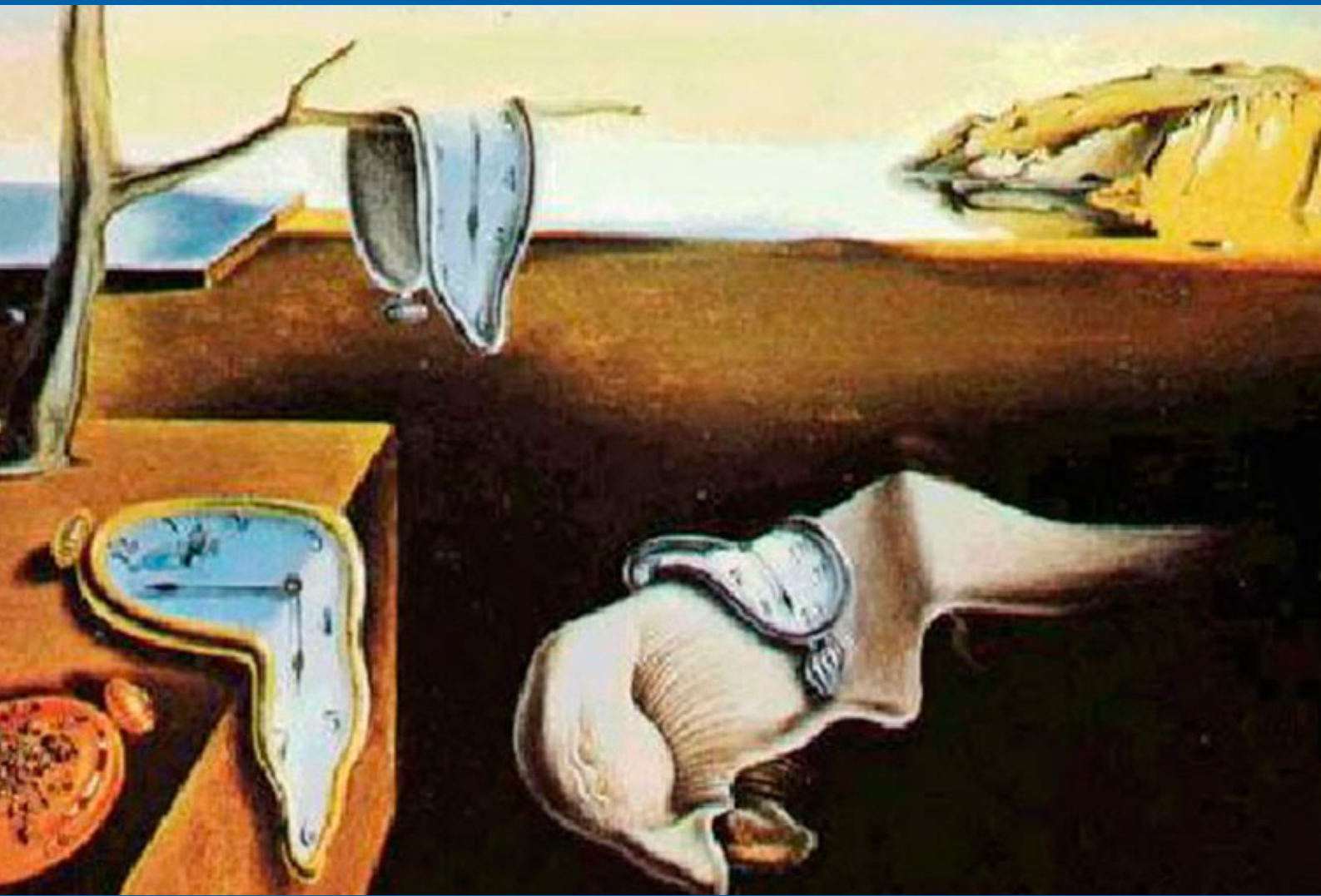
What does it mean to forgive? What do I do when I forgive? Am I forced to do it? Can I forgive even though the other is absent or lacks regret?

As I said before, when I do an offense, I carry it, it weighs on me, it occupies me emotionally. In computational jargon, I'm utilizing space of my hard drive of which I can't organize freely. Because of this it will be **my decision** if I desire or not to "liberate the other of their debt." But forgiving does not mean forgetting, nor that we will have necessarily a good relationship starting from there.

Forgetting also has two aspects: the self (that I just mentioned) and the other. It will obviously be easier to forgive if the other is shown, **if they allow me to see them** truly for who they are (the external part of regret, when someone that hurt me says: "*I didn't want to do it, I'm not like this in essence*"). If I see them as a person, I will be able to comprehend them (knowing the motives behind the damage done to me), and because of that it will become easier to forgive them, because it is their essence that became visible to me. This is true for someone that we feel affection for (a loved one that offended me in a discussion, and then approaches me to offer their apologies because it was not their intention, simply a daze), or with a stranger, for example when someone in the street drives right in front of me, and then makes a gesture of apologizing, and I can see how they regret their mistake. It is important to clarify that "comprehending" is not "justifying," as the latter corresponds to the plain of ethics, of the distinctions between what is right and wrong; for the same reason, that there is regret and forgiveness, will not stop the offender from having to obey by the laws or rules established legally or socially.

Also, even if it seems fairly hard, forgiving can also rely solely on me (even if the other does not regret it). Do I erase the guilt of the other when I forgive them? No, I just stop referring to them; I don't have a "pending tab" with them. But be careful: It is my own weight I am setting free, not theirs: them, if they do not regret it, will keep carrying the load of the abandonment of themselves, the loss of their own value.

Finally, I have to say that making mistakes is very human. Precisely because of how imperfect we are and for the fundamental condition of being free, life and its movements lead us routinely to committing mistakes. Threats that are **subjectively experienced** to our physical integrity (for example, feeling unprotected materially), psychic integrity (for example to our self-esteem, limits), many times have made us infringe, hurt others, getting to the point of even destroying them (sometimes achieving it). Regret and forgiveness are very decisive and personal acts, that search for the reunion with oneself -in the first place- and with the other. It's a coming back home, "my home" that place that I habit, that I know and that I like, in front of myself and in front of you, in front of the other, in front of the community.



Fulfilment to comprehend time.

Constanza Iturriaga⁸

“What is, then, time? If no one asks me, I know what it is; but if I wish to explain to him who asks, I do not know.” – St. Augustin Hippo.

“What is Time?”- This is a question that has permeated throughout our history. It is a question that still to this day echoes tirelessly, as it has through the centuries, without fading still from its baggage. Theorists from different areas have answered, but apparently, it is the question itself that calls our attention and settles on top of our existence. The purpose of this article is to reflect not on what is time (as a concept), but the ‘how’ (the experience of it). For this, it has been of great help and discovery what Dr Alfried Längle proposed in his latest conference in Chile: “Tiempo Sentido – Tiempo con sentido (Time sensed – Time with sense)”

Personally, Dr Längle’s conference happened to be greatly enlightening. I did my thesis based on the concept of time of Aristotle and Heidegger and finished it without feeling any closer to comprehending it than when I began. So, when I ask myself “What is Time?” there is no space for personal involvement. It becomes into an empty way of thinking, a reflexion about general things that leaves my affective disposition to the side of the picture. Counterposed to this empty thinking, to me time was -as Heidegger puts it-, always a ***time lived, experienced, and felt intimately by an I.*** Each time we want to apprehend the concept of time, its real dimension escapes us: the personal and individual experience of Time. Time is not a concept to be apprehended impersonally, less so to be defined as something foreign to us. Time is this “tick-tock” of a clock that is absolutely mine. It is my second hand moving throughout my life. Time is for oneself each time, of someone with an own name and surname. It is the voice of a human being saying, ‘my time’, ‘this time’, ‘my life’.

Dr Längle used other words to refer to this personal dimension of the experience of time, however, independently of the words we use, we can already appreciate this change in outlook: it is not about the what, but about the how. It is about how this question relates to me. What can I say about this time I was given? What do I do with it? How do I make it mine? – And so, *time* takes *my time*. I manage then to open a space for the question to penetrate and palpitate in myself: How do I live *my time*? And above all, how do I take conscience of my own time? Is it not somewhat obvious, that I have a given amount of lifetime and that I occupy it my way? As obvious as these questions may read, it seems that there is not a day-to-day rooted awareness about the importance of this temporality. The radical change is not that we ‘have time’, it is that we *are time*. We are *temporal* beings. There is no infinite reserve, filled with time to take as we desire: *we are temporal*, this means that each time I occupy my time, I do not occupy it like I utilize a pen, a car, a towel, or

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any other external object. The way to operate time is always to *live it*. This time can be spent, it runs out. Irremediably my time 'goes away' or I 'live it away'. Either way, there is no way back.

So, each decision and each election that I make in my routine, acquires a new dimension for my priorities. When I act taking time for granted, when I act as if I were eternal, I cannot notice the weight to the absurd of completing tasks that have no meaning to my life. And in that there is a deeper meaning. It is something that Buddhism and other disciplines have highlighted already: being *present here and now*. What does this phrase tell us when we dig deeper? For me, personally, it is the neuralgic point where I manage to unify what Dr Längle proposes with my own experiences. What I couldn't do from the point of view of philosophy was taking charge of vital and personal relevance of being *always in the now*. Because if I want to turn *time* into *my time*, I need to find the way of *being present* throughout all possible *now's* that may happen in my own life. How do I manage to be present, *really*, in each *now*? Because it is not the same being truly present in something, than simply 'being'. It is the difference between existing and *passing time*: How do I appropriate time in an authentic and personal manner? If we see that the present is really a '*being present*', then the answer must be that only I can appropriate my time as I do every action, devoted to it. Being-in each act: in my case it is being *in care* of my home and family, *in writing* this article, *in working*, *in my lectures*, *in my strolls and walks* through 'Ñuñoa', and also *in pain*.

From here we could make the following question that, although obvious, seems necessary: Are we not always present? We may be, and we 'lapse' through all of time, but that is not the same as being present. When I am present, I need to approve what I live through each day, each now. My mind does not meander in the possibilities, in what I could be doing, nor in the anxiety for the future, nor the nostalgia. I am in no other situation than my present action, whatever it may be. So, what happens with hardships? Unpleasant tasks? Do I not count in those moments? Maybe it's precisely then when we find the challenge of staying present. The sense -from my point of view- of being present is this particularity that I call 'unconditional friendship' or 'sacred marriage' with oneself. As with a relationship of absolute fidelity, I cannot nor should abandon myself precisely when I need myself the most. I cannot evade because it is then when I most need my presence, that embraces what comes and accompanies me in the event of grief, of a specific problem, or of a highly challenging situation. Being present then is being 'whole', because then I serve completely to myself, I serve 'fully in what occupies me'. Whatever it may be. Deeply moving are, regarding this, the experiences that Viktor Frankl relates as a survivor of Auschwitz. How may someone find direction, and internal space to survive, is something that amazes me. But there is no doubt this experience is no 'magic trick', and I think that it can only be possible with the previous condition of "having been present", even in the atrocities and the pain.

Many times, when we hear the words *sense* and *fulfilment*, it seems as if we heard unreachable and abstract ideas. My idea is proposing that *sense* and *fulfilment* are *concrete* actions and are found *here and now*. To make a reality of the concepts of *time*, *fulfilment*, and *sense*, it is necessary to bring them to everyday life: nowadays, for example: *what good made the actions I chose? Do the things I chose make sense to me? What do I want, can, can allow, and can make sense to do?* And if I need to do a tedious task, I ask: *what is it good for? Why did I choose to do it?* Suddenly I find that in everything I ask, there is value. And it is this value that plays a part each time I choose

to do this tedious task. The connection with the questions of my diary living, is what make these concepts real. It is necessary to bring reality to time (rea-lize it), and at the same time comprehending that time is not something that simply *happens to me* but is my own life that is in play and plays out 'now' after 'now'.

There is nothing more enlightening to feel time, than remembering our own mortality and knowing about how finite and ephemeral being. Searching for fulfilment in the stars, in a better past, or in the unreachable possibilities furthers us from our immediate presence. **Fulfilment is the fulfilment of our presence.** It is paradoxical that being temporal, we have to appropriate time. "Am I not born with time?", someone could ask. But anyone that has felt that time flees them, could maybe also comprehend this: that if well it is a mystery why we have reached this existence, it is not a mystery that for me to live it authentically I need to reflect about time, **about my time. Let us be interpellated by this question, and answer like so: "yes, today I was truly present. My life is not a mere weight, I am here, I exist"**. And then we may say "yes, I am, *whole*".



The Hermeneutical Space in The Therapeutic Approach of A. Längle⁹

Gabriel Traverso¹⁰

Abstract

This essay seeks to highlight the hermeneutics behind the development of the psychotherapy posed by Alfred Längle.

This emphasis on hermeneutics not only states a comprehensive aspect on the theory of existential analysis, but it provides benefits for practice as well, by helping the clients to re-signify their reality, allowing them a more coherent understanding of it. The PEA (Personal Existential Analysis) cycle is shown as a complete hermeneutical process, in all its steps. The highlight here is how the hermeneutical attitude is reinforced and complemented by the phenomenological attitude.

This essay seeks to demonstrate that the epistemology at the base of its approach, is hermeneutic, unlike Frankl's Logotherapy, and that the latter corresponds to another scientific paradigm. It is pointed out that epistemologically and paradigmatically, Längle's approach would be closer to postmodern approaches such as those centered on narratives and social constructionism.

Introduction

By *space*, I understand a place where I can move, act and where I can also have access to the materials required for my action - a workspace not only allows me to carry out the action of work, but also allows me to access what I need for it (tools, books, computer, etc.) -, I define now a hermeneutical space¹¹ as a place from where I can interpret and understand, by accessing the meaning it keeps within. We could also call it, for the same reason, a meaning space (or space of significations). In this article I refer in particular to the hermeneutical space established by Alfred Längle through his numerous work and praxis. I fill that space when I am in conversation with a consultant in physical space (or virtual space, in these times of pandemic), from my position as an existential-analytic therapist. On this occasion, I intend to observe and examine that space.

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¹¹ I take the concept of "hermeneutical space" from Sassenfeld (2016), also previously used by Mancilla (2013).

The hermeneutical act consists of interpreting, signifying, giving an opinion, and understanding. Understanding is always an act of interpretation (Gadamer, 1960). Traditionally, hermeneutics was reduced to the comprehension of written texts. Gadamer expands the field of hermeneutics to everything that requires comprehension, including all art and artistic expressions, not just literature.

In English the word *meaning* means "signification" (*Bedeutung*) and also "sense, purpose" (*Sinn*). In the English translation of this article, meaning without additions, will be used as "signification". If we have to refer specifically to "purpose", we will say *meaning (Sinn)*. All interpretation is an attribution of meaning. However, when we give meaning to some action, although it is a hermeneutical act (a signification), not all significations make sense. When I say "this doesn't make sense to me", I am signifying it, making an interpretation. Similarly, if I say that I do not understand something, I am understanding that I do not understand.

This distinction between signifying and meaning is important in Existential Analysis (EA), according to Längle's model, because meaning (as *Sinn*) is the central hermeneutical act of the fourth fundamental motivation (4th FM), and signifying is present in each FM. We signify a situation as threatening and we become distressed (1st FM); we signify a moment as valuable, and it gives us joy (2nd FM); we signify a phrase as a disqualification, and we get offended (3rd FM); we signify our work as very satisfactory, and we feel fulfilled (4th FM). It would be interesting to do a comparative research on the application and effects of logotherapy between English-speaking countries and others, on the basis of this hermeneutical difference when using a term so relevant in that "meaning-centered" approach, which has a broader understanding in English than in German and Spanish.

Hermeneutics of Längle on EA

Art speaks to us. Nature also speaks to us. The suffering of others speaks to us. The world speaks to us. Understanding that which speaks to us, belongs to the hermeneutical field. What speaks to us does so through language. All artistic expression is manifested through language. I can understand what has been said if that language is intelligible to me. If a Chinese person speaks to me in his language, I would not understand him, but if he expresses himself through gesture language, I could understand him. The language through which physicists develop and communicate their knowledge is mathematical and too complex for the layman to understand.

Längle (1993) refers to the concept of person as "that which speaks in me", which is described as the dialogic essence of the human being, with the 'me'¹² being its first interlocutor. He also (2014) alludes to internal conversation (*das Innere Gespräch*) as the central element of the relationship between the person and 'me' (*das Verhältnis von ich und Person*). This place 'me' as the interpreter of my own person. On the surface this may seem like an extremely easy task,

¹² The term 'me' will be used here on, alluding the German 'Ich'.

understanding ourselves. In reality, it is one of the greatest challenges of human beings throughout their lives. On the one hand, the person does not usually speak in words. The hermeneutical experience of internal dialogue is more like an understanding of music, which touches us through sensations and emotions, to which we give meaning. When our conscience (*Gewissen*) wants to warn us that something is not right for us, it does so through a feeling that we have to interpret and not as a superegoic mandate of the style: "You should not do that!" In addition to the difficulty that I can have to interpret feelings, there is also the complexity generated by other several voices that I receive in relation to the same matter, either from the psychic dimension, from the somatic dimension, or from the multiple learned stories that I retain, and from which have yet to learn how to differentiate or delimit myself, or have not elaborated them sufficiently, and identify them as my own.

From birth to death, life can be seen as a long and continuous succession of events. However, human existence does not take place in the facts but in the interpretation or in the meanings that we attribute to such facts. Or, to use Heideggerian terminology, we exist in a hermeneutic of facticity. Our joys and hardships emerge from our significations of events and the occurrences and situations that frame them.

We frequently assign incorrect meanings to what our own person wants to express to us. Even worse, many times we do not even notice the attempts of our internal interlocutor to communicate something important to us. As Längle (2014, 18) says, "The 'me' builds a bridge for the person, from himself to the world"¹³. But due to the non-corporeality of the person, this bridge is exclusively hermeneutical. Without the 'me' as the interpreter of the world, the person would be completely isolated, wordless, and unable to communicate. The same happens if the 'me' acts as a bad interpreter and transmits the wrong message. The way in which the person complains to the 'me' is by transmitting unpleasant sensations and emotions, which can activate psychodynamic reactions if they are not understood by the 'me'. This lack of self-understanding is often the mental condition of clients consulting a psychotherapist.

The challenge of the existential-analytic therapist is to help the 'me' in its frustrated role as interpreter of the person, and in more extreme cases (eg personality disorders), temporarily replace the 'me' in that role (an auxiliary 'me').

Meanings are always given in a particular context. Losing sight of that context is usually one of the reasons of misunderstanding. A 33-year-old patient consults me for having had panic episodes in a supermarket on different occasions. She is a pediatrician, single, very sure of herself and shows no other signs of distress, except for these episodes, which left her very confused. Making a regressive journey through her biography, we reached a situation that she had blocked: at four years of age, accompanying her mother in the grocery shop, she got lost for a few minutes until the administration, seeing the girl crying, called for her on speakers. The anguish that the adult found incomprehensible because it was not related to her current context, appears full of meaning when

¹³ (...) bildet das Ich der Person eine Brücke zur Welt

she understands that, unconsciously, her memory associates the physical space of the supermarket with that in which the four-year-old girl experienced a traumatic moment, which she interpreted as the terrible threat of abandonment by her mother. By lovingly welcoming the fear of that girl, which the adult had previously forgotten, she was able to return with peace of mind to buy in those spaces.

Hermeneutical phenomenology and clinical praxis

In relation to the above, Längle (2007) himself highlights the link with the context in clinical practice, making us see that “phenomenological work consists of seeing, as far as possible, the meaning of what the client said in what **he** really thinks and to see how it connects with his life context” (p. 20)¹⁴. It is important to note that in this sentence, Längle shows the relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics in therapeutic praxis. On the one hand it shows that the focus of interest is not on the therapist's interpretations of what the patient has said, but on his understandings and the context in which they occur; that is to say, it is about being able to bring to light the hermeneutics of the client instead of fitting the meaning of the client into the hermeneutics of the therapist. And the means to achieve it, is phenomenological work.

Already Espinosa (2006, p. 33) made us realize that "Längle develops the FM Theory phenomenologically, but in the style of Heidegger's hermeneutics", differentiating it from the traditional approach of Frankl. Indeed Heidegger (1927) calls his method "hermeneutical phenomenology", differentiating it from Husserl's method, which he refers to as "descriptive phenomenology". Längle, like Heidegger, focuses phenomenologically on understanding from the hermeneutical significations. Längle's art, and a very extensive and fundamental part of his work, has been to bring that work into the therapeutic praxis. To facilitate its application, he developed various methods, most notably the Personal Existential Analysis (PEA) (1993, 2000).

The first part of the PEA, which Längle refers to as the phenomenological phase, is much more than just phenomenology. It is certainly phenomenological, since it seeks to make the client's meanings emerge as purely as possible, filtering as much as we can, the external interpretations that may come from the therapist. However, it is above all, a masterful process of hermeneutical resignification and re-understanding of the client's existential situation, in which the therapist fulfills the role of an expert facilitator. Although in the scheme of the method - once situational understanding is reached - the next phase is followed linearly, one could return circularly to the starting point of the method, to repeatedly enrich the client's situational understanding. This would constitute a Länglean hermeneutical “sub-” circle. In practice, intuitively (or phenomenologically) we notice that Längle usually does something similar if he perceives that the client does not have a

¹⁴ Das Ziel phänomenologischer Arbeit besteht in der Praxis darin, das, was das Gesagte dem Patienten bedeutet, möglichst so zu sehen, wie er es meint und zu sehen, wie es auf seinen Lebenszusammenhang bezogen ist.

clear decision of the steps to follow. This is a relevant point that deserves further development. We speak of a “sub-circle”, considering - as we will see it in the next paragraph - the PEA is, itself, a hermeneutical circle¹⁵.

The actual phenomenological phase of the PEA ends in the situational understanding (what I understand about myself, about others and about what I do not understand), however, the complete cycle of the PEA, with all its steps, is a hermeneutical process from beginning to end. In the step of taking an inner position, the client listens to his conscience (*Gewissen*) and understands what the authentic position of as a person in the given situation himself is, he also understands what the most adequate action is to that position and understands the most appropriate way to express his answer. Once expressed, he interprets the effects of this and, according to that meaning, possibly enters another similar hermeneutical cycle, thus initiating a hermeneutical circle wider than the previous sub-circle. Once we have managed to understand the underlying meaning behind what the patient tells us by means of the phenomenological process, we can often observe that the meaning is not coherent with the situation. Words, and language in general, have their own strength and potency. When misused, they can generate, an otherwise avoidable pain. In this aspect, beyond the phenomenological work, the therapist usually makes interventions - which truly are hermeneutical reconstructions-, helping the client to redefine his experience. This work is especially important when the meaning attributed to a situation does not offer a way out, for example, if the subject positions himself as a victim, and therefore does not access his own resources to reposition himself in order to resolve the matter. When ontologizing judgments appear, they can paralyze the client, expressing things such as "I am a failure"; or "I 'gave' myself this cancer", which in addition to the anguish over the disease can add an undeserved guilt; or experiencing the end of a romantic relationship as an “abandonment”, in which the individual is not being left to his fate, but nonetheless he relives a trauma of the real abandonment experienced in childhood: these are examples that are often seen in clients, and they challenge the therapist to do a hermeneutical work of re-signification. Here, the hermeneutical and the phenomenological attitude are mutually reinforcing.

Alfried Längle, working with clients directly or through supervision, is an example of mastery of the art of re-signification, showing the extent of his hermeneutical attitude.

¹⁵ Expression used by Heidegger (1927) referring the circularity of the comprehensive process, in which all understanding is preceded by a pre-understanding, and the new understanding can become a pre-understanding for a subsequent understanding. Gadamer (1960) formulates it as the prejudice that precedes every judgment, and which constitutes a new prejudice that precedes another judgment as well.

The hermeneutical space of Längle

Alfried Längle's psychotherapeutic hermeneutics, in its current form, begins to build when he enters the hermeneutical space of Viktor Frankl, 30-40 years ago. Very soon he started modifying and extending Frankl's initial theory. It is not the objective of this short article to unfold the history of that process. Of course, I want to highlight the important differences between the Länglean and the Franklean (logo)therapeutic space. In the first place, Längle greatly expanded Frankl's space of meaning, to the point that it is not always easy to discover and recognize it: it remained as part of the 4th FM and in some anthropological conceptions.

On the other hand, we would do little justice to Längle's hermeneutics if we only consider it as a mere extension of Frankl's hermeneutical space, even though that extension is several times wider than the original space. Let us imagine that I have a very small house and that, as I have more resources and more spatial needs (the family has grown, for example), I build more rooms and equip those spaces with what is necessary for those new needs. The space has become more functional, I have more capacity for movement and action, but it is still my home and I manage it from my own perspective, culture and objectives. It would be different if I sell my house and the buyer builds another home and includes my former house as an addition. That addition now has a very different meaning for the new owner than it had for me.

With this metaphor I want to illustrate that Längle's hermeneutical space is another space, a different space, rather than an extension of Frankl's. When Längle speaks, for example, of meaning, of self-acceptance, of the person, even if he uses the same terms, he is not implying the same meanings as his former teacher. It is another hermeneutic, which includes another phenomenology, another understanding of the client and of therapy, another place from which meanings are constructed. Another therapeutic paradigm.

Frankl differentiates existence from facticity, like Heidegger does: "On one side is existence, and on the other side is whatever belongs to facticity"¹⁶ (Frankl 1988, 18). With facticity he refers to the psychophysical.

But when Heidegger speaks about existence, he means hermeneutics, in order to understand or to interpret facticity. For Frankl existence is the spiritual essence of human being, for him spirituality and existentiality are equivalent, and that can be described as being responsible. Frankl does not conceive of existence as hermeneutics. Interpreting the facts requires an interpreter. For Heidegger that is Dasein. For Längle, this function is fulfilled by the 'me', as the bridge between person and world.

¹⁶ auf der einen Seite die Existenz – auf der anderen Seite alles, was zur Faktizität gehört

In Längle's hermeneutical space, the 'I' is not only the interpreter of the person, but also the interpreter of the psyche and the body, as well as the external world. It is the dialoguing entity in the human being, the one that gives meaning to its world including itself.

Frankl (1988, 20), on the other hand, identifies the 'me' as the person: "In fact, I couldn't seriously say: "my person" - I don't "have" a person, but I "am" my person".¹⁷ He does not offer us an interpreter that gives an interpretive character to existence, and he does not need one since his gaze is not hermeneutical, as is that of Heidegger and Längle.

Frankl's logotherapy, unlike the GLE Existential Analysis, developed by Längle, does not follow a hermeneutical epistemology.

Although Längle may not be very sympathetic to the term, I would argue that his paradigm has a distinctly postmodern touch. I see EA much more in common with social constructionism (Gergen) and with narrative-focused therapies (White and Epsen), due to its hermeneutical epistemology, than with traditional logotherapy.

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¹⁷ Tatsächlich könnte ich im Ernst auch gar nicht sagen: „meine Person“ – eine Person „habe“ ich ja nicht, sondern je meine Person „bin“ ich. In the same paragraph, Frankl removes the identity of the ‚me‘ from the psychophysical: "(...) die Person ein Psychophysicum „hat“ – während sie ein Geistiges „ist“."

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The existential dimensions of loneliness: A dialogue among four existential therapists

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Preamble

Loneliness is a quintessential human experience. Some philosophers and existential thinkers (Kierkegaard, 2009; Moustakas, 1990; Yalom, 1980) would argue that loneliness is a fundamental state of being human once we become aware of our irretrievable separateness and distinctiveness, and realize that our most personal, intimate experience of the world and of ourselves is uniquely ours—irreplaceable and never fully known by the others—even under the ideal condition of a perfect empathic attunement. In Existential Analysis (EA), the experience of loneliness is understood as an experience pertaining mainly to the second fundamental motivation (FM2; relationships) and the third fundamental motivation (FM3; self-development, personhood, encounter). Thus, loneliness stems not only from a lack of outer relationships but also from a disconnect from self or a loss of sense of self.

Illustrating this existential-analytical perspective, the present article provides the readers the opportunity to witness a live, uncensored dialogue about loneliness among four EA trained Canadian psychotherapists²². This dialogical format reflects the EA dialogical stance, and allows the main themes related to the experience of loneliness to emerge organically and to illuminate various perspectives on this topic. To ease the readers' transitions among various parts of this dialogue, we will introduce the main theme and a summary of the main points of that theme at the beginning of each major section, before allowing the dialogue to unfold.

Loneliness and aloneness

It is relatively common for lay people and some philosophers to use terms such as “lonely” and “alone” interchangeably at times. Although there may be some degree of overlap or even blending between these terms, in our dialogue we differentiate between the experience of loneliness lived as a painful disconnect from self and/or others, and that of being alone experienced

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²² The dialogue presented in this article is an excerpt from the episode 7 (Loneliness) published by The Existentialists podcast at www.existentialistspodcast.com

as a peaceful or even joyful encounter with oneself in which we can celebrate our uniqueness and intimacy with oneself.

M²³: I'd suggest that it would be good to clarify our terms, because the term "loneliness" sometimes gets confused with "aleness" or "solitude". For myself, I make a distinction between being alone or in solitude and being or feeling lonely. Being alone is something that I very much appreciate, I choose, and I enjoy, because it allows me to be with myself, and to touch base with my inner ground. It gives me the space and the time to process my experiences, to sit with these experiences, and to live in and from an intimacy with myself. It is an experience that's rich and enriching. Feeling lonely is quite different. When I feel lonely, I cannot find that warm space within myself that allows me to feel connected with myself, and there is a weird feeling of estrangement, of not being fully with myself.

J: I liked the use of the word "estrangement" - estrangement from self but also estrangement from other people. And I think when my clients and even friends and family talk about loneliness, typically it means that there is a disconnect between myself and other people, or other people are not available, or they are not around. And I have historically felt loneliness that way, but, in more recent years, I would feel loneliness more like estrangement from myself. So, I like how you distinguished between loneliness and being alone and in solitude. I think, for me, I see loneliness as the feeling that arises first, maybe? I'm not sure if there's an order, but it just seems like in order to get to a place where being alone and in solitude is welcomed, there often is that walking through the darkness or the painful experience of a feeling of loneliness. In confronting the loneliness, we may be able to come to a place of finding our center and solitude. Thus, I agree about distinguishing these terms, but I also see them as intimately connected as well.

C: I like what you said, Janelle, because I was thinking about it too, and in more recent times, or in the past couple of years, I've certainly felt more solitude, but it feels very different than the loneliness that I maybe would've experienced before. In loneliness there was an insatiable quality to it where it did not really feel like it could ever really be filled, but I was seeking something to fill it. And then I feel like somewhere in the process or along the way, coming home to myself and having that relationship with myself converted or transmuted that loneliness feeling to one of solitude. I think the connection between the two is close and intimate, and, as Janelle was saying, in confronting or facing the loneliness, we may find a way to solitude.

X: For most of my life, I have not really felt lonely. That just shifted as I have gotten older, for a host of reasons, but I have always largely been content with being in my head, let's call it. Alone, but kind of knowing that I could go and play in my own head. I could go ahead and revel in fantasy, I could explore, I could philosophize, I could do a whole bunch of things even in, say, the presence of others that I don't really agree with or where I did not fit in- places where I imagine I could be lonely— but that was always kind of okay. And certainly, that's something that's come up recently with clients talking about how they're often so lonely when they are with other people, not

²³ The first letter of the authors' first names is used to identify the speakers throughout this dialogue.

so much on their own, which seems really paradoxical, that you would be lonely with others. And of course, for me then, there is this idea that no matter how close you ever get to somebody, you will never actually know what it's like to be them, and they will never fully reach us. And any attempts to overcome that are ultimately futile, which in many ways sounds quite... dark. But, at least for me, it has been quite revelatory.

C: I was going to say 'dark'? Or kind of precious? In that you have your own unique experience, your own unique separateness that only you can be in a relationship with.

X: Certainly, and that is how it has been for me, for sure. It almost kind of gives us permission to stop trying not to feel lonely. And I do not mean to give up, but to stop trying to overcome the futility of really trying to overcome it, particularly as it pertains to relationships.

M: Because there is always going to be some degree of aloneness and perhaps loneliness even in our most intimate relationships given our separateness and differences. It also seems to me that your remark, Xav brings up a different level of loneliness sometimes called 'existential loneliness', which is a fundamental experience of being human, in the sense that our separateness represents an existential given. And as you said, Chelsea, this is not just a dark place, but it could be a very fruitful experience. To me, there is something almost miraculous in the fact that we are separate, that we can enjoy that uniqueness and being different. And of course, there is also the beauty that comes from encountering the uniqueness and differences in others, which is only possible because we are separate and different from one another.

Lonely relational beings

If we are relational beings as some philosophers and researchers claim, how come that, at times, we all feel the throbbing, unrelentless pangs of loneliness or the terrifying spectrum of the possibility of feeling lonely or left alone? Shouldn't our relationships that we cherish as our ontological ground prevent us from feeling so disconnected and lonely? The EA stance on this suggests that fulfilling relationships based on the encounter of two real persons—not just of their projections of each other—are possible only between people who embrace their uniqueness and separateness and are able to live in the dialectical tension between the desire and capacity to relate with the others, and the desire and capacity to be alone. We turn both towards the others and towards ourselves, and every time we are in an authentic relationship with another person, we are always in relationship with ourselves. In and through this double openness and dialogue, our personhood emerges.

M: Given our discussion about separateness and existential loneliness as fundamental human experiences, are we then relational beings, or are we fundamentally alone? Or both? Some people say a lot these days, in certain communities at least, that we are relational and they claim that quite boldly and without much nuance about what that actually means, which, sometimes, creates the breeding soil for enmeshment, codependency, relational transgressions and wounds inflicted under the pretense of relationality. For myself, I think that we are ontologically relational, we are 'being-with' as Heidegger wrote, in the sense that our being-in-the-world is constituted and

exists in relationships. At the same time, we are also alone, in the sense of being separate, distinct, unique persons. As we assume our own existence, become aware of our own separateness, become ourselves and live authentically, being alone becomes a fundamental human, existential experience that deepens our capacity for being in relationships. It is not just a dark experience, but also a beautiful, rich experience.

J: So then, is loneliness perhaps an inability to accept that fundamental given that we are alone?

M: I think that to a certain extent that could be the case. Heidegger seems to suggest that most of us, most human beings, prefer to experience the security and often times the ignorance of being embedded in roles and functional relationships rather than being fully aware of the fact that we are also standing alone as being-towards-death, solely responsible for our existence. Most people are reluctant to take up their existence as separate, unique persons, and fear the perceived danger or burden of their authenticity. Hence, I guess there could be a comfort and safety in belonging, in the sense of blending in, and not assuming one's aloneness. It is also possible that instead of assuming this existential dimension of separateness and our authenticity, some of us frantically try to overcome it by searching outer relationships and roles; thus, we become more and more estranged from ourselves and lonely.

X: Is this not where something like codependency becomes a thing, or cults become a thing, where you are effectively trying to lose yourself, to not-

M: ...not to be yourself. Exactly, because there is a comfort in not being oneself, and not assuming the full capacity for becoming one's separate self. It is easier sometimes to blend in and to be part of a cult, or a community, rather than to fully, consciously, assume one's separateness and authenticity.

J: I think that there are a lot of people who grew up with quite different worldviews, that say that life is all about relationality, it is all about you and I, especially if you grow up within certain religious or spiritual communities. It is about you and God, or the transcendent, and not only that but also that our relationships with people on Earth are a microcosm for us to create a relationship with God. And so, for many people who grew up with those world views, the experience of loneliness is profoundly excruciating, because they were told that it should not be this way.

X: It can then be compounded, if the relations—the mortal relations, are a microcosm of the spiritual realm.

M: Indeed, I think that in these cases the suffering, the pain could be felt even more on the spiritual dimension—as if there is some failing or some longing there or perhaps something unfulfilled on a spiritual level.

Loneliness with the other versus loneliness without the other

EA affirms the importance of both relationships with others and of the inner relationship with oneself. Hence, an experience of loneliness can stem both from a lack of relationships with

others (the loneliness without the other) and from a lack of relationship with oneself, even when the other is present (the loneliness with the other). Many people feel an even more excruciating sense of loneliness when they are with the others and yet feel lonely and disconnected. This experience highlights yet again the crucial importance of developing our capacity to relate to and be with ourselves and by ourselves as a condition to experiencing fulfilling, mature relationships with other.

J: ... you can be in a room full of people, and still feel like the loneliest person in the world. So, what is going on there? And same thing, you can be in a room with one person whose singular focus is to be with you, and still feel like the loneliest person in the world.

M: Actually, phenomenological research on loneliness recognizes these two fundamental types of loneliness: the loneliness without the other—when I am by myself and there is no other to know me, to encounter me, to be with me—, and the loneliness with the other-- when I feel utterly alone and alienated even in the presence of the other, usually because I experience myself as being so different and out of reach, to the point that no matter how much the other tries to encounter me, I cannot receive or experience that. Hence, I can be with many people in a room or with just one person who is really focusing on me, and I can still feel utterly lonely. And I guess that points to some degree of estrangement from myself as well and evokes the question whether I am with myself enough to be able to receive what the other is seeing of me, or whether I am in a bad place for that (disconnected from myself).

And, of course, there are also situations, like the COVID-19 pandemic, that really bring to the fore the loneliness that takes hold because there is limited connection with the other, at least not physical, in person connection. This is in addition to the estrangement from ourselves.

J: For sure, absolutely. I think the latter was harder for people to see. In my experience, it has been harder for individuals to be able to say 'oh, I'm out of connection with myself'. I find that when people are suffering from loneliness, there is often this assumption that it's because 'I'm not in a relationship with the other'.

M: Very much so.

J: And because I relate more to the estrangement of self-side of loneliness, it is actually hard for me sometimes to understand, what is it actually that you're looking for from the other? We say 'oh, I want connection', but why? For what? What does that give us? What does that do for us? What are we looking for?

Longing to be known.

When we feel lonely, it is very tempting and almost irresistible to reach out for someone or something to alleviate our gnawing feeling of loneliness. At those times, we tend to become restless and frantically try to overcome the unpleasant or painful feeling of disconnect and hollow at the core of ourselves. Most of us would instinctively turn towards someone, towards an existing

relationship or we may try to find or start new relationships. It is as if we sense something vital or precious in turning towards the other when we are lonely.

M: What are we seeking to receive from the other that could alleviate our loneliness since we seem to have this hope or longing that the other could relieve some of that?

C: I think on a very basic level, and to go with what you said about the relational ontology, I can have my own self-experience but sometimes it's also helpful to have that acknowledged or mirrored from the outside. So, if somebody, you know, spends the time being open to me and acknowledge my presence or that I'm there or to be with me as I'm with myself, then that adds an extra solidity to how I feel my existence. It reminds me of a client that I had when I first started working, who felt very, very alone and was quite alone interpersonally. And he would go to the hospital, and he'd come back and tell me with tears in his eyes-- he was like, "I go to the hospital because I just want someone to look me in the eyes and acknowledge that I exist". Hence, I think there is something about being with others that is affirming to our existence... like I am here, I exist, someone recognizes me. And I think that is really important.

M: Yes, absolutely. That deep longing to be known, to be seen is very important. As human beings, we are not meant to be completely alone or alone all the time. 'Being-with' is also one important dimension of our existence. I notice again how being with others and being alone are such intimately related experiences and complete each other as well as our experience of being our own person as the person has both a private pole (intimacy with oneself) and a so-called public pole (being with others).

J: Interesting observation. I also really like what you said about bringing solidity to the existence... needing to know that I exist. Loneliness is also this harbinger of annihilation. That is huge: if nobody sees me, I do not exist. And then I go to right away—well, if that's the case, to me, it indicates that these people don't have themselves, they aren't with themselves, they can't let themselves feel their own person. So, to me, loneliness always goes back to the relationship to self and estrangement from self.

Developing the capacity to be alone

Our capacity to be alone and even to endure the painful stretches of loneliness develops ontogenetically, and it is intimately intertwined with the process of self-development. EA recognizes the critical importance of the external conditions of receiving loving attention, appreciation, and justice from the others in the development of a sense of self and self-worth. Developmentally, it is crucial to experience being seen and known by the other as we truly are not just as a projection of the other. Early developmental trauma and the poverty of such experiences of being encountered while growing up may lead to difficulties in developing a strong sense of self, and, consequently, to a diminished capacity to be alone.

M: I think it's also important to talk about the ontogenetic development, because someone who hasn't been seen, and doesn't feel that solidity of existence as reflected back by a loving other growing up, might feel probably more lonely and it will be more difficult to be alone when they are

adults. In contrast, someone who had some good experiences, even if not the full range of experiences of being seen- may have that experience of the solidity of their existence and of their sense of self. And it may be a little bit easier for them to endure even the existential loneliness, or to be alone.

J: That is a really good point.

C: And I think you can be seen, but I guess the quality of being seen varies, because you can be seen and acknowledged as an individual but maybe not be seen in your authenticity. And I think we need that, being seen by the other as who we are authentically to offset the feelings of loneliness. I think that is confusing for people... many people might have been mirrored growing up, and yet the mirroring maybe was not actually very accurate.

X: Yes, so then what do we say or think about people who—as therapists maybe we have done this. Maybe you’ve experienced this—I know I have—where I’ve got a client in front of me who—I’m really trying to be with them, and I’m putting major effort into doing that and to see beyond their primary complex, their superficial complex, and really looking at them. And yet, they will continually tell me that they have not been seen. And that’s a difficult one for a therapist, to hear, to kind of go ‘but, like, I’m right here with you, we’ve talked, we’ve done all these things, and yet still...’

M: Oh yes, I can totally relate to this. I can also think of some of my clients. I feel like telling them: “I’m right here, we shared some very personal experiences, we’ve done this for a while”, and it still doesn’t hold. It takes time and patience as some of our clients have never had that experience before. So even to be able to recognize it, first, and then to experience it is a huge thing. Sometimes it’s quite threatening, it’s very vulnerable. And then to be able to recognize it when it happens again and again, and to hold onto it and bring it up within themselves. It’s a very complicated and long process. It just takes time, especially if they didn’t have it growing up, to just recognize it and to be with it or tolerate it. Sometimes people feel very vulnerable when they are truly seen and there is also a high risk that they can feel shame or embarrassment as a result.

The pain of loneliness

It is often hard to pinpoint what aches so much when we feel lonely. Sometimes it may be just a feeling of dull malaise, of being out of sorts, disconnected and disoriented. Other times, we may notice our restlessness, a frantic, desperate attempt to quench the unease of sensing how hollow we feel. Or we may feel the throbbing pain of being thrown upon ourselves when we feel unable to support ourselves. EA suggests that this pain may be stemming from a sense of loss of self or connection with self.

M: What is so unpleasant and painful in being lonely that people would do many things just to get a little bit of relief from that. What is it so painful there?

J: I feel there is a quality, even if clients do not say it out loud, but this feeling of ‘nobody can help me, nobody can actually do anything’. There is a helplessness in it.

M: 'I'm out of reach and there is nothing I can do about it.'

J: Yeah. 'I could take medication, I could do yoga, meditate. I could go for walks. I could, you know—but this thing is in me, and it will not leave me no matter what I do. And you cannot take it from me, there is nothing that you could do to take this from me, so...'

M: In my most recent acute experience of loneliness, my feeling was that I was completely out of reach, like I was on a different planet, in a different galaxy. The feeling was that there was absolutely no one who could begin to understand my experience or would even want to begin to understand. An experience of complete disconnect. And yet really wanting and longing to be seen and encountered, like a thwarted, torturous longing for connection with the other. And the absence of the other- not only physical but especially emotional and spiritual- was heart-wrenching. It felt like I was thrown upon myself in a moment when my inner ground was rapidly unraveling due to a specific circumstance and when I really needed the other. That experience left me incredibly raw, exposed and vulnerable, and, sadly, it confirmed for me that, fundamentally, I am alone, and no one will be there with me in my darkest hour. And, at that time, that realization was terrifying.

J: I think as well that the feeling of non-existence that loneliness can evoke can be obliterating, and I think there's a... a desperation that comes in that, at least in some of the family members I've seen that have really suffered from loneliness. I just feel that desperation, like that needing-- that frantic reaching out—and that being futile.

C: Yeah, it is so strong. Yeah, and I think ultimately... perhaps there must be a receptivity to yourself first in order to create the openness or the ability to receive from the outside.

Dealing with loneliness in therapy

As therapists we work with a lot of clients who suffer from loneliness on a chronic basis. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this feeling of loneliness for many of our clients and even for ourselves. This raises the question of how to support our clients in dealing with their painful experiences of loneliness.

M: So how do we deal with loneliness and how do we help our clients deal with loneliness? Or how can we help them be with this experience?

C: For me, I see it, again, as helping them to foster and facilitate that relationship with self, and that receptivity to self. It does not change the fundamental aloneness, but it changes the relating to it.

X: How might people do that, Chelsea?

C: Well, I think it's a very long process and the therapeutic relationship helps create that container or that space for that self-relating to happen- that free emotional experiencing may not get to happen in other places. Through freely relating to oneself and to the therapist in the room, the client gets to get more in contact with themselves. And the loneliness maybe starts to dissipate from there.

J: I have experienced shifts with clients whose main issue is that they feel lonely. It is not until they can actually feel the pain, feel what they're feeling in the present moment, that that loneliness starts to subside. I am sitting in the office with a client, and my gaze is turned toward them, looking at them, trying to access them. But... their focus is on somebody else who is not in the room. So, it's interesting-- even just in the eye contact or the symbolic looking—they look elsewhere. And when the client brings their eyes back to themselves, and I am mirroring and looking at them, now we are dealing with the loneliness. Now we can engage with it and respond to it.

M: I also think it is important to lessen or let go of some relational expectations, like I should be fully seen, I should be fully known, or of that fantasy of finding one's soulmate or whatever idealized quality that intensifies the legitimately human longing of being seen and known. So, working with expectations, and calling out some fantasies—that the other should take away the pain of loneliness. The other— in this case the therapist— can be with the client, as you said, Janelle, fully present and encountering the client so that the client can show up for their own experience. But the therapist cannot and should not fix or take away the loneliness.

It's important though to explore that longing, the intensity of it and where does it come from, what shapes it. For example, I'm referring also to our culture that promotes a lot of unrealistic ideas about togetherness and coupleship, as well as the fantasy that there is someone out there who will just make it all better.

J: Yeah, and the way we communicate on social media. It's designed so that you never have to be lonely. Just open up your phone. Watch videos. Text someone.

M: That's such a good point, Janelle. Yes, that implicit assumption that there is a problem if you are lonely, or you must be doing something wrong.

J: Yeah. I think a lot of my work as a therapist has actually been with clients who will come in and ask, "what can I do?" ... "Nothing". Loneliness is not a doing thing-- It's a 'being thing'. You have to be in it.

M: Moustakas would agree with you. Loneliness is a state of being that cannot be done away with as it awaits to be fully lived.

J: For me, this is an ongoing process, and I'm learning how to be with my own loneliness. And I hold the belief that therapists can only be as effective as they've done the work themselves. And so, I think the trap to fall into as a therapist when the client says, "what do I do?" is to immediately try and give them things to do. "Oh, here's all the activities you can do, or this is how you can go out and meet people". So it's been interesting to see as I've grown in my capacity to be alone, how I'm also able to be with clients and their loneliness—not that it's comfortable—but there are these moments when I'm in my house and all of a sudden loneliness just descends. And here I am, and I feel it acutely. It's a challenge for myself to not immediately pick up my phone because that's easy but it's not going to do anything. But instead to actually just sit down and feel it... and I agree with what you're saying, Mihaela, that not everybody can do that right away; we have to build up that capacity. Even if you can do that for 5 seconds just to allow the feeling to arise, that is enough to start. In my own moments of loneliness often the feeling is nothingness first. And then

something, some other emotion will come up and then maybe I'll start having a dialogue with myself like I'll just start talking to myself, or images will come to my mind, or a metaphor will come to my mind, and I am just leaning into that, whatever the moment is giving to me, whatever needs to be here. So, I think, in how to be with loneliness is in acceptance. We should not do away with it as soon as we feel it, but to accept that it is here and so, what does it feel like? To get curious about it, like what is that feeling of loneliness like for me? And just to notice how it moves, and how it shifts.

M: Such important points, Janelle, thank you. Because if we can be with our loneliness, make room for it and notice how it changes, we are in fact undoing the loneliness by being with ourselves, with whatever we experience. We reconnect with ourselves, and the thick fog of loneliness begins to clear bit by bit. I discover that I can be with myself again.

In the spirit of what we just shared, let's wrap up our dialogue with a quote from Moustakas' book on loneliness. He wrote that "Loneliness is neither good nor bad. It's not a bad experience in itself but the point of intense and timeless awareness of the self which results in bringing a person deeply in touch with his own existence and in touch with others in a fundamental sense. I began to see that in the deepest experiences the human being can know, the birth of a baby, the prolonged illness or death of a loved relative, the loss of a job, the creation of a poem or a painting, or even the grief of a fire or flood or car accident... each in its own way touches upon the roots of loneliness, and in each of these experiences, in the end we must go alone". Hence, loneliness could be a calling to encounter our existence and ourselves on a deeper level, and to become more fully part of the existence by assuming our fundamental aloneness. And from that place, we can connect with others more deeply by respecting their own aloneness, boundaries and differences.

Final words

Loneliness, a fundamental state of existence, is often marked by a painful experience of feeling a disconnect in relationship with self and/or the other, which in EA corresponds to challenges or blockages primarily in the FM2 and FM3, respectively. Loneliness is also a common theme that emerges within the psychotherapeutic process. Ontogenetic development is important to consider when supporting clients who suffer from loneliness, as clients' capacities to sense their own presence and to feel seen by another can differ significantly. Clients' beliefs surrounding relationships, particularly their expectations and assumptions that one should not be lonely, shapes their capacity to endure and deal with loneliness. It is valuable for therapists to consider their own attitudes towards loneliness and their capacities to respond to loneliness when it arises. Since all human beings are fundamentally alone, it is beneficial for both client and therapist to be aware of such a state of being and to strengthen one's capacity to be both in relationship with others and with oneself as a means of dealing with loneliness.

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Meeting *Alétheia*²⁴

Michèle Croquevielle²⁵

Abstract

This work seeks to look closely at the concept of "truth" and its confrontation in the field of psychotherapy. It is a subject that had strong impact on me on my path of Existential Analysis (EA) with Alfried Längle, who refers to truth in its existential importance in his work with students and patients: Existential truths as those facts according to which we must act, without euphemisms, leaving out the "taboos".

Keywords: truth, confrontation, existential analysis, psychotherapy

Introduction

Years ago, in front of some members of a training group in Existential Analysis, Alfried told one of my classmates: "*you cannot be a trainer, you do not have the skills yet*", after which a silence fell, quite embarrassing. I must confess that listening to him had a strong impact on me, not because I did not think the same, but because of the fact that it was said "publicly" (of course, only among those of us who were his classmates). Why did he not tell him privately, so there would be no witnesses, or why did he not at least share it with us separately? On another occasion, in the circumstances of a private conversation with him, he blurts out a phrase to me, a "truth" that I did not expect ... although I sensed it ... And it was an intuition that I did not dare to look straight ahead, because – I thought –, if it is such, it would destroy an important part of my life. I did not conceive of my life living with that truth. It was shocking to hear it. It was not pleasant to hear it, it made me suffer, but then, it also relieved me. Why? Because I knew that it was so, but I did not dare to face it. And once I faced it, head-on (confronted), I realized that I could go on with my life including and referring to this fact, I could live with it.

Towards a concept of *Truth*

My experience contains two steps: first was the shock, followed by a specific process of incorporation of the difficult truth with which I was encountered. This can be understood by two concepts which are important in EA in the 1st Fundamental Motivation. The confrontation lifted the hidden, untaken, bypassed perception into reality, made it my actuality. Although I somehow already "knew" what was told to me, I now suddenly became "aware" of it: "Oh, there is this ..., it is my reality in which I am in and it has to do with me, it belongs to my world – it is real!" This was the

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hard shock I perceived, this sudden touching base with something that is there. This hits, shakes, hurts as every sudden impact at a wall or a glass door etc. does.

I then needed time to deal with it. I saw this as my actuality, but am I ready to take it, to withhold it, to live with it? A process of incorporation started. What does this mean for my life? What consequences will it have? Can I carry it, live with it? Or would it destroy me, overdemand me, damage me? – To check this out is the process which makes actuality my truth. The question arises, what truth really is?

Truth is generally defined by A. Längle as a *relationship* to being, a referring to what is, i.e. to that what we perceive as reality. Actuality (Wirklichkeit) is the basis of truth, but not the essence of truth. The existential relevance or the essence of truth consists in this "relation to the matter of fact ("Sachbezogenheit")" as conceived under the perspective of "living with these facts, i.e. to adjust and relate to it." (Längle 2011, 153) "Truths are revealing, unveil the deeply known, the 'forgotten', signify the 'unconcealed' (the Greek term for truth is 'a-letheia', which means 'removed from the Lethe, the river of forgetfulness'; cf. Heidegger 1976/2004a). Truth offers reliable support and therefore basically brings relief. The open, existential contact with truth promotes personal maturation (Jaspers 1983)." (Längle 2011, 153)

Socrates, in dialogue with Glaucon in the "allegory of the cave" (in Plato, 1998), gives us some illustrations that allow us, from those early years of philosophy, to describe the steps of this dis-closure of what is. Here, after the description of the chained men in the cave – who only looked at the depth ahead –, he recounts what would happen if any of them looked towards the light:

(...) suppose that one of them was released and forced suddenly to stand up, turning his neck round and marching with open eyes towards the light, and by doing this he suffered, and because of the dazzling splendour he was now unable to perceive those things whose shadows he had seen before. (p.339) ²⁶

A truth that im-presses²⁷

Here we find a first moment: to confront ἀλήθεια (Alétheia) for the first time, to face the truth. The impression when we un-veil what there is. When Längle shows me what I did not want to see, it makes a painful impression on me. He lifts the veil of something I didn't dare to look at. And initially, it has an impact on me, and then, it produces pain.

The incredulity by the "veil" – unawareness – and the pain that Socrates describes, is many times such. The subject did not see that truth (it was veiled), as it was presented to him. "Such a man, stubborn in his 'way of seeing', cannot even foresee the possibility that what is 'real' for him does not go beyond the shades."²⁸ (Heidegger 2004b, 215)

²⁶ Translated by C. Iturriaga

²⁷ Impression here also means: to be shocked by something.

²⁸ Original: „Der auf seine „Ansicht“ erpichte Höhlenmensch vermag nicht einmal die Möglichkeit zu ahnen, sein Wirkliches könnte gar nur das Schattenhafte sein.“ (Heidegger 2004b, 215)

F. Nietzsche, in his work *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873), also alludes to the difficulty that we sometimes experience when faced with a truth that damages us:

In this, people do not avoid being deceived so much as being damaged by deception: they hate, even at this level, basically not deception, but the bad, hostile consequences of certain kinds of deception. In a similar, limited sense, man also wants only truth: he desires the pleasant, life-sustaining consequences of truth; he is indifferent to pure inconsequential knowledge, and even hostile to truths that may be harmful and destructive.

The truth, says Längle, "is a reality, burdened by the task of living with it. It is a reality to which we relate our life and our decisions" (Längle 2011, 153).

And so it was in my case. And the question for me was: can I carry that weight? Can I endure that burden? Can my life still be possible with that truth that has come my way, producing such a painful impression? The 1st FM tells us that for me to be, I need to be able to endure and accept whatever is in front of me.

And some clients are also impressed by events, which for us therapists, are somehow evident. We tell them: "as you describe this, apparently your parents abused you; your partner, it seems to me, does not know how to love; death is possible, even for your children", etc. And although many can have the intuition, they are also impressed by such revelations... Many years inside a cave... without confronting, sometimes perceiving the light, but not daring to look *Alétheia* in the face.

The moment of confrontation

What do we mean by 'confrontation', and how does this relate to the concept of 'truth'?

EA is defined as a "confrontational" psychotherapy, a concept that is sometimes confused with violence, abuse, etc. However, "confrontation" is something quite mundane: it comes from the Latin *with* (to be close to) and *fron / frons / frontis* (front): Being or standing in front of something or someone. For example, when we ask a client, how are you? We lead him to "confront himself" in order to urge him to ask himself that question. It is a confrontation with his being / being here. Two types of confrontations can be distinguished: through a question (as in the example), but also through previous perceptions of the therapist.

Among the issues that Patricia brings to therapy is her unclear and unsatisfactory relationship with her partner. After 8 months of bonding, he does not accompany her, does not get involved in her interests, but they have some weekends of sex and fun. She feels lonely. As her therapist, I clearly see no commitment or dedication from him. "*Your partner, apparently, does not see you, he is not interested in you*", I tell my client. She is silent, impressed to see that their relationship was fading for months now. Then she nods, very sad and tells me: "*I smelled it, but I didn't want to look at it in the front.*"

In his article *Das Bewegende spüren*²⁹, Längle (2007) poses different ways to approach the therapeutic access: Provocative (which directly and initially confronts the issues to be addressed, arousing interest, but also risking the emergence of protective reactions, and with it, the possibility of causing the client to close up); Meditative (a combination of giving him³⁰ time and exercises); and Comprehensive (the therapist withdraws to the background, so that the other can “unfold” better through what he says, observing what happens in him, what it is), the latter being, according to the author, the most cultivated form by humanistic and existential orientations (ibid. p.18). These distinctions are relevant, although, from the point of view of this author, they are not mutually exclusive, given that in a psychotherapeutic process the three modalities may converge at different times.

It is fair to say that not all confrontations leading to an encounter with Alétheia, are always painful or dreaded. I remember Alejandra complaining because her parents never really saw her, nor did they consider her. They were not affectionate towards her. There were only demands and comparisons with her sister. However, she is a warm, expressive woman, and careful with her loved ones, which made me wonder, how did she learn that way of being? And I ask her [the other way to confront] about some caregiver, or grandparents in her childhood. And she begins to remember and to tell me about her childhood with her grandmother. She loved her very much, she pampered her, accompanied her in the absence of her parents ... Suddenly she opens her eyes wide and exclaims: *My nona saved my life!* Then she begins to cry deeply and quietly.

Phenomenology and Truth

To the concepts of truth and confrontation, I must add understanding and phenomenology.

“Understanding only becomes substantial, when we understand what it is, that moves the other to say or do something, and not only what he says. Otherwise, anyone could say it. It would only be a semantic transfer, but it would not have led to an encounter. But in this way, the person is behind it, his why.” (Längle 2007, 20).

Längle develops extensively this concept of “un-hiding”, saying what it is, bringing it to light, in his own elaboration of phenomenology applied to psychotherapy.

The hermeneutical phenomenology (of interpretation) that Heidegger poses, can be defined as an instrument with the aim of answering the question: “what and how much can I know” and it specializes in going from the mere appearance of things to the Being of these, to what “is behind”, the very essence of things, to bring information contained in the subjective appearance. (Croquevielle 2009, 27)

Croquevielle and Traverso, in the book *Existential psychotherapies* (2011), briefly describe the phenomenological procedure:

²⁹ This work is only available in Spanish and German; in English, it could be translated as “The intuition of movement”.

³⁰ The masculine mode will be used as a generalization.

The phenomenological attitude requires a double opening on the part of the therapist: “towards *outside*, to what impresses from the outside (what the other says, how he says it, gestures, etc.) and a second opening towards the *inside*, to what moves me, to the effects of the phenomenon about me [as a therapist]”. (Croquevielle 2009, 28). That is, the therapist opens up completely to allow himself to be 'moved' by the client and, at the same time, he opens up internally to realize how he has been 'moved', to discern in that which moves him, what has to do with the patient and what has to do with his own issues (to put them in parentheses). (p. 131)

Längle says:

"But just listening to a story or a narrative charged with emotion, to a certain extent, requires letting oneself be grasped by the essence of what is experienced, that is, a spontaneous internal phenomenology: What appears here? How do I receive it?" (Längle 2007, 19).³¹

Phenomenology is based on how actuality appears/speaks to a single person. Therefore, phenomenology requires concrete facts and details. (This means that phenomenology is linked to reality. Although it has a constructive sequence it is not a mere construct, not a dream, it is not fantasy. It requires a good description. In the praxis of psychotherapeutic work, it is a description of the subjective actuality and truth, which therefore is the starting point of phenomenological work.) (Längle 2007).

That is why the fact, the truth, what it is, is so important to see, and expose. Without access to the truth, without turning around and looking towards the light, it will be very difficult to complete the process of self-understanding that phenomenology seeks. For this, as Längle says, concrete facts and details are required, however, sometimes these are either very painful or feared (sometimes also ignored in their importance), which is why patients have not dared to look at them, confront them. Only the truth provides me with a firm ground to walk on. This firmness allows me to step on safely and leave it behind when I take the next step, and thus continue my walk.

Here, another distinction is important, which arises in the field of Heideggerian phenomenology³², embraced by Längle and EA, and which refers to the issue of prejudices. The philosopher argues that in the phase of the reduction of his method, all previous understandings, expectations, and judgments should be put in parentheses (*Epoché*). That is to say, leaving out, as far as possible, our previous knowledge, in such a way as to be open to what will be perceived. However, the distinction that Hans-Georg Gadamer invites us to, in *Truth and Method* (1990) regarding this issue, is interesting. He tells us: "In itself, prejudice means a judgment that is formed before the definitive validation of all the moments that are objectively determining" (p. 275) Then he adds, "Prejudice does not mean in any way false judgment, but the concept that it can be valued positively or negatively". And then he continues, alluding to the "*préjugés légitimes*" (ibid.). The *legitimate prejudices* would be those facts that we have been able to verify. As therapists, we listen

³¹ Aber schon allein das Anhören eines emotionsgetragenen Berichts oder Narrativs verlangt bis zu einem gewissen Maß ein sich Erfassen-Lassen vom Wesen des Erlebten, also eine spontane, innere Phänomenologie: Was zeigt sich da? Wie wirkt das auf mich? Was entfaltet sich in diesem Gespräch?" – (s 19)

³² It is interesting that the term phenomenology has its roots in the Greek φαίνω (phaino), which in its various meanings means: to appear, bring to light, reveal, and “to come into Being”.

and embrace the descriptions of our clients, which leads us to have / build legitimate prejudices, on which we can legitimately base some statements. For example, when Patricia described her romantic relationship, along with her manifest sadness, both from my own experience and from experiences shared by others, I can think that Patricia's partner is not interested in her. She does not say it (but then she will tell me she had not seen it before), but I did. And I showed this to her, and this, in later sessions she thanked me for, because it brought her the clarity, she needed to end the relationship.

Two experiences of confrontation with the truth

A client, already treated in previous years, with whom we had already established a therapeutic bond, and whose issue was well resolved, reappears in the consultation with an issue about love relationships. He, as a child, suffered from a violent father. With only seven years of age, he already had to come between his alcoholic father and his mother, so that he would not hit her. He even insisted that she hide in her bedroom, so his father would leave her alone. He used to sleep with a knife under his pillow.

Now, a grown professional man, he cannot have mature relationships with his partners: "*With you is like walking on eggs*", they tell him. He is always defensive with women. He is unable to really see them, and to relate to them as peers. Then the topic of his mother comes up: "*I always feel like I have to protect her.*"

I ask him: if you look at that situation now, in which you protect your mother, how does it appear to you that at the age of seven ... you had to interpose your body to take care of her ... shouldn't it be the other way around? Shouldn't she be the one to protect you? [Here, I make a "legitimate prejudice", because, with the knowledge that he has provided me in previous sessions, it is a judgment formulated as a confrontational question that seeks the un-veiling, after a Provocative access, as Längle says].

Suddenly his mother begins to appear in front of him, the one who was not able to interpose herself, to take care of him. His mother who recoiled from his father, exposing him... Anger, a lot of anger emerges in him towards his mother.

After a few weeks with these upsetting feelings, time allowed him to start looking at her with more distance. He says that before, he only felt compassion for her suffering, and that now, although he could feel some compassion, he could visualize her as the adult that she was (and is), responsible for her decisions and their consequences. Several weeks later, he tells me that they had a conversation. He tells her that in therapy "*I saw things that I haven't seen before*". That he always saw her as a victim and that now he saw her as responsible. Also, that he could understand her. They cried together. He tells me that "*it was a very healing conversation for both of us*". It is still too early to know in what form his way of relating to women will change, but I think it will in a freer way, by not having to experience himself as responsible for them.

In order to find the truth, this other type of confrontation, to question, can be seen very clearly in the confrontation with anxiety, a psychotherapeutic method typical of EA. In the Death Portal (Längle 2005), it is the therapist's requirement to be very clear and sure that he can support himself to face the consequences of this experience.

I remember a client who, confronted (asked) with the question of what, for her, would be the most feared thing, she could not even enunciate it. What was that unnameable thing, that which was hidden without being able to be un-veiled? Her body visibly tenses, her gaze is lost on the horizon... *The death of all my children*, she finally manages to stammer: "*I could not live with that. I would rather die*", she says very anguished, crying.

I perceive her anguish, the horror of such an image, and the denial gestures she makes with her head.

I ask her: would you really stop living?

She responds very pale, "*no, I couldn't*". She was not able to see her life continuing after such a fact.

I then continue: and what would it be like? Would you kill yourself?

She remains silent, shocked by this new confrontation. After a new silence, she cries quietly. "*No, I really wouldn't kill myself. But it would be very painful to keep on living.*"

What happened to her, inside herself? When confronted and induced to look at herself, she realizes that, despite this eventual great loss, she is able to endure and still be standing, something that she could not even think or consider before: to be able to keep on being, living, despite that (eventual) fearfully painful wound in her life.

Now, after this confrontation, she sees herself living, and enduring, although with pain, a possible life with such loss.

Necessary conditions for the confrontation of the truth

In the allegory of the cave, we can see the first confrontation with something that blinds us, and is painful to look at. What is required, as a therapist, to support and accompany the client in this un-veiling?

EA already raises it: in the first place, the therapist must have the confidence and courage to walk the path towards *Alétheia*. He (or she) must be sure that he can be, and can keep being, with everything that happens in himself (and the client). If this is not the case, there is the risk of anguish, which can arise in the therapist and leave the client "abandoned to his fate", and / or that he transfers his own insecurities to the client, interrupting the process that is taking place. We also need to make sure that the client can endure what he will see. That he can continue to be, despite the eventual shock and pain. And yes. The light can be blinding at the beginning, and it can also be painful, however, it is likely that what the therapist has already seen (that truth), the client has also already sensed (smelled it, as Patricia literally said). But it might happen that the client has not sensed it or does not want to see it. Then is not the time yet for this confrontation. And as therapists we must be very respectful of the client's own time and own processes. That is why the training of the therapist is so fundamental, as well as his phenomenological and empathic capacity, so that he can see his client in depth.

What else is required for this encounter with *Alétheia*?

Closeness to one's own feeling, the clarity that this is correct and a decision that will bring well-being, and that will be for the best. The latter, because we must be very sure that what we are doing has a meaning, in such a way as to convey to the client that he is in "good hands", that he can trust looking towards the light, that he will not be left to fall, that he will not be left alone. That happened to me before the image Alfried made me turn and look at. I knew myself in good hands. I trusted that, by our mutual knowledge and prior bonding, I could trust in what he encouraged me to look at. This is also what happened to my clients: we had a mutually trustworthy bond. Taking this into account, there must be an alliance previously built, a therapeutic bond, so the client can feel safe, and though it hurts to look at, and though the image of the most feared thing can be terrifying (but is often smelled), there is a therapist, a person, a human being next to him, who will accompany him with all his humanity, to walk the path that will lead him out of his cave.

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A Calm Death after an Intense Life

Gabriel Traverso³³

Introduction

I have divided this article into two parts: the first one is a description of the case, seeking to engage the reader in an emotional and compassionate understanding of the client and the existential conditions that have led to her suffering. In the second part, diagnostic conclusions and psychotherapeutic treatment are presented from the existential analysis perspective.

I. The Case

A few days ago Enrique³⁴ called me, still in *shock*, to inform me that his wife Maria had died last night, while they were sleeping, due to cardiac arrest. At some time, he touched her and felt her cold. She was dead. She had recently turned 42 years old. She died without realizing it, calm, serene, in apparent peace.

What a calm death for a woman who had such an intense and suffering life!

The news really touched me, it moved me deeply. I was moved by her death, as I was by her life that always touched me since I met her, just over 15 years ago. From that place of being touched, I wanted to share her case.

She came to my consultation referred by her half-sister (on the mother side), Pachi, who was a couple of years younger and a student of mine at a university where I taught classes at the time.

She was not yet 27 years old. When I saw her, I perceived her as if she was a cello string stretched almost to her breaking point. It was a tension that seemed to cut the air of the office. From her I learned that her being “intense” was not only related to the enormous intensity (force or energy) of her feelings and behaviors, but also to this great internal tension, to her being “in-tense”. Intensity plus in-tension. A tension between many internal forces. If I had to simplify them, I would say between a gigantic destructive power and a great loving and creative torrent.

She started by telling me, “my life has been very difficult.” I remembered that phrase many times over the years, because it continued to be that way. She had been admitted to psychiatric centers many times for depression, bulimia, excessive alcohol intake, and many suicide attempts. One of those hospitalizations was for about a year in a Central American country, the land of his artist father. I seem to remember that it was from a cocaine addiction. Upon her return, in one of

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³⁴ All names are fictitious, in order to protect the identities of the clients.

her prolonged hospitalizations, this time caused by her alcoholism, she met Enrique, hospitalized for a similar reason. He was 22 to 23 years older than her. Maria must have been 22 years old, half his age. They were attracted and intimidated. As everything with María, it was an intense relationship, one of love and hate, although in the last years of her life it had stabilized. A year after they met, she became pregnant with Valeria, who dies, apparently as a result of the enormous disorders in her life, I do not remember if she died at birth, or days later. Maria suffered a lot for it, bearing an enormous guilt. Four months after starting therapy, she becomes pregnant again. She was between delighted and terrified (“scared as shit”, she told me, “I don’t want to destroy it again”). After a year of therapy, Jacinta was born. This time everything went well, in large part because of the “relative” stabilization from therapy, though we had only work for 18 sessions. Maria was never steady in attendance, as in everything else. Many times she desperately asks for a session and she doesn’t come.

Going back to the first session, she says her medical diagnosis is a bipolar disorder. And she adds, “I am accelerated, I am depressed.” “I am borderline” (BPD). She says “I am”, not “I have.” She comes medicated with trazodone, fluoxetine, quetiapine, and topiramate, all in fairly high doses. She rebels against the effects of the medications and often interrupts them. Sometimes due to its effects – they make her feel less alive – sometimes due to a lack of money: poverty, often on the verge of misery, is a constant in her life.

Her poverty, her suffering, her precariousness, her abandonment experience, generates a deep compassion in sensitive people. Thus – I find out at some point – therapy (as well as the house where she lives and her medication) is paid by Uncle Vicente, as she calls him. He is not a relative, but an older man, apparently a friend of his grandfather. At the 6th session, Maria arrives with him. He wants to meet me and know about the prognosis of the therapeutic process. He looks very concerned about Maria and her future. I imagine that he would also want to know about my real existence and make sure that his money was not being evaporated by alcohol.

Maria has fond memories of her childhood. She remembered herself as a dreamy and creative girl. She was chubby, although, and apparently this disturbed her mother. At the beginning of adolescence, she had anorexia, which later evolved into purgative bulimia, which continued into adulthood to the point of chronic damaging her teeth, and even losing some of them. Her dentist was another compassionate person who kept treating her for free while she needed it. She always thanked him with great affection.

From the first sessions, her great, her biggest pain in life appears: the relationship with her mother, Marilén, who is the same age as Enrique. Already in the first session she refers to that relationship as one of violence. Later it takes the form of a total emotional abandonment. Every time she got drunk, that overwhelming, unbearable, torturing pain appeared, which she tried to mitigate with more and more alcohol, and with many diverse self-injurious behaviors. In these fifteen years I have received countless calls from her in a drunken state and from her desperate crying and her tangled tongue I always distinguished, clearly and as a constant, the words “my mother” as the center of her pain. Her experience is that her mother always rejected her and that Pachi was given everything that she was denied of, love, appreciation and material things.

María was born from a relationship between Marilén and Osvaldo, a Central American plastic artist who after a certain time returned to his country. He had been the love of Marilén's life. María's interpretation is that her mother, just stepping out of adolescence, blamed her for Osvaldo's estrangement, and for having to interrupt her studies, but, above all, because the love of her own parents turns towards María, who raise her, while she is relegated to the role of an older sister, jealous of her own daughter, living in the same house. In fact, it was the maternal grandparents who exerted the paternity of Maria and gave her shelter and protection. Despite the distance, Osvaldo did not abandon them. Furthermore, he recognized Pachi as her own daughter, who was the product of Marilén's temporary relationship with another man and gave her his last name. With some regularity he talked with Maria and also listened to all of Marilén's complaints about their daughter.

An important and long part of the therapeutic work with Maria focused on differentiating her from her mother. This was not easy. The internalized mother was so powerful and destructive and had such a superegoic presence, that whenever she manifested, Maria's self-injurious behavior was unstoppable. It was present in her suicide attempts and in many of the self-inflicted damages. When she cried because of the rejection or abandonment of her mother, even in current situations, and especially under the influence of alcohol, her voice, in timbre and content, sounded like that of a six or eight year old girl. That is why I presume that, despite her fantasy of having had a happy childhood with her grandparents, it was likely that there were blockages of greater situations of mistreatment and abuse than those narrated by her.

After the tenth session, in which she told me that her relationship with her mother was better, I proposed to invite her to the next one. I wanted to meet her personally to get an idea about the feasibility of working on the mother-daughter relationship directly with both. They arrived together. After that conversation I had to admit that there was no hope on that side. This lady, with marked paraexistential features, would have needed many years of individual psychotherapy before she was in a position to have relational therapy with Maria. I could not glimpse an iota of appreciation for her daughter. I heard only complaints of all kinds. I did not hear more about her directly as she did not show interest in the eventual progress of her daughter's therapy, until about 4 years later. She called me to tell me that her daughter was about to die in the ICU of a Hospital. The content of the spoken text was that of a mother in distress, but I couldn't help but notice a tone of complacency and relief. This was confirmed to me when, as the days passed, Maria recovered and, against all odds, survived. Then Marilén's interest in her daughter faded and she stopped visiting her.

What happened was that, days after the earthquake in 2010, with a lot of alcohol in her body, María jumped, in her last suicide attempt, from the apartment where she lived, on a ninth floor, and did not die. She spent about a month in the ICU with her stomach open while her internal organs, severely damaged by the impact, were being repaired. Under these conditions I visited her a couple of times, with the proper authorization being her therapist. Her aggressiveness decreased significantly after this event. With the healing of her physical wounds, there also came a healing process of some of her soul wounds. For a time, she wanted to recognize herself as a motherless. By accepting that orphanhood, she significantly lowered her expectations about her mother, but

this does not work for differentiation. I can continue without differentiating myself from my father, even though he died 50 years ago, if I have not worked on my own delimitation and individuation. That was the work we tried to do with Maria. Although there was a difficulty. To differentiate myself, it is not enough to say "I am not that subject"; Differentiating myself from others requires to recognize myself in what is my own. For Maria it was always very difficult to recognize herself in something intrinsically her own. What she felt it was mostly her own, was her daughter, who was taken from her by the lawsuits that her mother made very early, because of her and Enrique's alcohol dependencies. Fortunately, it was not her mother, but Pachi who stayed with Jacinta, allowing her more contact with the little girl. This is the whole biographical experience of María; before the settlement of what was her own, something was always taken from her, dispossession after dispossession, only remaining the most complete emptiness of herself. Perhaps what was mostly her, and her own, that which cannot be taken from her, are her intense emotions and affections. But it was only dynamic, without content.

In the seven years after I met her, we had no more than eighty sessions with Maria, which for such a serious personality disorder is very little. More than half of those sessions were intended to put out the fires of her dramatic contingency. Progress was made in establishing a small "self" with which she manages to have an adequate distance from her mother and develop a reasonably stable relationship, which in the first years seemed impossible. In the last eight years we had no more face-to-face meetings, although I had countless phone calls from her. That was rather a period of accompaniment in her suffering, when she was feeling overwhelmed, our conversation helped her focus. She told me that no one understood her and knew her like I did, which was probably true.

In any case, the last ten years of her life were the best, where she had herself the most. She managed to create a small world of her own, precarious, but fairly stable, without falling into previous extremes and excesses.

Diagnostically, Maria had, as she said herself in our first session, a borderline personality disorder. The diagnosis of bipolar was ruled out very early on, so she stopped taking the medications. Her mood swings were always triggered by contextual factors, without any endogenous regularity. Her depressive states were driven by a psychodynamic with enormous vitality and energy, unthinkable in a bipolar.

I must say that when Maria was not possessed by the psychodynamic reactivity, she was a very beautiful and sweet person. To have helped to rescue that person, even if only partially, helps me with the pain of her loss.

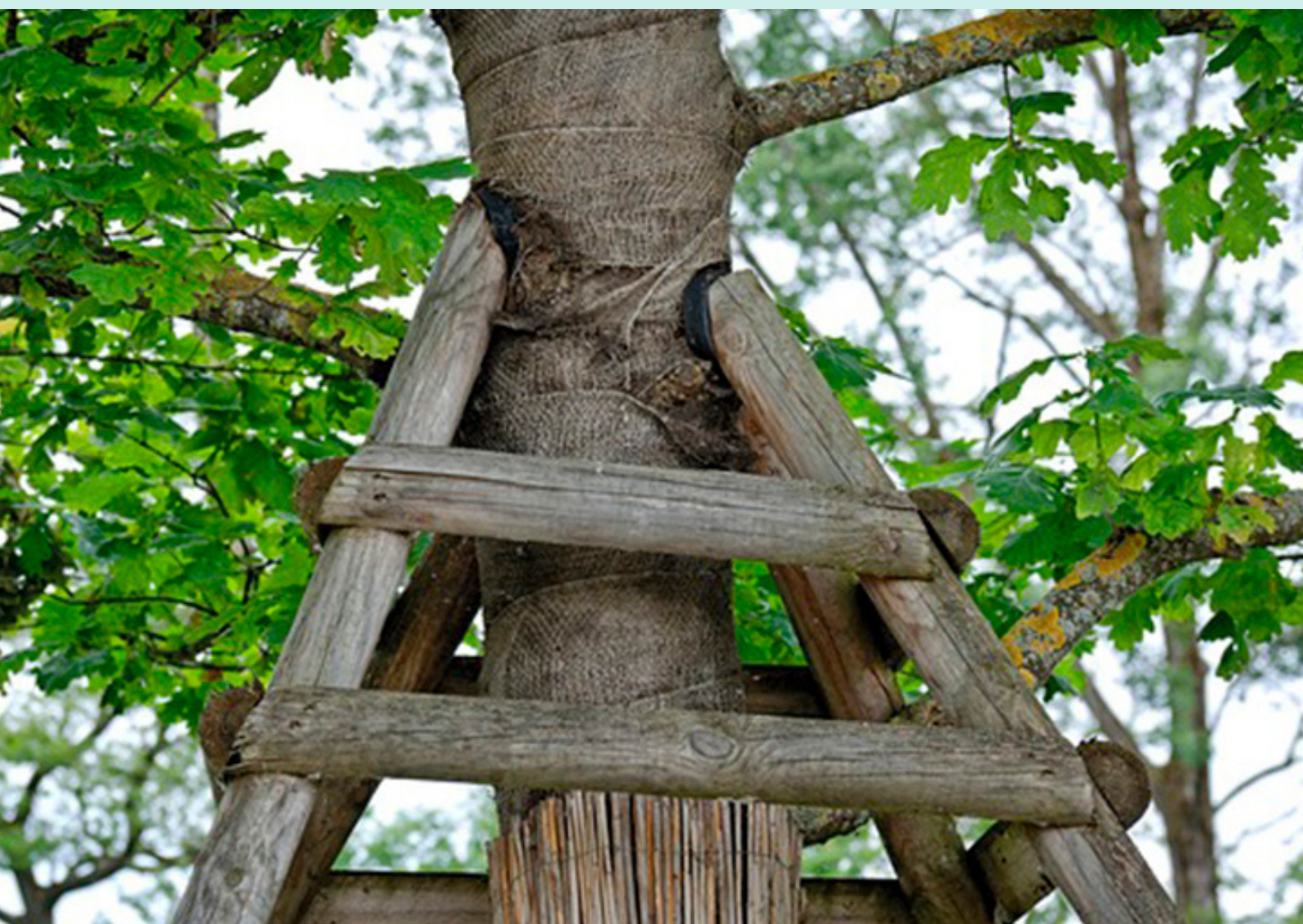
II. Conclusions on the diagnosis and treatment according to the Existential Analysis

In the case of Maria the four fundamental motivations of existence (FM) are deeply affected. The primarily most affected is the third, which is manifested by a big emptiness of herself. The limited accessibility to her person is replaced by rigidly fixed coping reactions: first, a great dissociation, outbursts of anger, annoyance and dramatization. We can understand it by the lack of the conditions of this motivation: she was not considered, nor treated with justice, nor did she

receive the necessary appreciation from her close environment, particularly from her mother, in order to see herself and be seen in her own value. Secondly the second FM is very disturbed, which is expressed in her large and frequent depressions. Because she lacks delimitation and differentiation from others, she seeks to fill the emptiness of herself with relationships of fusion, in which a 'we' tries to replace the 'I'; fusion instead of closeness. The coping reactions of anger and activism appear very fixed. Enjoying the passing of life with its values is replaced by experiences of great intensity and eagerness; binge eating on a purgative bulimia, excesses in alcohol and substances. The strong disturbance of the four motivations, the large number of fixed coping reactions and the limited access to her own person, reveal a very severe personality disorder.

In the first phase of the therapy, we worked with the reactive psychodynamic (which protects her from the daily contingency and the pain it causes) from an understanding perspective and directive guidance, providing an auxiliary self in the absence of a personal self who can take position in different situations. At the same time, we worked on a gradual co-resignification of the dysfunctional interpretations of the behaviors of the main actors in her environment, with which self-injurious behavior and the concomitant extreme consumption of alcohol were attenuated. We reinforced the conditions of the first FM, helping to lower her anxiety (fundamental anxiety and, above all, anticipatory anxiety), confronting it through the corresponding methodology. PEA (Personal Existential Analysis) could only be applied when her own person began to appear, from session 65 approximately.

The main difficulty in Maria's treatment was the lack of regularity in her attendance at the sessions, with interruptions of several months. And generally, when she came to the office, she was devastated. If I had to highlight the greatest aid she had in her own process, I would say it was the strength of the therapeutic bond.



Run and jump before the floor falls

Andrés Gottfried³⁵

Ms. María T. attended her first session expressing “deep anguish”, which at times manifested in panic attacks, especially in closed places, since she described a “*feeling of lack of air, strong pressure on the chest, agitation, dizziness, fear and the urge to run away*”. This situation did not allow her to have, what Ms. T. referred to as “*a calm and peaceful life*”; at any moment she could be triggered to feel great anguish which she felt in her chest and feet. She said, “*I want to be well but I can not, I have no strength*”.

In exploring the actual events of her life, no remarkable facts were identified. When asked what she could attribute the feeling of “*deep anguish*” to, Ms. T. stated that she was not clear when those long-distressing emotions had begun, and that they had grown over time, especially, on her return to Argentina after having lived in the United States for almost 11 years. She reported that she had married young, had had 2 daughters and had emigrated to the United States with her husband. In that country she had had a good life, but living with her husband was not easy, until she decided to leave him and return to Argentina with her children. It had been 4 years since her return, and her daughters were 20 and 18 years old. In Mendoza, she had a good job and a comfortable life, economically speaking. She did not have a partner; however, it was not a subject that worried her, as she said she felt fine that way.

At the second and third sessions, Längle’s Biographical Method was used, but nothing of relevance to Ms. T. was identified. She did not present any event to which she could attribute such anguish. Her panic had increased. At the end of the third session, the Argentine adaptation (Gottfried, 2016, in press) of the Test of Existential Motivations (TEM) by Längle and Eckhardt (2000) was administered. At the base of the instrument are presented the theoretical contents developed by Längle, which systematizes “*Existential Analytical Psychodynamics*” (Längle, 2000; Längle, S., 2003; Espinosa 2006) based on the development of “*Fundamental Motivations of The Existence*” (Längle, 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009). The TEM consists of four scales representing each of the Fundamental Motivations of Existence. Each scale is composed of 14 items, with a total of 56 items.

She completed the questionnaire in the waiting room and before leaving, she handed it to the secretary. When evaluating the TEM, it was noted that Ms. T had obtained low scores in all the scales, especially those of the 1st and 2nd Existential Motivation. These scores were below the 25th percentile, which is interpreted as “*blocking zone and Coping reactions*”. The items of Fundamental Trust (1st MF) with very low scores were: item 2 “*I can gladly accept the circumstances in which I live*”, item 13 “*I feel as if I could lose the floor under my feet*”; Item 22 “*I feel I have enough space to live*”, and item 32 “*Insecurity in my life distresses me.*” The items of Fundamental Value (2nd MF)

³⁵ Argentina

with very low scores were: item 20 *"I am a sad person"* and item 30 *"I experience life as a burden"*. The questions for further clinical inquiry came naturally: "What distress you? What can you not accept that makes you feel life as a burden?, and what makes you feel that you lose the floor from under your feet?"

In the fourth session when talking about her daughters and her relationship with them, suddenly a painful memory came to her mind: *"Oh no ... I had forgotten ... it wasn't in my mind... I actually had three children. My youngest son, the only male, died very fast with hemolytic uremic syndrome at one year and two months"* (with tears in her eyes). She then reported that they buried the baby's body and the next day, she and her husband decided to move to the United States, retracted the contract of the house they rented, sold their car and paid for the tickets for the trip. Within 15 days of burying her son, she was traveling to Texas with her husband and two daughters. Ms. T reported that her husband never spoke of the "subject" and lived his life "as if nothing had happened." After Ms. T. named what the center of her anguish meant for her: *"the death of her one year-old son"*, psychotherapy began from the Längle Method called "Personal Existential Analysis (PEA)" (Längle, 2007; Längle, 1998b; Espinosa, 2006). Ms. T. was asked to describe in detail what had happened since her son became ill until he died. Having to report the events that had been "forgotten" made her come in contact with what had happened to her, connect with her pain and work with the impression contained in her experiences, elaborate them and take a stand in front of them.

Through the phenomenological analysis of the PEA, Ms. T. was able to express the immediate and spontaneous sensations in front of the death of her son: *"Nicolás's death hit me suddenly, I felt totally alone, unprotected, tight... life became a very difficult load to carry"*. She felt for her deceased son a "special preference" over his other two daughters, for having had the "same eye color of her father," whom she had loved very much and had died of a heart attack when she was 17 years. By connecting her only son to her father, attention was focused on her father. Apparently, the loss of her son, brought up a previous loss, also very significant. Ms. T. had had a bad relationship with her mother, which was getting worse over time and was cut off at the time of treatment. She remembered her father as someone who gave her security, protection, and containment, and above all had been an important support in her difficulties with her mother and in the difficult time of adolescence. When her father passed away, she left her last year of secondary school to go to work, since she needed money to go live alone. At the time of leaving home, she started a relationship with a man 9 years older, because he seemed a "grown man" and the next year married him.

Ms. T. could see a common reaction to these two losses: "fleeing". She said: *"It was like the floor was constantly falling off, as if small blocks of the floor began to fall into the abyss and I had to jump to the next and the same with the next thing ... jump when my father dies, run away from my mother, avoid loneliness and marry the wrong person, jump and flee the death of my son ... jump and jump ... Run and jump before the floor falls"*. Ms. T., in order to survive, reacted automatically by "fleeing and jumping" Her avoidant movement of protection (Längle, 2003) did not allow her to take a stand against the loss of her father and then against the early death of her son. The anguish was worked from the 1st MF (Längle, 1997, Längle, 2005) and 2nd MF in the acquisition of deploying its internal strength to accept and elaborate her "double duel". In the following sessions, Ms. T.'s

primary “*fleeing and jumping*” reaction was brought together with all the values that she could discover of herself. This integrated emotionality became a force of will, a will anchor in affectivity, which allowed her to find a position, and express herself in a new way in the world and leave the withdrawal. It was apparent that her personality was very similar to her father, who was a serene, strong and secure man. Shad learned how to cope with the difficulties of life from him. She was able to distance herself from her youth reactions to his father’s death, and at the same time realized that she had also been a strong person to endure difficult marriage, to care for and educate her children, to support herself economically in a foreign country, and to have made the right decision to separate from her husband, who reminded her of her mother, as both were derogatory, critical and aggressive.

In the following session returning to the theme of her resemblance to her father, Ms. T. spontaneously offered an observation: “*I am as strong as my father*”. That gave her enough confidence to be able to be by his own strength in the face of adversity. She felt that she could lean on herself, and at the same time an inner space opened up to confront her panicked states with courage. Her panicked states declined considerably after that date until they disappeared altogether when she decided to go to the cemetery to visit her father to bring him flowers as an act of thanksgiving and to visit her son’s grave to give him a plaque. Ms.T. made a Copernican turn, a movement that went from her father to herself, that is, from the trust characterized by protection, space and support, placed in her father, directed towards her person, becoming herself the center of her inner strength. Feeling strong and secure allowed her to connect with life and freely enjoy what gave her “*life to her life*” (Längle, 2003), because she felt calm, her floor no longer fell, her existence was strong and firm. As the tango “*Volver*” written by Alfredo Lepera (Gobello, 1999) and sung by Carlos Gardel says: “I am afraid of the encounter with the past that returns to face my life For the traveler who flees, sooner or later stops his walk”.

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Beingⁱⁿ
the World

A FILM BY TAD RUSPOLI

Movie Review – Being in the World (Ruspuli, 2010)

Derrick Klaassen³⁶

There is little doubt that we are living in a time and place that challenges us to consider what it really means to be human. How do we understand what it means to be a human being? Were Plato and Descartes correct when they proposed our being to be primarily one of thinking and rationality? Or might it be better to follow Heidegger, who understood our being, our Dasein, as embedded and contextualized ‘in-the-world’, with the unique human capacity to take a stand on our own existence? And if Heidegger was right, what might this mean for how we should engage with the world, for how we can be ourselves in our uniqueness and our unique situation, for how we may find meaning and engage with beauty in the world?

These are the questions that the documentary *Being in the World* (Ruspuli, 2010, <http://beingintheworldmovie.com>) seeks to address. But rather than focusing on what might be experienced as dry and erudite philosophical talk, the director Tao Ruspuli, approaches the topic in a lively and engaged manner. The film maker deftly mixes reflections of prominent and current phenomenological and existential philosophers with artists and masters of various crafts – of woodworking, jazz and flamenco music, and African-American cuisine – and thereby offers the audience a vibrant and at times even inspiring celebration of being human in a technological age.

Being in the World was inspired by the well-known American philosopher and Heidegger scholar, Hubert Dreyfus (1929-2017). This is not surprising given the fact that Tao Ruspuli was a student of Dreyfus, who was a prominent and much-loved teacher of philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley. Dreyfus is probably most well-known for his commentary on *Being and Time* (Dreyfus, 1991), his general scholarship on Heidegger (e.g., Dreyfus, 2006, Dreyfus & Taylor, 2015), and his Heideggerian critique of technology, including in particular artificial intelligence (Dreyfus, 1972) and the internet (Dreyfus, 2009). Other philosophers who are featured in the film – mostly American as well, with the notable exception of the Canadian McGill University scholar Charles Taylor – are friends, colleagues and former students of Dreyfus. Many of them are well-known Heideggerian scholars in their own right, including Mark Wrathall, Sean Kelly, Taylor Carman and Iain Thompson. The philosophical reflections in the film focus on features and elaborations of Heideggerian philosophy that emerged particularly in the work of Hubert Dreyfus. These include reflections on the development of skill and mastery, the connection of these skills to the meaning of Dasein, and the importance of risk in becoming ourselves authentically.

The philosophical reflections in the film are beautifully interrupted by moments of great craft and mastery. The viewer is invited to engage with the immense skill of a Japanese carpenter, the beautiful work of a juggler, the reflections and sounds of various jazz musicians and the heart-warming reflections of an African-American chef in New Orleans, Louisiana. The most frequent

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artistic contributions, however, come from Manuel Molina, a Spanish poet, singer, and flamenco artist. Molina truly embodies the art of flamenco music, losing himself during these ‘performances’, and demonstrating the connection between great ability and craft and the way in which these are fused with personal commitment and identity. Molina offers a stunning demonstration of the Heideggerian philosophical principles; rather than merely playing flamenco music, he embodies it, is simultaneously absorbed into the music and yet seems to become most uniquely himself as he plays. It is, in my estimation, indeed a film that is worth our attention and enjoyment.

Now you, as a reader of *Existencia*, might rightly ask the question why such a film would be relevant to you. After all, are we not counsellors and psychotherapists, whose job it is to engage therapeutically with our clients? What is to be gained by understanding this rather complex and heady philosophy?

Let me respond to this, admittedly somewhat presumptive, question. You may not be the kind of person who even has such a question. After all, many psychotherapists who have trained in or are training in Existential Analysis or related psychotherapies have a great love of philosophy and especially existential and phenomenological writings. Indeed, the ideas of various philosophers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Scheler, Buber and Levinas, to name just a few, are featured frequently in our own scholarly journal, *Existenzanalyse* (e.g., Bauer, 2016, Espinosa, 1998, Längle, 2013, Vetter, 2007). And yet, Existential Analysis has rightly, in my view, placed lived experience and clinical engagement rather than philosophical reflection at the heart of its training and psychotherapeutic approach. So, we might rightly ask, what is to be gained by further philosophical reflection?

One answer is that deeper philosophical engagement and reflection may allow us a sort of ‘peak behind the proverbial curtain’ of Existential Analysis. It allows the viewer or reader to engage with philosophical texts (or films, in this case) on their own terms. Such personal philosophical engagement offers not only the opportunity to understand the philosophies that ground Existential Analysis more deeply, but it also facilitates critical engagement with our training and psychotherapeutic approach. Philosophical engagement enables us to ask informed and challenging questions and thereby also opens up the possibility for ongoing philosophical, theoretical and ultimately experiential and clinical development within Existential Analysis.

A second answer is, however, much simpler. It is, view the film yourself. Be open to being moved, to being drawn in, to being inspired. See for yourself. For those of you who choose to view *Being-in-the-world* (Ruspuli 2010), I hope that you will not only be touched by the beauty of the arts and crafts and moved by the personal and philosophical reflections in this film, I trust that you will also be encouraged to deeper personal philosophical study, for your personal good and development but also for our collective growth as a theoretical orientation and community.

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Cecilia Carrère: "I feel that accompanying a person at the end of their life is a gift" (Interview)

Carolina Erber³⁷

The language of music springs up like spring in the profound reflections on life and the transition to death that Cecilia Carrère shares with us. A Bachelor of Arts with a major in Music Theory, Superior Violin Interpreter and for eight years a member of the Classical Orchestra of the University of Santiago, her way of approaching the Person is born in a beautiful mix between her Training as Counselor in Existential Analysis and her work as a music therapist accompanying cancer patients with instruments as special as the lyre. In this interview, Cecilia shares her story and her bond with music since she was a child, and the path of encountering herself and her patients, through her experiences through art.

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