

de voir l'actualisation du potentiel humain être restreinte et subordonnée à la performance et la productivité intellectuelle, ainsi que le suggère Carkhuff en référant aux Freud, Einstein et Marx comme modèles d'actualisation intégrale. Une telle conception reflète davantage l'attitude d'une certaine éthique protestante du travail qu'une vision globale de l'actualisation pour eux-mêmes de tous les dynamismes humains, y compris l'amitié, la sexualité (dont il n'est aucunement fait mention), le besoin de comprendre, d'éprouver et d'approfondir ce qu'est d'être un humain, ainsi que ce que les anciens appelaient les vertus contemplatives et que Luther, bien avant Carkhuff, avait qualifiées d'immorales.

Ces critiques mises à part, il s'agit d'un volume que tous ceux qui s'intéressent à l'actualisation du potentiel humain, particulièrement dans un contexte professionnel de relation d'aide, auront sûrement avantage à lire.

Yalom, I. *Existential psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books, 1980.

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A journey into the world of existentialism can be an unsettling experience. The traveller zigzags back and forth in time, crossing boundaries sometimes marked, often imperceptible, into provinces of creative expression of unlike terrain. It is to travel to places where landmarks have an illusory quality about them, a kind of impermanence, the meaning of which can be felt but not entirely grasped. Worst of all perhaps, the traveller frequently finds it impossible to share the experience with others, being left, that is, with only the vaguest recollections.

If the metaphor seems to overstate the case, consider for a moment a few features of existentialism. To begin with existentialism, which is scarcely a new philosophy, has its roots in many disciplines. True, Søren Kierkegaard, the 19th century Danish philosopher and theologian, must be credited for initiating the formal movement, but his thinking whether directly or indirectly (How much faith can we put in Goethe's concept of the *Zeitgeist*?) drifted beyond its theological base into philosophy, literature, sociology, psychiatry and psychology. So today anyone wishing to understand the term faces an awesome list of names and

references: Camus, Kafka, Kazantzakis, and Keasey, Tillich and Buber, Binswager, Boss, and Frankl, Heidegger and Sartre, and many from the camp of humanistic psychology e.g. May and Maslow. And the list could easily be expanded!

The problem for counselling and psychology students, however, should be obvious. Few students however earnest, however intrepid, could hardly be expected to integrate in a short time the ideas from such diverse sources and more than this make sense of them in terms of counselling and psychotherapy. Depending, naturally, on what they read they could easily conclude that existentialism is a philosophy of despair, and at odds with the broad meaning of counselling; decide that it has to do with optimism, courage and commitment, terms vaguely familiar to counsellors yet troublesome to translate in a practical sense; see it as a particular attitude, something to be carried into counselling but offering little as far as understanding human behavior goes; perceive it as no more than a prescription for doing one's own thing; or reject it outright as anti-empirical or, as Fromm did, on the grounds that the whole system is eventually reducible to indefensible solipsism.

What has been badly needed is a reference which provides an overview of the topic but offers more than a few slogans to hang on the wall. Until recently such a book was unavailable. Now, fortunately, it is. Irving Yalom's *Existential Psychotherapy* meets precisely these needs. It is a kind of scholastic still that extracts the essence of the topic but packs an intoxicating wallop.

Yalom is no stranger. He is best known, however, for his writings on group work, notably *Encounter Groups: First Facts* which he co-authored with Morton Lieberman and Matthew Miles.

With this, his newest book, one he labored over for a number of years, Yalom has quite simply earned all the superlatives of the dust cover reviews. It is a splendid book, indeed.

After providing a brief historical sketch and admitting —out of some sense of propriety, it seems— his own limitations, Yalom goes on to cover four major concepts of existentialism: death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness. Each topic, in turn, is subdivided to deal with related issues such as anxiety, responsibility, guilt, will, past and future and so on. Moreover, most of the concepts are not studied *in*

vitro, as it were, but rather explored in terms of their meaning in everyday life, psychopathology, and psychotherapy, and brilliantly illuminated through case studies, personal disclosure, and research.

Take Yalom's treatment of death anxiety, that primitive anxiety which underlies all other forms. According to Yalom each individual early on finds denial strategies to cope with the dread of death. But these mechanisms are no more than extensions of two fundamental beliefs, "the archaic beliefs that one is personally inviolable and/or protected eternally by an ultimate rescuer."

Under ordinary circumstances we get along by relying on suppression, repression, displacement, and so forth. But faced with extraordinary events these mechanisms no longer provide protection and the individual then must take more extreme measures. The binding of time and anxiety may be attempted through greater self effort. The individual is driven to work more (workaholic), or into compulsive heroism (Yalom uses Hemingway as an example) or plunges further into narcissism with its concomitant need to control others. Marked passivity occupies the other end of the continuum as the person symbolically waits to be rescued.

The cases of Mike and Sam are used to illustrate the two maladaptive coping styles. Briefly, Mike, a believer in total self-sufficiency, rejects chemotherapy for a malignant lymphoma and, leaving his wife behind, emigrates to an underdeveloped country which culturally rewards individualism. It was impossible for Mike to admit to his own mortality.

Sam on the other hand exists almost entirely through others. He gives lavishly of himself and his money. His life falls apart when his wife leaves him. He does not live so much as pass the time, immersing himself in crosswords, T.V., newspapers, etc. Yet even with support

Sam could not take that first step out of his loneliness. All of Yalom's efforts fell on deaf ears and any self initiative was out of the question. And why? Sam had to wait symbolically for that special call from the "ultimate rescuer". He had, as Yalom states it, "to be found *without* having to ask for help".

The message here is unequivocal: Sometimes our efforts as counsellors fail because at a deeper level they pose a greater threat to the individual than the initial concern. Harry Stack Sullivan said somewhere that loneliness was the only thing worse than anxiety. Hence, people would suffer anxiety to overcome loneliness. Yalom's position doesn't make Sullivan's proposition any less true, perhaps, but it does say something about the meaning of anxiety. Sullivan's assertion may hold in certain cases only or, in short, for specific types of anxiety. If this were not the case how are we to explain those instances which all counsellors have undoubtedly experienced at sometime in their career where the client, after making some progress, slides back into isolation and, more than that, seems somehow more comfortable there? Yalom has us examine the behavior from a different vantage point and though not all cases of this sort can be explained in terms of death anxiety, (we have to allow for counsellor error, too) it is an interesting possibility.

In an age of "how to" books of the pop psychology genre it is a pleasant change to come across one with substance. Indeed, if all Yalom had done was lift us slightly above the canned remedies that pass unfortunately as the state of the art, he would have done quite enough. But, he has gone a whole lot further. He has made the world of existentialism that much clearer and done so, besides, in a scholarly fashion. Time alone will judge whether *Existential Psychology* deserves to be called a "classic". At the moment, however, this hefty work is indisputably the best of its kind around.