

Existential Analysis Psychotherapy



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Logotherapy is mainly applied in two ways. In both cases clients are helped by receiving "information." In one case the information comes from the philosophy of successful living described by Frankl; this is existential instruction. In the other case the information is basically advice given by the therapist on specific situations of the clients to help them find possible meanings in them; this is existential explanation. In both cases therapy is based on a philosophy of living without which life would be chaotic and meaningless.

The advice provides clients with information which enables them to lead their lives on their own. Frankl saw logotherapy as supplement to traditional psychotherapy.^{1,p242} This was the way it was applied by Frankl and his followers for half a century: the defiant power of the spirit was called on to help clients lead a life worthy of human beings, especially in hopeless, concentration-camp-like situations. Here, logotherapy is an important supplementary and rehumanizing therapy - as cure and prevention in counseling and education.

The Need for Existential Analysis Psychotherapy

Sometimes, however, clients know what advice they should follow but have difficulties: lack of motivation or judgment, inability to act upon the advice, lack of staying power, inhibitions, emotions, to name just a few. In such cases, advice or information will not help, may even be discouraging and overdemanding. Clients may even break up the therapy.

In facing such difficulties, should logotherapy be limited to a merely meaning-oriented method? Doesn't it have specific methods for psychogenic disturbances for which Frankl sees logotherapy as "unspecific therapy"?^{2p.201} My practice has convinced me that beyond logotherapy an existential analysis psychotherapy is needed.

But for noogenic neuroses, too, for which logotherapy is considered specific therapy,^{2,p.201} treatment originating in the spirit^{3, p.172} may not be sufficient. In addition to treating noetic conflicts, a therapy of neurosis sometimes must pay attention to the psyche (phobia, hurt feelings). On the other hand, treatment of psychogenic neuroses may need to consider somatic and

noogenic aspects. This is based on practical experience as well as on existential analysis theory which considers neurosis a disturbance of the total human being, including psychological and somatic functions.

Existential analysis leads clients to a fresh view of themselves and the world.⁵ The method aims at shaping a new person, under the guidance and supervision of the therapist. Existential analysis therapy, like traditional therapy, runs on two rails, although in different forms:

a) Strengthening the self: emphasis on greater efficiency, awareness of latent abilities, on the positive and healthy.

b) Relief from negative aspects of self: clearing of deficiencies, hurts, and disturbances.

The therapy aims at shifting the balance from weakness toward strength. The difference with traditional therapy lies in the special anthropological background. The existential analysis therapist sees clients as persons challenged to act responsibly - responding to the questions life asks. The method is phenomenological - the therapist pays primary attention to the effect the events of life have on the clients and how they handle them.

The Structure of the Method

Existential analysis demands from the therapist:

1. to be "with" the clients on a noetic level.^{3,pp. 87,91}
2. to understand the clients' motivations (will to meaning)
3. to help clients relate to themselves and their world, especially through modification of attitudes.

This requires years of professional training, cultivation of personality, and practical experience^{4,pp.3-5} - our training goals at the Society for Logotherapy and Existential Analysis.

Ad 1: Existential analysts must remain on an existential level, enabling them to "participate" in the clients' problems and open them to the process that is effective in therapy or, where no illness is present, to personality changes. This opens the existential space in which clients can develop.

Ad 2: Existential analysts must open themselves for what motivates clients, their will to meaning. It is less important *what* clients experienced, but *how* and *why* they experienced it and why they took this particular attitude to it. The same is true for their actions: not so much what they did but why. Understanding clients in this way deepens the therapeutic process and leads to a better self-understanding of the patients.

Ad 3: The existential analyst helps clients to achieve a breakthrough to their authentic selves and find meaningful

relationships to the therapist, to others, and to themselves. Their capacity is activated to be responsive to others and in the dialogue with themselves. An attitude is achieved that restores the clients' meaningful relationships and frees them from the bonds of their problems and inner psychic emotions.

Existential analysis counseling does not always deal with problems of meaning, the main concern of logotherapy. It often deals with aspects of self-development: self-understanding, freedom, capacity to relate, trust, attitude, interest, inclination, emotions, abilities - wherever a will to being is expressed. Deeper analysis is basically concerned with questions of justification of one's existence, the legitimacy of one's actions, works, demands, one's "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger). But human beings also want to do justice to life, to others, and to themselves, they seek responsibility. And they also want that justice be done to them. Here a third motivational factor joins the "will to being" and the "will to meaning": the "will to justice."

(A case study illustrating existential analysis will be published in the next issue of the *International Forum*.)

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