Basic Principles of Existential Psychotherapy

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www.existential-analysis.org + ww.ieapp.ru/
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Abstract:
The paradigm of existential psychotherapy encompasses those approaches which consider the human being as builder of their life, trying to take over responsibility and search for meaning. Humans are not just adapting to the world (by better learning) or reacting to conflicts or systems. Psychic problems are therefore seen in their interactions … ./.
Abstract - continuation:

...with one’s own performance of life (which is called „existence“) within the challenges and possibilities of one’s world. Psychic disorders are therefore characterized by inhibiting the dialogical exchange and limiting one’s decidedness in life which produces a suffering of alienation in a reduced life. Therapy intents to help to understand and to exercise decided, own behavior which must be trained by little steps in actual life.

..../.
Abstract – (end):
This means that in existential therapy unconscious conflicts being or false determining learning which drive the human as well as system influences are more in the background. Instead the experience of values that attract and their committed and decided realization is in the center of attention. Psychodynamics, learning processes and psychopathology are to be treated with the “resources of the person”.
Audio recording with Russian translation at

http://laengle.info/index.php?&page=aktuelles

in the English and Russian section of the hp
1. Existential Psychotherapy – a short profile
1. Existential Psychotherapy

Philosophical background:

Founders:

1. Existential Psychotherapy

Existential Psychotherapists today:

Existential Psychotherapy =

a special section of the Humanistic Psychology
2. Basic assumptions of Existential Psychotherapy
2. Basic assumptions of Existential Psychotherapy

2.1 Being-in-the-World
2.2 Humans are not fully determined
2.3 The essence of life is existence
2.4 Existence = not being forced → free dealing with what is there
2.4 Existence = not being forced → free dealing with what is there

2.5 Subjective experience is the appropriate access to existence → work with subj. experience
2.6 existence also claims clarity with its **basic themes** like groundlessness, death, loneliness, meaning (absurdity) (Yalom)
2.7 psychopathology: lack of clarity, decisiveness and/or dealing-potentialities - life is not “responded“ (responsibility) because of a blocked „dialogue”
Basic principle of Existential Psychotherapy:

Dialogical exchange with the world, and with oneself
2. Basic assumptions of Existential Psychotherapy

Without dialogue with the world and with oneself

→ one cannot find oneself

→ one cannot find one's meaning
2. Basic assumptions of Existential Psychotherapy
Without dialogue with oneself and with the world arises → emptiness + feelings of being lost → ▶ alienation

2. Basic assumptions of Existential Psychotherapy
To Exist...

= Being.

Real Being ... to really be as a human being –

What is that?
3. The Paradigm of Existential Psychotherapy and the basic activities
3. The Paradigm of Existential Psychotherapy

Being human = Being-in-the-World

(Dasein)
3. The Paradigm of Existential Psychotherapy

Being human = Being-in-the-World

i.e. each human being has his/her world!

→ to deal with the other and with oneself = Existence
3. The Paradigm of Existential Psychotherapy

Fundament:

The freedom of the Person

→ The human being is always challenged to live his freedom
Being-in-the-World and being free requires 3 basic activities from the therapist and patient:

→ openness
→ positioning
→ commitment
3.1 Openness

Phenomenological attitude:

= let oneself being asked by the actual situation [V. Frankl]

= „Existential turn“
Instead of *asking* for the meaning of your life...

See yourself as the decisive center of your world!
“It is life itself that asks questions of man. (…) it is not up to man to question; rather he should recognize that he is questioned, questioned by life;

(Frankl 1973, 62)
“It is life itself that asks questions of man. (…) it is not up to man to question; rather he should recognize that he is questioned, questioned by life; he has to respond by being responsible; and he can answer to life only by answering for his life.”

(Frankl 1973, 62)
questionning, asking…dialogue towards me

(= demand, requirement(s) of the situation)

3. The Paradigm of Existential Psychotherapy
3. The Paradigm of Existential Psychotherapy

questionning … dialogue
(= demand, requirement(s) of the situation)

ME
Person

Being-in-the-World

„World“
Other(s),
YOU vis-à-vis other(s)

Responding

Dialogueal reality of existence
In other words...

Being **human** means:
⇒ being questioned

to **live** means:
⇒ giving answers
The therapist is asked: what needs the patient and what requires his/her situation now, and what from me?

And teaches the patients to also look similarly at their situation.
3.2 Positioning in harmonizing with oneself

= Inner consent

needs continuous inner and outer DIALOGUE
Task of existential Psychotherapy:

to help human beings to live with inner consent to what one does
3. The Paradigm of Existential Psychotherapy

The inner consent am I!

Therapist gives his/her personal inner resonance (position) in the therapy.
3. The Paradigm of Existential Psychotherapy

3.3 Commitment

To be present with one’s heart = to be totally there.
The therapist should be felt by the patient as person – by his/her personal endeavour and accompaniment.
Without commitment – no existential therapy.

Without commitment – no inner fulfillment.
4. The four Principles of Existential Psychotherapy
4. The 4 principles of Existential Psychotherapy

The therapy → focusses own decision, i.e. inner consent

→ to bring oneself to the world

➢ presence
➢ relationship
➢ inner dialogue

→ to live the meaning of one's life

➢ commitment
4. The 4 principles of Existential Psychotherapy

=> The 4 „pillars“ of Existential Therapy

They are structuring, helping to be „really there“
1. Principle:

Being-in-the-World = dealing with the *reality*.

→ work on being able to accept what is given
1. acceptance:

Perception, looking at – instead of keeping up expectations, wishes, interpretations.

Development of power, courage, support for being able to trust.
2. Principle:

Being-in-the-world = to come to *live* in it.

Work at the *turning towards* the given.
2. Turning towards:

Absorption, *let come inside* all what nurtures life (like food, water, air) — instead remaining cold, untouched, functional, without relation.
2. Turning towards:

Develop and caring of relationships, pleasure, closeness, to make life valuable.
4. The 4 principles of Existential Psychotherapy

3. Principle:

**Being-in-the-World** = to be *oneself* in it.

→ work at the **looking at** the person
4. The 4 principles of Existential Psychotherapy

3. Looking at:

Delimitate, sensing the essence (the own) – instead prejudices, sham, manipulation.
4. The 4 principles of Existential Psychotherapy

3. Looking at:

Development of decisiveness, genuin, responsibility, appreciation, to be able to encounter authentically.
4. Principle:

Being-in-the-World = to deal with the future.

→ work at the tuning with the situation
4. Tuning:

Openness for the situation, for the needed, for the offered – instead of looking at programs, fixe aims and rigid plans.

Developing flexibility, orientation, for finding meaning.
4. The 4 principles of Existential Psychotherapy

Practical consequences:

1. Taking seriously the subjective reality → work with the experience (not with what is just hoped, thought, imagined, dreamt)
4. The 4 principles of Existential Psychotherapy

Practical consequences:

2. **Phenomenology** is the tool for detection of the personal in the experienced
Practical consequences:

3. To proof the behaviour of the patient and the therapist if be authentic, responsible participation in the own life and in the world.
Life is not “something” — it is the chance for something.

(V. Frankl)
Thank you for your attention!

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