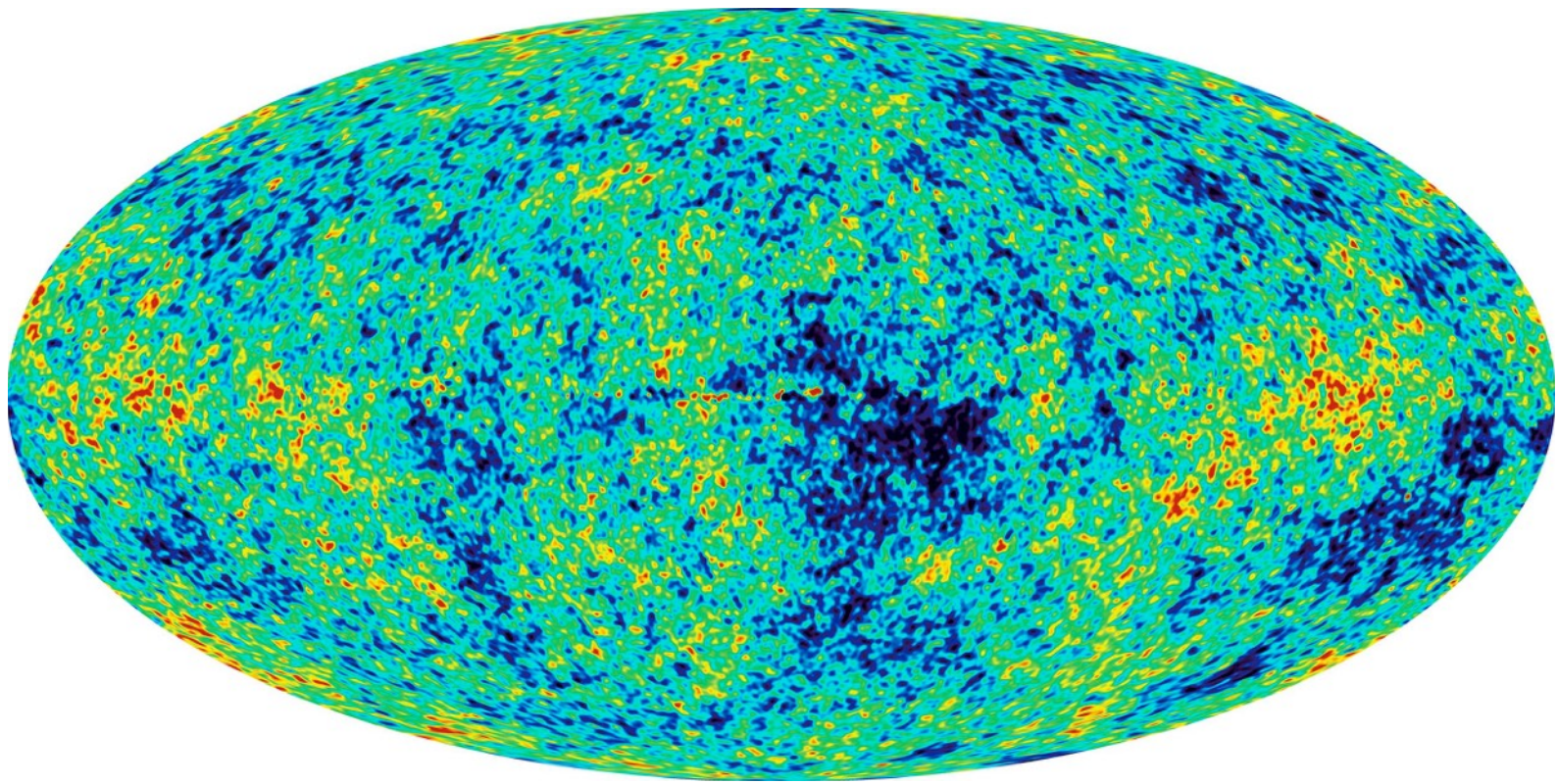




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The Existence



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Editor's Note

Existence

Materialism and idealism are two philosophical approaches to existence. In the materialism, only palpable things in the ontic sense would exist. In contrast, idealism proposes that only representations in our minds exist. What exists and what does not exist is an unresolved problem in the philosophy of language. Aristotle and his followers in the Middle Ages argued that objects had essential properties while other properties were contingent or accidental. For instance, in this theory, a human is human and cannot be a non human. A human, in essence, is a human. However, a human can also have properties: A human can learn philosophy for example. These properties are predicates of the object. Therefore, qualities like having two arms and two legs or activities like learning philosophy might become contingent property of humans. This idea of existence can be applied to God as well. Therefore, God could exist in essence. God would not need properties to exist. Kant, Hume and other philosophers resonate with the Aristotelian concept of existence.

This Aristotelian model was particularly challenged at the beginning of the 20th century when other logic philosophers such as Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell argued that existence was indeed a second order property of individuals. This was based on the idea that the same logic was used for existing and non existing objects. For example, one can argue that humans exists whereas monsters don't exist. We don't have a logical mechanism to differentiate one for the other. Therefore it is not possible to exist in essence, or at least to argue for such an existence. In a pragmatic realm, we could argue that empiricism and consensus would be the way to discern what exists from what does not exist. However, linguistically we lack a logical method for

discernment. In their deeper logical form they are both general existential and negative existential claims. Simply existing cannot be a predicate of the individual.

Alexius Meinong was an Austrian philosopher who further questioned the logic of existence. He denoted three modalities of existence. In Meinongian theory, existence implied material and also temporal being of the object. Subsistence would imply being in the non temporal sense. This would imply objects like numbers or mathematics. Finally, absistence would apply to objects that don't have a negation. For Meinong, all objects absist, whereas some subsist and an even smaller amount of these, exist.

In summary we lack linguistic tools to discern between existing and non existing objects. Empiricism, science and consensus may be more useful tools for the approximation of existence.

Fernando Espí Forcén

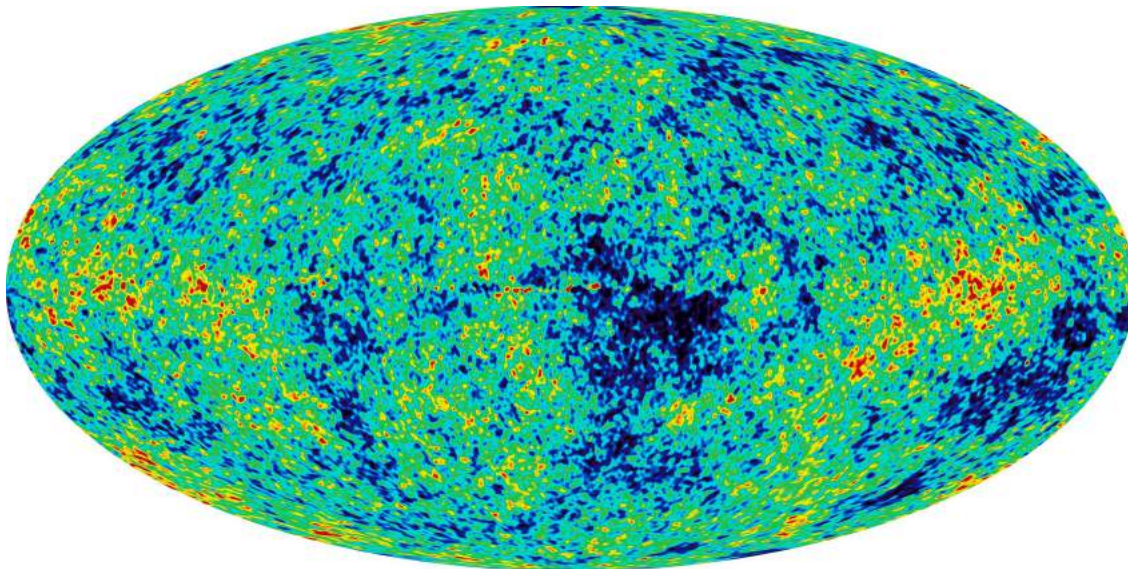
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Icons of Psychiatry

The Origin Of Our Universe

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The microwave anisotropy probe was an uncrewed spacecraft operating between 2001 and 2010. The mission was renamed Wilkinson microwave anisotropy probe (WMAP) after professor David Todd Wilkinson (1935-2002) in 2003. The mission project was headed by professor Charles Bennett of Johns Hopkins University. The spacecraft measured temperature differences across the sky in the cosmic microwave background (CMB). In Big Bang cosmology, CMB is electromagnetic radiation which is a remnant from an early stage of the universe. It is the oldest electronic magnetic radiation in the universe. With a traditional optical telescope the space between galaxies and stars is completely dark. However, a sensitive radio telescope shows that

there is a faint background noise that is not associated with any star, galaxy or object. This is the CMB, discovered in 1965 by astronomers Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson. CMB gives a snapshot of the universe when temperature dropped enough to allow electrons and protons to allow the formation of hydrogen atoms. This happened approximately 380,000 years after the Big Bang. This period of formation of the first electrically neutral atoms is referred in cosmology at the period of recombination.

In February 11th of 2003, NASA published the first year release of WMAP data. The latest calculated age and composition of the early universe were presented. With these data, the WMAP science team has been able to map the pattern of tiny fluctuations in the CMB radiation (the oldest light in the universe) and produced the first full-sky map of the microwave sky. The team has also determined the age of the universe: 13.77 billions (thousand millions) years. They have nailed down the curvature of the universe. Moreover they have determined that ordinary atoms form only 4.6% of the universe while 24% of the universe is dark matter and 71.4% is dark energy.

The content of this image tells us much about the fundamental structure of the universe. It shows a temperature range of plus-or-minus 200 microKelvin, with fluctuations in the so-called cosmic microwave background radiation appearing here as color differences. These measurements reveal the size, matter content, age, geometry and fate of the universe. They also reveal the primordial structure that grew to form galaxies and will test ideas about the origins of these primordial structures.

Essays

One Unit Of A Human: Individuality, Interstitial Existence, And Challenges To Care In Inpatient Psychiatry (A Social Work Observation And Reflection)

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Patients and clinicians within the bounded spaces of the hospital often remark upon an experience of loss, especially toward elements of their humanity and their identity. Whisked away by a multitude of professionals into the machinery of care systems, inpatients in particular are suddenly unmoored from their daily lives, routines, and relationships. For psychiatric inpatients, there are many factors that further exacerbate this experience, such as being conveyed to and confined within a unit against their will, the intensity and nature of their psychosis, the inability to access substances used for coping, among others. In place of “normal” pieces of their lives, the dimensions of artificial space and spontaneous relationships offers the potential for a brief obliteration of the usual narrative experienced by the patient in the hopes that treatment and intervention can construct a different outcome that does not provoke acute psychiatric crisis.

Who is the solitary patient that exists before us in that given moment, after enduring so many alterations to their social variables? In the course of an acute hospitalization, we see them as individuals and target treatment accordingly. Though opportunities may exist to engage with members of their social supports, these efforts are usually dedicated for the purpose of obtaining collateral information around an individual’s presentation and rarely as a co-occurring

component or focus of treatment. After all, even in cases where a patient's social supports also experience substantial mental distress, they are not the ones actively removed from the community for purposes of intensive care. The existence of a patient, and the existence of their distress, is thus incorporated into treatment approaches that aim at the singular person as the level of organization within their ecosystem for appropriate intervention. When a patient leaves the hospital, their medications will have been adjusted, behavioral and safety plans created, and connection to therapists and psychiatrists who will see patients individually established. On discharge, we wish them the best and hope that they need not return to the hospital on some future admission. Many still do.

While acceptance of the singular human as the unit of care has become a necessity by the construction of systems that we work in, this can also appear to be *prima facie* bizarre. When any of us considers our own existence, we scarcely exist in solitary space. We likely have some degree of friendships, families, value systems, religious beliefs, and other aspects of "personal" identity that is defined through connection to others. The existence of those others and the interactions that take place in between the hypothetical self and other are fundamental components of our own existence. They are dynamics which exist in the interstices between satellites of individual selves and are vital and immeasurable aspects of our own lives and those of our patients. The quality and nature of those dynamics have abundant implications on any person's own ability to navigate through social strata and can contribute to our own mental wellness or distress. The inability to attend fully to those factors among psychiatric inpatients for systems reasons, on the basis that they do not constitute criteria for ongoing acute admission, is often baffling to patients, their social supports, and initiates to the setting of the psychiatric unit.

To formulate any presenting problem confronting a patient as a phenomenon primarily derived from other social dynamics (homelessness, relational violence, racism, cisheterosexism, ableism, etc.) is rarely satisfying to many clinicians working in this space. For one, the possibilities for intervention grow bleak when the person presenting before us is seen as having limited power over the beginning or the end of the problem at hand. This is therefore acknowledged and dismissed as outside the resources and capacity of the hospital attending to the care of the individual patient. Perhaps we go as far to remark, "if only," that if a patient had

access to a given resource, that if they had different social identifiers, their circumstances might be different, but the interlocking tangle of social complexities rarely offers such a simple framing of cause and effect to define and resolve problems of a social nature. Chronic problems become static factors that are seen as immutable and normative; at best they can be understood, but that becomes the limit of the social obligation of a clinician in these spaces to address any given issue.

What are the consequences of our individually targeted approaches that neglect or inadequately address the existence of problems that take place in the interstices between the patient, other humans, and systems at large? The practical reality of care that “centers” the patient as an individual inculcates an acceptance of fragile social variables that present a high likelihood of failure and prospect for readmission as constants within society. The urgency of inpatient psychiatry and the limited resources that exist within that space to stabilize social factors give little to no space for clinicians to attend to these issues in the course of treatment, even when they are highly salient. Identification of social vulnerabilities without interventional recourse becomes a substantial source of frustration for patients, their supports, clinicians, and society alike. In the end, we all do our best. It is often not enough. We go on, and continue to exist.

Looking For A Purpose

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“The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for”¹

The mind is not designed to deal with aimlessness in life². A throng of people going about their business is usually the mainstay of any urban metropolis. However, upon closer examination, they are usually in a hurry to go nowhere.

Most of us are clueless of what we want to do with our lives. Between ages 18 and 25, a person undergoes several life changes. We finish high school, we go to college, fancy someone, and get a job, and so on. Even after having “settled”, it does not guarantee that one can define what they want in life. The vast majority do not have a clear goal to which they strive towards, leading them to have this constant feeling of numbness.

This is evident when looking at the rising rates of depression in the country. An estimated 17.3 million adults in the United States had at least one major depressive episode. This number represents about 7.1% of all US adults.³

Our minds are simply not designed to deal with aimlessness in life. We humans instinctively search for meaning and having that is crucial for our psychological well-being.² The people who are content with their lives have one major theme in common: they devote themselves to an idea which bigger than them. This includes people who are of service to others, who dedicate themselves to a cause, or their entire belief in higher power- different avenues that lead to the same destination, contentment.

The importance of meaning in life is supported by research demonstrating its relations to several mental health variables such as depression, anxiety, hope, and life satisfaction⁴. The happiest individuals are those who have a future direction and goals which are significant enough to strive and live for.

However, the idea that we were born for some higher purpose and that it's now our cosmic mission is inherently wrong. This is the same kind of absurd logic used to justify that our lucky number is 7 or (though this might ruffle some feathers) believing in the zodiac signs.

There is one undeniable fact: we exist on this planet for an unspecified amount of time. During those times we do things; some important, some not. So how do we define what our purpose is?

There are numerous self-help avenues that claim to help you find your purpose. After searching through this material, it essentially boils down to three basic questions which you have to take the time and think critically about. What makes you happy? What are you good at? What concepts are you curious about? Constantly keeping these questions at the forefront of thought will give one a better chance of finding meaning in their existence.

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Articles

Integrating Self-Determination Theory And Existentialism

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“Essentially only one thing in life interests us: our psychological constitution, the mechanism of which was and is wrapped in darkness. All human resources, art, religion, literature, philosophy and historical sciences, all of them join in bringing lights in this darkness.” - Ivan Pavlov

Psychotherapy should be guided by a philosophical framework that can guide us to a total picture of a person with the full spectrum of issues that humans contend with. (1) Self-determination theory (SDT) is an approach to motivation situated within the realm of social and personality psychology. (2) This approach has been widely recognized as an empirically validated theory. (3) The theory is seen as broadly fitting into the field of humanistic psychology and its emphasis on the innate human tendency to grow and develop one’s potentials as articulated by Maslow and Rogers. SDT is essentially a theory of human agency.

A foundational tenet of SDT is the recognition of three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Deci and Ryan (4) define needs as “innate organismic necessities rather than acquired (learned) motives” (p.229). The satisfaction of these needs is essential for psychological growth and well-being. Autonomy is defined as volition (4) and self-endorsement of one’s actions (3) that are congruent with the individual’s integrated sense of self.

Competence is the perception that one has of completing tasks successfully, especially tasks that are challenging. (5) To feel one's competence is to experience being effective. In the body of SDT empirical and theoretical literature, these first two needs of autonomy and competence are central to understanding the enhancement (or, conversely, the undermining) of intrinsic motivation and well-being. (6) Relatedness refers to the experience of being connected with others and belonging to a community. SDT has placed significant emphasis on autonomy. This paper will focus on autonomy in relation to the practice of psychotherapy.

“In comparison with capitalism, which reconstituted man as an economic animal; in comparison with Marxism, which found man an object made up of organized matter; in comparison with catholicism, which saw him as the unwitting plaything of an imperious unseen power (the Divine Will); in comparison with dialectical materialism, which saw him as unwitting plaything of the deterministic evolution of the means of production- existentialism made man a god”

— Ali Shariati [cited in Haq (7)]

A broad definition of existentialism has been attempted several times. Joseph, Reynolds (8) delineated eight elements of existentialism which include a phenomenological approach, freedom, and authenticity/responsibility. Phenomenology was initially articulated by Edmund Husserl (9) who emphasized methodology rather than a philosophical theory. Husserl emphasized that the phenomenologist's task is to “describe phenomena.” That is, one must pay attention to and describe the “things themselves.” The phenomena to be described are any events, persons, or things as they present themselves to one's experience. (10)

SDT asserts that it is an empirical approach to **many** issues addressed in Carl Rogers' approach to psychotherapy. (11) Rogers is often described as a phenomenologist. Moreira (12) points out that during what she calls Roger's “experiential phase” (when he was engaged primarily in a psychotherapy that had shifted from client-centered to “we-centered”) he was influenced by the phenomenology of Eugene Gendlin and phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty.

Andy Rogers (13) elaborates on an incident in Carl Rogers's professional life that Rogers described as “an instance of disillusionment” in his early career but led him to evolve his approach to counseling. This incident captures Carl Rogers's phenomenological perspective. He

had been doing insight-oriented therapy with a woman client, a mother. He confessed, in *On Becoming a Person* (14), that this established therapy was not working and that he had said so to this client. Whereupon, the mother asked if he did “counseling.” When Rogers said that he did, “real therapy began then, and ultimately it was very successful.” (p.11). Andy Rogers points out that the changes in Carl Rogers’s ideas were the result of his experiences in the relationship with his client rather than from a reliance on established theories of therapy. As Andy Rogers puts it, real therapeutic work began when “Rogers gave up knowing all sorts of things that someone in his position would normally be expected to know” (p. 151). Perhaps, Carl Rogers (14) framed his phenomenological perspective best when he described the “essence of therapy”: “I enter the [therapy] relationship not as a scientist, not as a physician who can accurately diagnose and cure, but as a person, entering into a personal relationship. Insofar as I see him only as an object, the client will tend to become only an object” (p.201).

Carl Rogers incorporated many aspects of what later became SDT. It is clear, from his writings and recorded sessions, that his client-centered approach is very supportive of the other person’s freedom/autonomy. Indeed, for Rogers, autonomy is a major goal of human development. (15) His approach was also supportive of each client’s competence in that Rogers was guided by the self-actualizing principle that every person has the resources necessary for change and growth. Of course, Rogers addressed the other person’s need for relatedness: his therapeutic work is marked by unconditional positive regard as well as empathy.

Freedom and Autonomy

Perhaps the touchstone of existential philosophy is its emphasis on individual freedom. Freedom is also a central value of existential-humanistic psychotherapy. (16) It is also the philosophical issue most consistently addressed in SDT empirical research and theoretical papers. The question of freedom is part of the psychological need for autonomy.

Both Jean Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger focused on freedom. Heidegger pointed out that we are all “thrown” into the world and must, nevertheless, make our lives meaningful. (17) Having been thrown into the world, humans are entirely responsible for their choices, values, and behaviors. It is through our choices that we determine what to value and thus create our worlds

and give life meaning. (8) Ryan et al. (18) place their approach to autonomy within the existential phenomenology of Paul Ricoeur when he asserted the notion of the “capable human being.” According to Ricoeur, human capabilities constitute human lives and enable responsible human action and life. (19)

Ryan and Deci (20) have also recognized Soren Kierkegaard as being at the philosophical root of their approach. They point to Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the importance of authenticity and freedom. Ryan and Ryan (11) make the case that autonomy is at the center of a person’s being authentic because acting autonomously is to be “volitionally engaged” (p. 2) and that “autonomy is in fact definitional to authenticity (p. 2).” They reviewed several studies of the social contexts that either support or hamper authenticity. These findings strongly indicate the importance of support for an individual’s autonomy as leading to willful choice and authenticity. Among the studies they reviewed were those showing that feeling authentic is limited where one is controlled and externally rewarded. Several studies have since shown that people who are dispositionally more authentic report having higher levels of well-being and self-esteem. Given the centrality of autonomy, it becomes important to determine the social conditions that foster it. Thus, SDT has demonstrated that therapists as well as parents, teachers, and other “authority” figures who provide the other person with choice, respect, and empathy foster well-being. For example, Farber (21) has developed a successful integrative approach to psychotherapy with individuals living with HIV. This approach focuses on enhancing their autonomy as well as agency in living with HIV and improving their choice-making patterns. Doshi et al. (22) showed that counselors who were supervised by autonomy-supportive supervisors showed higher levels of self-efficacy in their [counseling](#) work. In an interesting set of studies demonstrating that freedom and responsibility go together, Sheldon et al. (23) found, in their cross-cultural experiments, that those individuals who experience support for autonomy are able to accept responsibility for their failures.

Conclusions and Implications

Existentialism has made a significant impact on psychotherapy. SDT provides an important framework for the application of existential principles to the practice of

psychotherapy. This broad theory emphasizes the centrality of freedom/autonomy, relatedness, and competence in human motivation with a particular emphasis on autonomy and authenticity. Regardless of a therapist's theoretical orientation, any approach that supports the autonomy of the client will improve outcomes. Thus, any client activity that is chosen by that person will be more intrinsically motivated and thus enhance their commitment to change and growth.

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Being-Towards-Death: Daesin And Descendants

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God may or may not be dead, but our being lives on through our descendants. While existentialism has wreaked havoc on spiritual underpinnings of religion, a person's being persists through care of those he touched and those who touched him. So inquires Martin Heidegger, (1889–1976) whose moral compass took him to totalitarian depths, but who, nonetheless, has something significant to say about the human condition as it faces death.

Heidegger (1962) opens his magisterial opus, *Being and Time*, indicting Aristotle's (384–322 BC) definition of being—"whatever is anything whatsoever," spread over all 10 Aristotelian categories—as inadequate. Heidegger called for the necessity of explicitly restating the question of being because of the widely held belief that being's roots in ancient ontology makes its study unnecessary and superfluous. As a philosophical concept, being is supremely universal to the point of vacuity, resists definition, and is obviously self-evident. After all, everyone knows what being is, so its interpretation is without merit. Heidegger disagrees with this antiquated bias and calls for a uniquely human essence of being. "By considering these prejudices, however, we have made plain not only that the question of being lacks an answer, but that the question itself is obscure and without direction. So, if it is to be revived, this means that we must first work out an adequate way of formulating it" (Heidegger, p.24).

The idea behind *Being and Time* is straightforward: Being is time and time is finite. Time ends with death, the end of one's life. So, if one is to have an authentic life, one needs to confront one's death honestly. We need to project our life on the timeline of our death. Being-toward-death is the concept that brings the individual face to face with his mortality and meaning of life (Critchley, 2009).

Daesin (being there) is Heidegger's term for being or existing. It refers to the experience, distinctively human, that confronts such issues as selfhood, living with others while being alone with oneself, and the inevitability of death. Daesin, or "being there," concerns involvement in the world. The world itself consists of relationships among entities, both human and things. And such relationships end with death.

Heidegger's conception of being-towards-death severs the importance of the relationship of the deaths of others. Death is certain, indeterminate, and, in the final analysis, death trumps all. Death cuts off relations with kin or others. Death cannot be experienced through the death of others, but only through my relation to my death. Death is certain, but we don't know when we will die. Finally, death outdoes all; it's the ultimate end . . . it "outstrips all the possibilities that my power of free projection possesses. Death is that limit against which my potentiality for being is to be measured. It is that essential impotence against which the potency of my freedom shatters itself (Critchley, 2009).

Robert Pirsig, (1928–2017), author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, was living on a houseboat in England when word came that his son Chris was murdered in a mugging on the streets of San Francisco. Years before, father and son had motorcycled across the United States in Pirsig's philosophical quest for the metaphysics of quality, which was the narrative for the Zen book. Pirsig noted that while he and Chris lived apart for years and had relatively little contact, they were close. He asked:

Where did Chris go? He had bought an airline ticket that morning. He had a bank account, drawers full of clothes and shelves full of books. He was a real, live person, occupying time and space on this planet, and now suddenly where was he gone to? Did

he go up the smoke stack at the crematorium? Was he in the little box of bones they handed back? Was he strumming a harp of gold on some overhead cloud? None of these answers made any sense (Pirsig, 1984).

Pirsig went to Chris's room and touched the things that were his son's—his clothing, books, a bank book—in an attempt to rekindle his son's presence. Chris was an individual with a life, travel plans, a Daesin, with concerns of selfhood, being with others, being alone. Now all that remained were his ashes in a container. (Toft, 2018).

The Chris I missed so badly was not an object but a pattern and that, although the pattern included the flesh and blood of Chris, that was not all there was to it. The pattern was larger than Chris and myself and related us in ways that neither of us understood completely and neither of us was in control of” (Pirsig, 1984).

If anything, Pirsig's account describes a loving relationship between parent and child. Their lives were separate yet intertwined. “Death does indeed reveal itself as a loss, but a loss such as is experienced by those who remain. In suffering this loss, however, we have no way of access to the loss-of-Being as such which the dying man ‘suffers.’” In Heidegger's words, *the dying of Others is not something which we experience in a genuine sense; at most we are always just ‘there alongside* (Heidegger, 47: 282).

Is this true? Are we merely a collateral presence in the death of one's child?

A child's death tears a huge hole in the center of all that. And the people who loved the child become desperate to fill that hole. They long for someone who can become a new object of love. They long for someone who can once again become the center of their caregiving patterns. Metaphorically speaking, we can describe that hole in [the] center of the pattern as the “spirit” of the dead child. It is something invisible and real that remains behind and waits for a new body to enter (Pirsig, 1984).

The death of a child is experienced fully as genuine. Heidegger's conception that “the only authentic death is one's own is both false and morally pernicious” (Critchley, 2009). Most

parents would trade their own lives for the survival of their child. While we may have no way of accessing the loss of being that Chris suffered when he was dying, nonetheless, in the pain of his death, his parent suffered as if it were his own death. Death closes the possibility of continuing one's being into the future. We seek closure to fill the hole that the death of a child leaves.

Pirsig's second wife, Wendy, became pregnant and gave birth not long after Chris died. Pirsig stated that "*This time he's a little girl named Nell, and our life is back in perspective again. The hole in the pattern is being mended. A thousand memories of Chris will always be at hand, of course, but not a destructive clinging to some material entity that can never be here again. It was the larger pattern of Chris, making itself known at last*" (Toft, 2018).

The idea that the being of a deceased loved one lives in the memory of those left behind is both genuine and true. At times their being is transferred to another living being. In Pirsig's experience, Chris's being lives in his stepsister Nell. A healing of Chris's loss occurs, and his material presence in memory is set free. We know not who or what orders such a transfer of love from one being to another. Perhaps God is not dead after all.

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Photo: Robert Pirsing and his son

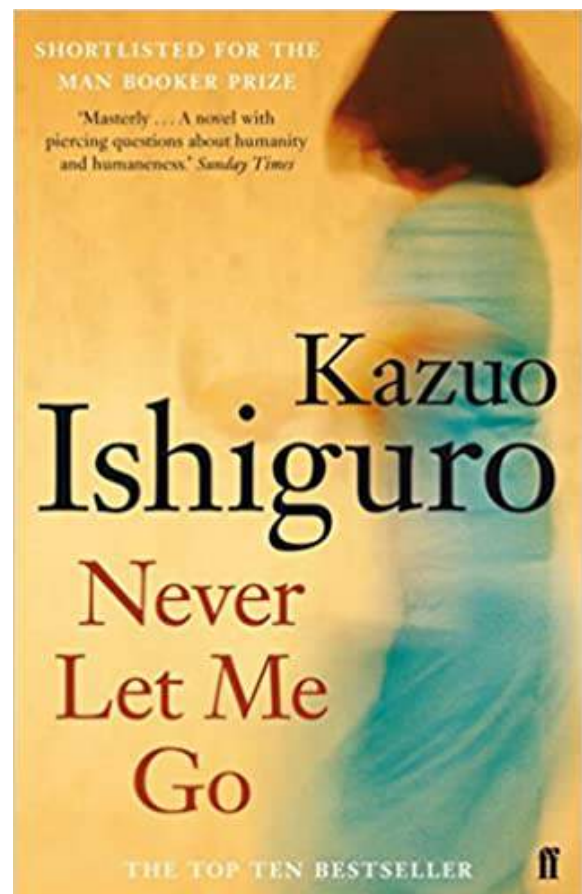
Book Reviews

Existence From The Lens of Kazuo Ishiguro

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The purpose of human existence is a topic that has been explored since times immemorial. To each generation there exists seminal works that explore this theme, and a contemporary work by the author Kazuo Ishiguro presents a fresh take on the meaning of existence. In the novel *Never Let Me Go*, Great Britain exists as a dystopian state where human beings are cloned to serve as organ donors to their originators. This topic is especially pertinent as we live in the day and age of genetic medicine that has given rise to treatments ranging from mRNA based vaccines to IVF surrogacy. The clones in *Never Let Me Go* thus serve both as proxies for a world whereby the imperatives of scientific advancement trumps the necessity of medical ethics, as well as a tabula rasa for readers



to project their own ideals of what is the true meaning of human existence.

The original publication of the novel in 2005 came at the end of the beginning of the digital age, when E-commerce and digital entertainment first began to transition from being transient novelties to household necessities. This technological transformation has drastically improved the material well being of the developed world, as well as uplifted billions out of poverty in the developing world. At the same time, this breakneck pace of technological advancement has left people listless, trying to find a deeper meaning to life within this hyper-materialistic world. This has led many to look into our collective past to find what our forebears thought of the meaning of existence. From the Cartesian ontology's derivation that the ideal life is one that is in pursuit of mental tranquility, to the Spinozan belief that life is the pursuit of reason, or to Lao Zi's belief that an ideal life is one free from desires. We have all at one time or another considered the meaning of human existence.

In *Never Let Me Go*, the meaning of existence for the cloned protagonists was to donate themselves in a literal sense until completion, a thinly veiled euphemism for death. The protagonists explore the relationship they have between each other, as well as their place within the larger confines of their world. Yet, the meaning of their existence is never questioned. This juxtaposition of the protagonists' quiescent acceptance of their fate with the reader's befuddlement springs forth the idea that for each, the meaning of existence is to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. One can see that some of the most popular forms of contemporary entertainment are simple documentaries of people operating at the highest levels of their fields. From the blacksmith spending months forging a knife made of Damascus steel, to the Michelin starred sushi chef using said knife to slice a simple piece of nori. People gravitate to these ideals because they are in pursuit of a life whereby one improves the world by constant self-improvement towards a platonic idea, and for many, therein lies the meaning of existence.

Literature, Cinema and Psychiatry

From Paris To Casablanca, A Tale Of Two Cities

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Epigraph

Rick Blaine: You know what I want to hear. You played it for her, you can play it for me. If she can stand it, I can!

Sydney Carton: It is a far far better thing that I have done than I have ever done before; it is a far far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.

Introduction

Imagining can be more vital than living – but only for the neurotic.

Courage trumps sentimentality when the cause is noble and the agent worthy.

Strange to say that love, which is glorious, is not the greatest. On occasions values clash and one has to choose one path instead of another. This can be the harbinger of greatness, with love sometimes the vector.

Camus suggested the only serious philosophical question is that of suicide. Alternatively one may ask: is there any cause worth dying for?

All sacrifice by its ordain entails loss.

Sacrifices bring us closer to the subject and to ourselves.

The biblical prophets threw water on the fires of animal and human sacrifices and gratefully mankind has not looked back since then.

With these cryptic lines of introduction we will contrast two classics of Western lore – Charles Dickens' 1859 novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and the 1942 Michael Curtiz film, *Casablanca*.

Casablanca

Casablanca is a film from Warner Bros. made in 1942 and set during World War Two. It cost one million dollars to make and grossed about 6 million at the box office. This seems a modest profit for a film that the American Film Institute has consistently rated as one of the top three movies of the past 100 years.

Curiously Umberto Eco judged *Casablanca* 'mediocre' as a film. He thought the characters did not develop in a believable psychological way. However Ecco conceded that the presence of many archetypes – heroism, corruption,



sacrifice, unrequited love - allowed 'the power of Narrative in its natural state, without Art intervening, to discipline it (the movie)'. Ecco concluded that it was the Narrative and the Archetypes that succeeded in elevating the film to a 'phenomenon worthy of awe'. The main Archetype, he noted, was sacrifice.

Rick Blaine a drunken cynical hotel proprietor and Victor Laszlo a heroic resistance fighter were in love, with and loved by, the same woman, Ilsa Lund. The counterpoint of the moral struggle was between the love of Rick and Ilsa and the vital anti-war work of Victor and Ilsa. In the end a sacrifice is made. All three made sacrifices – Rick for his requited and unrequited love; Ilsa for her loves, and Victor for knowing his wife probably loved another man more than he.

The film reprised from 1931, with great effect, the song 'As Time Goes by' by Herman Hupfeld.
(1) It was Rick and Ilsa's signature song from their affair in Paris.

You must remember this:

A kiss is still a kiss,

A sigh is just a sigh.

The fundamental things apply

As time goes by.

And when two lovers woo

They still say, 'I love you.'

On that you can rely,

No matter what the future brings.

As time goes by.

Moonlight and love songs: never out of date.

Hearts full of passion, jealousy and hate.

Woman needs man, and man must have his mate.

That no one can deny.

It's still the same old story.

A fight for love and glory.

A case of do-or-die.

The world will always welcome lovers

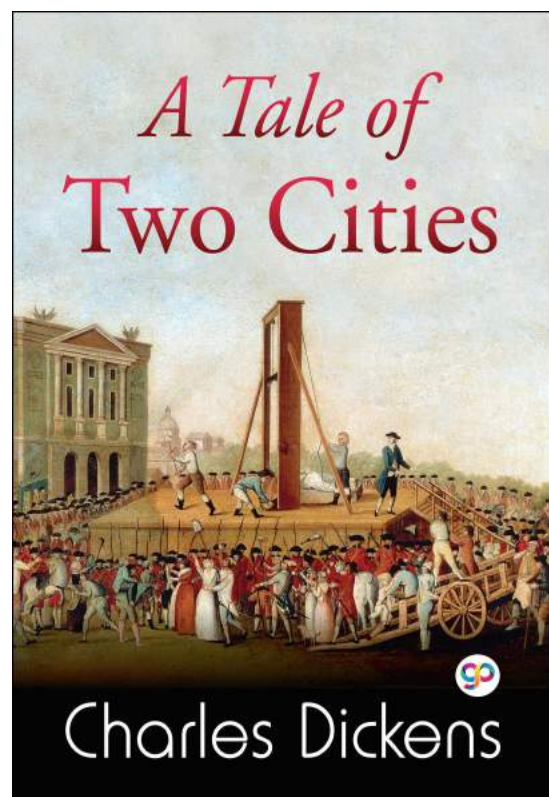
As time goes by.

But the times were momentous. Good versus evil. Life versus death. In the big picture Rick observed: 'Ilsa, I'm no good at being noble, but it doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world.'

The final stanza of the song replays the tension of the film – a fight for love and glory. The love between man and woman is fleeting like vanity. It is the big panorama - the Glory of God and King, the vista of history, the struggle between good and evil - that Rick believed in or grabbed on to as a life-buoy.

A Tale of Two Cities

Sydney Carton was a hard-drinking cynical English barrister when Dickens introduced him. Dickens wrote of Carton that 'the sun rose upon no sadder sight than the man of good abilities and good emotions... sensible to the blight on him, and resigning himself to let it eat him away.' Carton was in love with Lucie Manette. She however felt towards him as a concerned mother and not a potential mate. Early in the story it was clear she would never love him, so Carton promises melodramatically to 'embrace any sacrifice for you



and for those dear to you'. When Lucie and her family found themselves trapped in Paris during the Revolution, Carton urged them to flee to London. However her beloved Darnay (Carton's competitor in love) was imprisoned awaiting La Guillotine.

Carton with subterfuge exchanges places with Darnay who is freed to escape with Lucie. As Carton is pushed towards La Guillotine Dickens notes his final thoughts:

'I see... the new oppressors who have risen on the destruction of the old, perishing by this retributive instrument, before it shall cease out of its present use. I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss ...

I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous and happy, in that England which I shall see no more. I see Her with a child upon her bosom, who bears my name...It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.'

Conclusion

1. In both stories the heroic male was lifted to glory by the love of a female. An universal archetype and not just a cinematic technique. The heroism fruited on self-sacrifice but for a cause greater than self.

Self-sacrifice for self, for example athletes, is really another form of narcissism. Self-sacrifice for a value outside of self bespeaks altruism and ultimately nobility.

Depth psychology postulates that when a person adopts an heroic posture it is protective against the fear of death. A hero stands out from the crowd. His fate is not the fate of Everyman. The hero-worshippers lining the confetti-strewn boulevard ride the slipstream and in the process elevate the hero onto a supra-natural plinth.

This might have been an unconscious protective mechanism for our heroes however it does not explain their meaning-seeking motivation.

We could rephrase the function of heroism and understand it as an act that re-evaluates one's life. The conflict that brought about the heroic act sharpens one's appreciation of life by clarifying one's value system.

Alternatively the psychology of the sacrifice may be self-pitying and self-glorifying which does not resolve any conflict – simply generates more of the same.

2. Dickens portrayed a sacrifice which benefitted others, ensuring the happiness of the woman Carton loved. What were Carton's depth-psychology motivations? Dickens described him as being depressed, feeling sorry for himself, and stuck in self-pity. Maybe he could have formed a loving relationship with a woman – maybe not. Maybe he deliberately created an impossible circumstance for himself. It was safer. Most people move on, as a real-estate agent might say. Paradoxically the opportunity to die by La Guillotine provided meaning in his life. This is both ironical and absurd.

3. Rick's sacrifice was costly. For four years he drowned his sorrows in drink in the backwaters of Casablanca. Yet ultimately he forced Ilsa away, into the arms of his love-rival, for the sake of a greater cause. One senses he was a more mature personality than Carton, understanding the difference between a hill of beans and the Battle of Britain.

Rick achieved dignity through the love of a woman – a love lost, revived and enabled him to live out his life, fortified by the memory: 'We'll always have Paris', he said. And with that, his self-pity was expiated.

4. There is often ambiguity in searching for Truth.

Whom did Ilsa love more? Was she sacrificing her love of Rick for the anti-war effort? Did cynical Rick really give up his woman for a Cause or did he sense he could never have had her because she too believed in the Cause?

What did Carton mean at the end when he cryptically stated that in dying he was going to a better rest than he had known before? Did his unrequited love with Lucie press him to suicide in sacrificial nobility?

5. Sometimes living in a state of 'what-if' is easier than the rough and tumble of daily relationship.

6. Why sacrifice? Animal/human sacrifices were to appease god, to protect ourselves from the unknown and to teach ourselves values. Sacrifice always means giving up one thing for another, which ineluctably builds our hierarchy of values. Sacrifice defines values.

7. How can a person continue to live after such a painful sacrifice? One way is by understanding the sacrifice as an opening to symbolic immortality. This is a well established mechanism in depth psychology. One overcomes impotence and meaninglessness by creating something that will outlive you. Hence symbolically you can achieve immortality and defeat the ordinary fate of man.

Rick did this by saving civilization, as it were, by sacrificing his personal 'hill of beans'. Carton imagined his name and memory continuing on in his beloved's life and family for generations.

8. What is attractive and appealing about the self-sacrificial archetype?

I think it strikes a deep chord in our genetic-cultural makeup and is surely related to survival. A lot has been written on balancing selflessness versus selfishness in building society. Spock the Vulcan explained to Kirk why he sacrificed his life to save the Starship Enterprise: 'The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few – or one.' (Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn, 1982.)

However some evolutionary psychologists claim every decision we make is based on self-interest – even unto death. I think this is *reductio ad absurdum*. A more pragmatic way of assessing an altruistic act is – who or what benefits.

For Rick and Carton, whatever psychological dynamics were at play, clearly other people were direct beneficiaries of their self-sacrifice.

Theirs were acts of altruism.

Future Issues

Spring 2021 - Justice

Summer 2021 - TBD

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