

December 2023

Dear Readers,

I write to you from Canada where autumn is quickly turning into winter; the nighttime comes sooner and is longer, and the daytime air is cool. I greet you, wherever you are today, with heartfelt appreciation of the warmth of our shared existential community. This community connects us to each other and to something larger than our own individual lives. Paradoxically, the content of this existential community of dialogue also turns us back to each of our own lives, and to our personal responsibility to take up these lives. In doing this, we in turn invite the Others in our lives – our patients, students, partners, children, family members, colleagues and friends – to do the same, facilitating what we understand in the framework of Existential Analysis to be truly authentic encounter.

One of my favourite authors and poets, the late John O’Donohue, writes poignantly about this singular opportunity that each of us has for becoming our own persons. He says in his book, *Eternal Echoes*,

There are no manuals for the construction of the individual you would like to become. You are the only one who can decide this and take up the lifetime of work it demands. This is a wonderful privilege and such an exciting adventure. To grow into the person that your deepest longing desires is a great blessing. If you can find a creative harmony between your soul and your life, you will have found something infinitely precious. You may not be able to do much about the great problems of the world or to change the situation you are in, but if you can awaken the eternal beauty and light of your soul, you will bring light wherever you go. The gift of life is given to us for ourselves and also to bring peace, courage, and compassion to others.

Indeed, we describe such harmony between one’s soul and one’s life as living with “inner consent,” the principal aim of Existential Analysis. This is not something that can be achieved by instinct nor by chance. And, despite the many implicit or explicit “manuals” that seem exist in our family, religious, or cultural communities about what it means – and how to live – a so-called “good life,” none of these manuals can be aligned with the mysterious inner knowing of the beauty and light of one’s own unique and infinitely precious soul.

It thus requires the persistent and lifelong work that O’Donohue references to fully take up this privilege and adventure of coming to one’s own inner presence and affirmation of life. Although there are no impersonal manuals for doing so, I find myself deeply grateful that Existential Analysis provides methods and processes for cultivating this opportunity for becoming oneself. In reviewing the contributions for this issue of *Existencia*, I also notice the enduring theme of developing one’s authentic and subjectively known self, which we call the person, and which Frankl describes as the part of the human that is free.

Through the contributors of this issue of *Existencia*, you are invited to reflect on these themes in various ways. Gabriel Traverso explores disorders of self-emptiness and self-esteem, in which not having oneself leads to an emptiness whereby we see each other through the eyes of others. He encourages us approach patients' suffering of self-emptiness through hermeneutic phenomenology to seek understanding of how a patient suffers and how they fill self-emptiness, gradually inviting them closer to meeting and responding to their own unique person. Traverso also challenges us to explore not only individual disorders of the self, but societal mental health norms from an existential analytical perspective; in fact, he suggests that we may discover that those who are adapted well to societal norms and health systems may not correspondingly have inner freedom to access and act from their own essence.

Gabriela Valenzuela poses a question that is controversial among mental health therapists, which is whether it is possible for therapists to authentically enter the psychotherapy space. Challenging the notion of the therapist as a "blank slate," she asks what is prudent, what is wise, and emphasizes how this is discerned in a contextual rather than standardizable manner. She cautions us not to over-identify with professional standards and ethical codes such that we lose ourselves as authentic persons, who are in tune with ourselves. It is in fact through this attunement can truly listen to our patients in genuine and authentic encounter. Through a review of Yalom's book, *Every Day Gets a Little Closer: A Twice-Told Therapy*, Martín Maturana further explores the fundamental factor of psychotherapy, which is the human encounter between two people in the context of the therapeutic relationship. In this book, which is an account of the therapeutic process, over time, from the distinct perspectives of the patient and the psychotherapist, it becomes apparent that the patient valued the presence, closeness, and human gestures of care more than the therapist's insight and interpretations.

Finally, offering empirical evidence derived from a Ukrainian sample, Yaryna Kaplunenko describes mindfulness as an antidote to existential anxiety in times of crisis. This research found a negative correlation between existential anxiety and mindfulness ability. This can point both to the fact that existential anxiety may be a threat to living in the here and now and also to the possibility that cultivating mindfulness capacity can be an effective tool for reducing anxiety and stress.

In closing, I come back to expressing my appreciation for the values and methods that Existential Analysis offers us to cultivate harmony between our souls and our lives through inner consent. In this process, we reach deeply into what is infinitely precious and personally intimate. Through this, we also reach across the countries and continents that separate us geographically and find kindred spirits in the community formed by Existential Analysis. We stand together with a common recognition of the value of the person, each person. O'Donohue suggests that awakening the beauty and light of our souls brings light to wherever we go. Together, reaching to each other across the continents, I believe that we have an even greater opportunity to share this light and to bring peace, courage, and compassion to others in our personal and professional communities.

With gratitude for our shared community,

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