

PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

Journal of the APPA

Volume 3 Number 3 October 2008

Special Issue on Post-Existential Counseling

Editor

Lou Marinoff

Guest Editor

Del Loewenthal

Associate Editor

Seamus Carey

Reviews Editor

Troy Camplin

Managing Editor

Lauren Tillinghast

Technical Consultant

Greg Goode

Legal Consultant

Thomas Griffith

Editorial

Postmodernism, Poison and Medicine

Lou Marinoff

Articles

Introducing Post-Existential Practice

Del Loewenthal

The Between as Unknown

Julia Cayne and Del Loewenthal

A Case of Counseling with a Person Diagnosed with Dementia

Dennis Greenwood

Therapy's Modernist 'Regime of Truth'

Richard House

A Re-Examination of the Case of Lola Voss

Rhiannon Stamp

Reviews

Philosophical Midwifery

Svetlana Correa

Heidegger and a Metaphysics of Feeling

Tim Weldon

Everything Has Two Handles

Britni Weaver

www.appa.edu

ISSN 1742-8181

Nemo Veritatem Regit

Nobody Governs Truth

Introducing Post-Existential Practice
An Approach to Wellbeing in the 21st Century

DEL LOEWENTHAL

RESEARCH CENTRE FOR THERAPEUTIC EDUCATION, ROEHAMPTON UNIVERSITY, London

Abstract

This paper, in introducing this Special Issue, proposes a place for exploring notions of wellbeing at the start of the 21st Century that are in contrast to the increasing cultural dominance of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). An attempt is made to offer a space where we might still be able to think about how alienated we are through valuing existential notions such as experience and meaning whilst questioning other aspects such as existentialism's inferred narcissism and the place it has come to take up with regards to such aspects as psychoanalysis and the political. The post-existential would also include the post-phenomenological, where, for example, Merleau-Ponty's notion of being open to what emerges in the between (as well as his notion of embodiment) would be given primacy over Husserlian notions of intentionality. As a result, questions such as those of mystery, an unknown and an unconscious and the non-intentional can be re-examined. A third element to be explored will be the extent to which we might consider more recent ideas—for example, Saussure, Levinas, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan and Wittgenstein—without becoming too caught up in them. It is hoped by having a possible space to explore, what some would now call, our 'wellbeing', theoretically through post-existentialism and methodologically through post-phenomenology, that this can provide a loose base, with concerns of any further generalisation, for a greater possibility of accepting, rather than escaping, who we are.

Keywords: *wellbeing, post-existential, post-phenomenological, existential, psycho-analysis, post-modern*

Introduction

Welcome to this special issue of *Philosophical Practice* on post-existentialism, describing work in progress at the Centre for Therapeutic Education, Roehampton University, UK (where we carry out research and train counsellors, psychotherapists and psychologists). We are all practitioners (psychological therapists) with a particular interest in the implications of continental philosophy for practice that we term 'post-existential'. This development is in contrast to the rapid growth of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in what some would term our current 'age of happiness' (Layard 2006, Seligman, 1995). CBT can be seen to include a way of not thinking which can be useful at times but catastrophic as the main approach to well-being. The post existential takes as an important influence Heidegger's *dasein* in exploring the 'well' in terms of 'being' (in the world with others), and is a particular mixture of some aspects of existentialism, phenomenology and post-modernism.

'Post-existential' is taken to mean 'after' Heidegger (1962) and—in a different way—after Husserl's phenomenology (1983) yet looking to retain what might be both good from existentialism together with aspects of subsequent developments such as postmodernism. At the very least we might consider, as David Cooper suggests, that existentialism 'is worth revisiting at intervals for the help it may offer with themes of contemporary interest' (Cooper, 1990: vii). So let's start by briefly going back to what might have been meant by existentialism—a name probably originating

from Gabriel Marcel (Cooper 2003) and then taken up, at first very reluctantly, by such other French philosophers as Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) and Simone de Beauvoir (1972) though perhaps becoming particularly grounded in Martin Heidegger's work on existence which he in turn developed from the work of Kierkegaard (1941, 1980) and Nietzsche (1883, 1974), and, in particular with regard to phenomenology, Husserl (1983).

Whilst there appears to be no agreed definition, David Cooper provides a parody of what was taken as existence:

'... a constant *striving*, a perpetual *choice*: it is marked by a radical *freedom*, and *responsibility*. And it is also prey to a sense of *Angst* which reveals that, for the most part, it is lived *inauthentically* and in *bad faith*. And because the character of the human life is never *given*, existence is *without foundation*; hence it is *abandoned* or *absurd* even. (Cooper 1990: 3-4)'

However, how one responds to these existential concerns is vital. In a way, whilst there is no agreement as to what existentialism 'is'. For many in the 1950's and 60's, the method of existentialism was phenomenology which was particularly developed by Heidegger's teacher, Edmund Husserl through the encouragement of Wilhelm Wundt, regarded by many as a founding father of psychology. Whilst Wilhelm Wundt was one of those who persuaded Husserl away from his more quantitative interests to develop Brentano's descriptive psychology (1995a) (whose audience included not only Husserl but a one Sigmund Freud), Wundt (1904) considered psychology to be partly a natural science and partly a social science.

Hence, if we return to David Cooper's parody of existential terms, and if we attempt to study them experimentally, this could be very different to a study that looks at what emerges in terms of meanings. Thus, for Brentano, experimentalism is not appropriate (1995b) whereas current psychological practice has increasingly been dismissive of phenomenology. Husserl's hope for a pure phenomenology which we do not contaminate was not considered to be possible by the likes of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty or Sartre. Nevertheless, Heidegger managed to marry existentialism and phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty developed a notion of meaning emerging in the between which became more dominant until Foucault (1974) and others questioned whether phenomenology was still relevant after the advent of structuralism and the developing influence of Saussure and structural linguistics. Later, Derrida (1990) importantly questioned if any system of thought, whether, for example, phenomenology, structuralism or psychoanalysis, would always be blinded by its own definition. Yet would it not be possible to look at some questions regarding our being existentially - without this being about nostalgia (Oakley 1990) and an attempt to return to something that probably never existed (Borsch-Jacobsen 1991)

The versions of existentialism that appeared in the English speaking world seemed to remove such issues of politics and psychoanalysis, unlike, for example, Continental Europe, where Sartre would come to explore existentialism and Marxism and Binswanger would speak of the existential analyst who, 'not only is in possession of existential-analytic and psychotherapeutic competence, but ... he must dare to risk committing his own existence in the struggle for the freedom of his partners' (Binswanger in Friedman 1991: 426). Binswanger, of course, later said he had misunderstood Heidegger's notion of being, though he did say he felt it was a fruitful misunderstanding! Heidegger, in turn, considered Sartre's understanding of his (Heidegger's) work as rubbish! Heidegger did work with Medard Boss who, some felt therefore, had the nearest possibility of looking at the implications of Heidegger's writings for existential practice. Interestingly, the so-called 'British school' of existentialism adopted more of Boss's work but attempted to drop Boss's interest and

strong influence from psychoanalysis (Cooper, 2003). This is again in contrast to those who start with psychoanalysis and then consider the existential-phenomenological (Askay & Farquhar 2006). Neither are what is termed here, the ‘post-existential’.

We thus have the most popular currents of existential psychotherapy in the UK (as represented by Van Deurzen, 1997; Spinelli 2007) and in North America (as represented by May, 1996; Yalom 1980) as not requiring the possession of existential analytic competence as essential and removing, in general, the political. The existential movement has a history of aristocratic and indeed, sometimes what are seen as Fascist political tendencies. Yet, couldn’t post-existentialism combine, for example, Foucauldian notions of power with existential concerns and couldn’t post-existential practice explore the unknown including an unconscious—it seems very different not to wish to start with psychoanalytic theories as opposed to allowing them to sometimes come to mind. Thus, one fundamental difference between the post-existentialist and, particularly Anglo-Saxonised, existentialism is the former’s acknowledgement that inevitably we are all subject-to, so the rejection of psychoanalytic dogma as a starting model does not mean, or indeed is a rationalisation for, an attempt to be subject-to nothing.

It is here where the post-modern (Loewenthal and Snell 2003) may bring about the greatest change to what was regarded as existentialism in that we are seen as being, for example, subject-to language (Lacan), writing (Derrida), ethics (Levinas) and an unconscious (Freud). Thus, Sartre’s ‘I am my choices’ could be regarded as representing a very narcissistic age. In contrast the post-existential person would be regarded as only having some agency with an attempt towards a responsibility. For example, it might be that in growing up someone took a survival path, which may have been necessary then but may now be redundant and unhelpful to this person or others—perhaps he was therefore less able to take responsibility for who he was then but has more, but not complete, agency as to where he finds himself now. Furthermore, whilst aspects of learning theory may be of help here, though more likely in the context of Polyani’s tacit knowledge (1983), we might also be able to see constrictions in ourselves and how we constrict others—both politically with various sized notions of the letter ‘p’—as well as how our intentions are not always clear to us.

Foucault became interested in power and knowledge and the political status of psychiatry as science. With post existentialism we would now in exploring our well-being, raise questions on power, knowledge and the political nature of psychology as science. This would be in some ways be similar to how Foucault and some existentialists questioned the political status of psychiatry as science and at least a primacy would be given to first thinking of what is termed ‘mental illness’ as dissimilar to a physical illness but instead more to do with relations with others. Yet there would be vitally important distinctions: Foucault (1974) abandoned his early interest in phenomenology. But was this as Hoeller (1986) points out because he took Husserl’s notion of transcendental phenomenology which does not really allow for the historical and cultural. As further argued by Hoeller (1986), Heidegger with his *dasein* as being in the historical/ cultural world with others, enables phenomenology to be released from Husserl’s attempts to show a pure subjectivity and thus ‘a universal doctrine of the structures of individual subjectivity and intersubjectivity’ (Husserl 1977:178-9). This opening up of phenomenology was further developed for psychotherapy by Binswanger, Boss and Laing, and we term this ‘post-phenomenology’ to distinguish it from Husserl’s original transcendental phenomenology. Thus if we could both be attentive to what emerges in the between of client and therapist and be aware of what is regarded culturally and historically as common sense we could have an interest in how both our clients and those around them have brought and bring pressures on each other. This meeting which could include the implications for the present of the client’s history and the history of the culture, without being caught up in a potentially totalising

approach (in this case for example, Foucauldian genealogy) would be an example of post-phenomenology and might also be closer to what those such as Wilhelm Wundt saw as psychology, though the post-existential should, it is suggested, always be beyond.

One exception to those existentialists mentioned above, and who may be regarded as leading to post-existentialism, is R.D. Laing (1990, 1969). He, as with existentialism, was able to keep something open without defining it in a positivistic way, so that there is not the danger that can happen through taking away the mystery, of taking away the thing itself (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Laing, for example suggested that whilst behaviour is important, what is really important is how one experiences behaviour (Laing 1967). Here again, Laing and those influenced by him, are not being put forward as if their approach is the ideal but that they are able to hold a space which is always only partially defined where something helpful for our thoughtfulness may at times emerge.

One result of all this concerns what we regard as psychology. For those such as Binswanger, who might be seen in some ways to be more in keeping with Wundt:

‘When this *my*, or *our*, this *I* or *he* or *we* are bracketed out, the result is that psychology becomes “impersonal” and “objective” while losing, at the same time, the scientific character of a genuine psychologist and becoming, instead, natural science... In place of a reciprocal, “personal” communication within a we-relationship we find a one-sided, i.e., irreversible, relationship between doctor and patient and an even more impersonal relationship between researcher and the object of research. Experience, participation and confrontation between human beings in the present moment gives way to the “perfect tense” of theoretical investigation’ (Binswanger in Friedman 1991:414)

Thus unfortunately, “good” psychological research is currently determined by publication in quantitative, primarily American, journals and relations between people are more for English departments where there is usually more chance of studying not only Freud and Lacan but Derrida, Foucault et al. In the social sciences, there is a historical, cultural shift to behaviouralism, with desperate concerns for survival by some to quantify experience to show that it is evidence based. Yet, what is denied keeps re-emerging and questions have again recently been raised as to whether psychology should really be the science of experience rather than the science of the mind (Ashworth, 2004).

This Special Issue

So post-existentialism can be seen on the one hand to be attempting to find a place between existentialism and post, post-modernism. Enabling us to take from the existential and the post-modern that which can be helpful to us in exploring our existence at the start of the 21st century? Another dimension of post-existentialism is to find a place between natural and social science, for by starting with notions of existence is to imply starting with the human soul (Plato in Cushman, 2001) and the historical and cultural aspects of social (rather than starting with the natural) science. With this emerge the possibilities of a political viewpoint which could engage with various notions of, for example, democracy and the notion of an unconscious coming more from those such as Kierkegaard (1941, 1980) and Nietzsche (1883, 1974). Such possibilities open up returning psychology to its philosophical roots and with it, important implications for those practices aimed at promoting wellbeing—and with it, important implications (including the way we train our students). The assumptions underlying such an approach can hopefully be found in this journal.

I have previously attempted to explore some of these dimensions: initially through how individuals and structures in society conspire to produce a form of alienating escape motivation (Loewenthal, 2002). More recently I have been interested in exploring, on the one hand, how post-modernism has emerged from phenomenology (Loewenthal and Snell 2003) and on the other, evalu-

ating the usefulness of qualitative research for exploring relational aspects in therapy with particular reference to the post-existential (Loewenthal 2007). Furthermore, I have also given an example of what might be considered post-existentialism in this journal (Loewenthal 2007) suggesting that whilst Buber is useful, Levinas might be regarded as a post-existential philosopher, but only again if one can consider his work in terms of implications for practice and not as another totalising dogma. What follows in this special issue of *Philosophical Practice* are further developments of post-existentialism in terms of work in progress that my colleagues and I are carrying out at the Centre for Therapeutic Education at Roehampton University in the UK.

In these papers we are using the terms counselling, psychotherapy, counselling psychology and sometimes psychoanalysis interchangeably. As discussed, we are all interested in developments from, and after, Heidegger. For example, Julia Cayne and I provide some implications of post-existentialism and post-phenomenology for practice by examining what might be helpful and unhelpful regarding aspects of existentialism, psychoanalysis, and post-modernism for an exploration of the between as unknown. Dennis Greenwood then explores the implications of both research, in terms of a phenomenological hermeneutic approach, and theory, in terms of intentionality, of post-existentialism when learning to work therapeutically with someone with a label. Next comes Richard House, who argues against a 'modernist' view of psychotherapeutic theory—describing it as both unsustainable and antithetical to good practice—and for a spiritualised post-existential phenomenology. Finally, Rhiannon Stamp, in re-examining the case of Lola Voss, shows how some ideas from existentialism can enhance philosophical practice, when considered alongside structural linguistics.

So, hopefully not forgetting our phenomenological roots, we attempt to start with practice and link Heidegger with developments such as those in continental philosophy, education, theology, structural linguistics, psychoanalysis, psychology, postmodernism, literature, social anthropology, art history and architecture. The results, we hope are, for good reason, always an incomplete project which we have termed the 'post-existential' in the hope that it may provide an impetus for exploring some implications of philosophical practice for our wellbeing in the 21st Century.

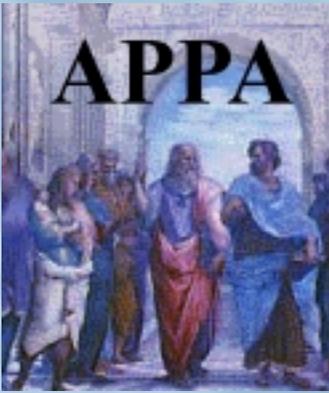
References

- Ashworth, P. (2004) 'The origins of qualitative psychology' in J.A. Smith (ed) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* London: Sage, 4-24
- Askay, R. & Farquhar, J. (2006), *Apprehending the Inaccessible: Freudian Psychoanalysis and Existential Phenomenology*. Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press
- Binswanger, L. in Friedman, M. (1991), *The Worlds of Existentialism: A Critical Reader*. New York: Delmar Publishers, 414 & 426
- Borch-Jacobsen, M. (1991), *Lacan: the Absolute Master* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press
- Brentano, F. (1995a), *Descriptive Psychology*. London: Routledge
- Brentano, F. (1995b [1874]), *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. London: Routledge
- Cooper, M. (2003), *Existential therapies*. London: Routledge
- Cooper, D. E. (1990), *Existentialism: A reconstruction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
- Cushman, R. (2001), *Therapeia: Plato's conception of Philosophy*. (New Ed.) New Jersey: Transaction Publishers
- De Beauvoir, S. (1972 [1949],) *The Second Sex* (trans. by H. M. Parshley) London: Penguin
- Derrida J. (1990), *Resistances to Psychoanalysis*. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- Foucault, M. (1974 [1954]), *The Psychological Dimensions of Mental Illness* (trans. by A. M. Sheridan-Smith). New York: Harper and Row

- Heidegger, M. (1962 [1927]), *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E.S. Robinson. London: Harper and Row
- Husserl, E. (1977), *Phenomenological Psychology* (trans. J. Scanlon). Nijhoff: The Hague
- Hoeller, K. (1986), 'Editor's Forward—Dream and Existence' Special Issue of *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, 7-17
- Husserl, E. (1983), *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy* (trans. F. Kersten) Nijhoff: The Hague
- Kierkegaard S. (1980 [1844]), *The Concept of Anxiety* Trans. Thomte R., Princeton, Princeton University Press
- Kierkegaard S. (1941 [1855]), *The Sickness unto Death*. Trans. Lowrie W.. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press
- Laing R.D. (1967) *The Politics of Experience* London: Tavistock Publications
- Laing, R. (1969) *Self and Others* (2nd Edition). London: Routledge
- Laing, R. (1990) *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. London: Penguin
- Layard, R. (2006) *Happiness: Lessons from a new Science*. London: Penguin
- Loewenthal, D. (2002) 'Involvement and Emotional Labour', *Soundings*, Issue 20, 151-162
- Loewenthal, D. (2007) 'Relational research, ideology and the evolution of intersubjectivity in a post-existential culture', in D. Loewenthal (ed.), *Case Studies in Relational Research*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 221-240
- Loewenthal, D and Snell, R (2003) *Postmodernism for Psychotherapists*, London: Routledge.
- May, R. (1996 [1950]) *The Meaning of Anxiety* (revised edition) New York: W. W. Norton
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962) *The Phenomenology of Perception* (trans. C. Smith) London: Routledge Kegan-Paul
- Nietzsche, F. (1974 [1888]) *The Gay Science*, trans. Kaufman W., New York: Vintage Books.
- Nietzsche, F. (1883) *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Tille A., New York: Dutton 1933
- Oakley, C. (1990) *Journal of Existential Analysis* Vol. 1, No. 1.
- Polyani, M. (1983 [1966]) *The Tacit Dimension*. Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith
- Sartre, J.P. (1943), *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, Trans. Barnes H., New York: Philosophical Library, 1956.
- Seligman, M. (1995) 'The Effectiveness of Psychotherapy: The Consumer Reports Study' *American Psychologist* Vol. 50, No. 12, 965-74
- Spinelli, E. (2007) *Practicing Existential Psychotherapy: The Relational World* London: Sage
- Van Deurzen, E. (1997) *Everyday Mysteries: Existential Dimensions of Psychotherapy*, London: Routledge. (2nd edition 2006)
- Wundt, W. (1904 [1874] *Principles of Physiological Psychology* (trans. E.B. Tichener) London: Allen
- Yalom, R. (1980) *Existential Psychotherapy* New York: Basic Books

correspondence: d.loewenthal@roehampton.ac.uk





PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

Journal of the APPA

Volume 3 Number 3 October 2008

Special Issue on Post-Existential Counseling

Aims and Scope

Philosophical Practice is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the growing field of applied philosophy. The journal covers substantive issues in the areas of client counseling, group facilitation, and organizational consulting. It provides a forum for discussing professional, ethical, legal, sociological, and political aspects of philosophical practice, as well as juxtapositions of philosophical practice with other professions. Articles may address theories or methodologies of philosophical practice; present or critique case-studies; assess developmental frameworks or research programs; and offer commentary on previous publications. The journal also has an active book review and correspondence section.

APPA Mission

The American Philosophical Practitioners Association is a non-profit educational corporation that encourages philosophical awareness and advocates leading the examined life. Philosophy can be practiced through client counseling, group facilitation, organizational consulting or educational programs. APPA members apply philosophical systems, insights and methods to the management of human problems and the amelioration of human estates. The APPA is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.

APPA Membership

The American Philosophical Practitioners Association is a not-for-profit educational corporation. It admits Certified, Affiliate and Adjunct Members solely on the basis of their respective qualifications. It admits Auxiliary Members solely on the basis of their interest in and support of philosophical practice. The APPA does not discriminate with respect to members or clients on the basis of nationality, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, age, religious belief, political persuasion, or other professionally or philosophically irrelevant criteria.

Subscriptions, Advertisements, Submissions, Back Issues

For information on subscriptions, advertisements and submissions, please see the front pages of this document. For information on back issues, APPA Memberships and Programs, please visit www.appa.edu.

Editor

Lou Marinoff

Guest Editor

Del Loewenthal

Associate Editor

Seamus Carey

Reviews Editor

Troy Camplin

Managing Editor

Lauren Tillinghast

Technical Consultant

Greg Goode

Legal Consultant

Thomas Griffith