

May 23, 9 to 11:30 AM

Existential Therapy Schools. Developments.

The Why, the What, and the How of Existential Therapy.

In my presentation, I will try to answer each of the questions posed in the title. I will begin by answering the first two questions, essential or not so essential, but questions that therapists ask ourselves:

First: Why do I do existential therapy? And I'm going to answer it in Italian, *perché mi piace*. This answer is simply so you can see that I use humor in therapy. And now, moving away from humor, I will answer it throughout the presentation.

And the second: Why do I do existential therapy? Here my answer is much more complex, and I don't really know if I'll answer it as expected. My first approach would be for the human world to recover, if it ever lost it, the humanism that characterizes us as a natural species.

It seems very ambitious; however, I couldn't do any other type of therapy. Would this be a limitation on my part? Or, on the contrary, would it be a liberation, since I can't limit myself to guidelines or theories that explain the human being, but rather I lean toward those who have shown us existence as such, with all its greatness and all its miseries. I found that vision in existentialism.

Let's look at another aspect of the why and the what for.

We cannot conceive of the human being as something other than coexistence. For human existence to be possible (animals don't exist, they have life), we begin, like other living beings, with other beings of the same species who reproduce. Until recently, a man and a woman were necessary; today, all that's needed is an egg, some sperm, and a uterus from a woman who isn't necessarily the same woman who provides the egg. Also, I mustn't forget to mention this, doctors are necessary, since eggs and sperm aren't free to roam the world. So, from conception, we're talking about a human world, a world of coexistence.

But the difference with other living beings is that only humans can stay alive and thereby create the world, if they are sheltered for a long time—could we say three years, perhaps much longer? So, we are inevitably co-existential beings because we need another person to care for us, even if only to stay alive. The anthropologist Margaret Mead gave an explanation that I think is perfect and sums up all of existentialism. When a student asked her what she considered the first sign of civilization, she explained that the first sign of civilization in ancient culture was the discovery of a broken and healed femur. No animal survives a broken leg or paw; it becomes easy prey for predators. On the other hand, a broken femur that heals is proof that someone stayed with the person whose leg was broken long enough for it to heal, protected it, and cared for it until it was healed. “Helping someone through difficulty is the starting point of civilization,” Mead explained.

Here, Heidegger's conception of caring for things, for oneself and for others, as the fundamental structure of existence appears very clearly. *Sorge* as care, and *fürsorgen* as the proper way of treating others, the care of the other.

Spitz, in turn, has shown that a human being who is fed mechanically at birth and does not receive love dies of stagnation. Combining these visions, we can say that the care of the being is given by love.

Furthermore, as humans, we have other physical characteristics that define us as co-existential beings. One of them is our erect posture, which indicates that we are moving toward the future. As Rispo expressed, all our organs are configured forward, leading us forward, toward the future.

We have vocal organs that allow us to speak and thus communicate, although we don't only communicate through speech. When we communicate, we express emotions that give greater emphasis to speech. But speaking means that someone is listening; otherwise, speaking wouldn't make sense; it would be a soliloquy. If someone speaks and someone listens, we are in presence, one human facing another; one reciprocally gives meaning to the other; we call this dialogue. The first sign of human respect is that if someone speaks, the other must remain silent to understand the other's expression. And vice versa, when the speaker remains silent, they give space for the other to express themselves. Only this can be called dialogue.

Care, in turn, implies responsibility, since before the other, I commit myself as a co-existent person to another co-existent person. As Levinas expressed, responsibility for the other is the fundamental structure of subjectivity, which is constituted through our relationship with others, and our responsibility toward them is what makes us human. This allows us to reaffirm the first purpose I expressed: existential therapy allows us to restore our possibly lost humanity. It brings back light, darkness.

Therapy, then, is a manifestation of coexistence achieved through dialogue and care for the other, in mutual reciprocity. In dialogue, as I already expressed, each person expresses and listens, following a common thread that gives meaning to what is being discussed.

Caring for the other's being is also mutual between therapist and patient; both care for each other, both collaborate in the realization of their respective life projects. This dialogue does not have to be static or solely delivered through words, since existence itself is dynamic, changing, and always open to uncertainty. And because it is dynamic, it is open to creation. This had to be reflected in the style of doing existential therapy: coexistence, dialogue, care, love, openness, creation.

The therapy we carried out began with the creation of a modality that tangibly showed Binswanger's existentialisms and the different modes of being.

Regarding the existentialisms, we can affirm that all of them are present in therapy. We can mention: freedom, responsibility, commitment, authenticity, affectivity, anguish, guilt, corporality, expression, and those mentioned by Heidegger: understanding oneself, finding oneself, and speaking to oneself.

Personal therapy allows for the exploration of the singular and dual modes, and the plural mode may also emerge in its aggressive version. The dual mode goes beyond the couple and friendship. Rispo includes in this mode the therapeutic and pedagogical relationship, and all other manifestations of love: maternal, paternal, filial, fraternal, and others. The singular mode (one's own world, *eigenwelt*) includes the individualistic mode (self-centered).

From the perspective of the worlds, we can say that personal therapy is a therapy centered on the *Eigenwelt*, although without neglecting the *Mitwelt* inherent to the therapeutic relationship.

Group therapy complements the missing or less explicit worlds and modalities of personal therapy. In this, there is an emphasis on the *Mitwelt* without neglecting the *Eigenwelt*. Corporeality is involved, which is why we involve the *Umwelt*, in addition to all aspects related to it. Other worlds do the same:

Vorwelt: the preceded world, the historical past shared by other beings, the history of humanity; it is impersonal.

Lebenswelt: the world of life, the vital, natural world; it is pre-existing and preconceived; it belongs to the person.

Überwelt: the world of values, of beliefs, the world beyond, the world of transcendence; it is personal.

Folgewelt: the world that will happen, the inaccessible future, the coming future; it is impersonal.

I have mentioned the terms "patient" and "not client," and I want to explain this. In Argentina, the word "client" is used for a commercial exchange; from its definition, a client is a person who requests a good or service in exchange for payment. Although money is involved in therapy, the two concepts do not correspond to the therapeutic bond. We do not sell a good, we do not provide a service, even if it is called that. We analyze the existence of the person who consults us and with whom we share moments of deep intimacy. Nor could we call them a patient because they bring a medical perspective that doesn't correspond to the therapeutic relationship. However, if we stick to the definition of a patient, it is someone who has patience. On the other hand, the word "patient" comes from the Latin "patir," which means to suffer, to endure. Therefore, we could call them "patient." Since the person who

comes to the consultation is someone who suffers, it seems appropriate to call them a patient.

In the therapeutic encounter, patient and therapist express themselves freely, without a script learned by the therapist or guidelines to follow. Both therapist and patient reveal aspects of their existence; each is present to the other, the corporality of one before the corporality of the other. Each gives their time and locates themselves in an established space that will gain meaning as the individual expresses themselves from their deepest intimacy. They will be able to do so when they experience that space and time as part of their own being, where they feel sheltered, their deepest wounds cared for. Then it will be an authentic encounter. But temporality and spatiality don't have to be confined to something measured and static. Therapeutic space-time is a humorous space-time in Binswanger's terms, and the body doesn't have to always remain in the same position, for example, sitting.

One way to experience this space-time in a new or different way is through the use of dramatizations, expressing an emotional state with the body. In group therapy, we instrumentalize the use of music and light effects that produce a transformation of space-time, from oriented to experiential.

The creative aspect is initially determined by the therapeutic approach, which allows for all types of expression. Techniques from other therapeutic currents can be used, and new ones can be created as appropriate at the appropriate moment. This is the moment of Greek Kairos.

The word "technique" comes from the Greek "techne," which means a set of procedures, rules, actions, and protocols that aim to achieve a specific and effective result. However, it is also translated as "art," and while art can follow rules, its organizing principle is not precisely the techniques but creation itself.

The important thing in a therapy that utilizes techniques is not to follow fixed rules that lead to a specific and effective result, but rather that they can be ways of opening existence to different modes of expression and communication. This allows us to peer into worlds unexplored, not even by the patient.

If we are beings open to uncertainty, therapy must reveal these aspects to us. Let's see how. The patient is accustomed to recounting what happened and is happening to them, usually in a repetitive manner.

The therapist who utilizes creativity can surprise them with the use of humor, which is nothing more than a disruption of the temporality in which the patient had been expressing themselves. Humor used creatively breaks down barriers, brings people closer emotionally, and reduces conflict by seeing the situation from another perspective.

Another way to surprise the patient is to use diverse "techniques," always with an existential vision of the situation experienced. I call these techniques expressive

alternatives. I used the term "surprise," which, according to the Royal Spanish Academy, means: to move, to suspend, or to amaze with something unexpected, strange, or incomprehensible.

If we examine the meaning of the term "to move," it means to disturb, unsettle, alter, or strongly or effectively move someone. It can also mean to move or excite. This "to move" is composed of two words that have meaning for the therapeutic relationship: to move the other, to remove them from where they were, and "with," which is the expression of being-with another, a form of expression of encounter.

It is unexpected precisely because it is unexpected, which is why it surprises (without a shadow) and takes the patient by surprise. It produces an emotional reaction to the new situation to be resolved. It is the uncertainty we face in our existence.

Binswanger stated that knowledge of the basic structure of existence provides us with a systematic guide for practical analytic-existential exploration. In any situation, it is possible to grasp the existential project of the world, whether "in spontaneous linguistic manifestations, in systematic exploration, in experiments with the Rorschach or associative techniques, in drawings or in dreams." I add that all elements of human creation can be utilized in the therapeutic path. Creation is a form of discovery.