

EDITORIAL

We are delighted to be able to open this, the first edition of the thirty-second volume of *Existential Analysis*, with no fewer than six papers that were delivered at the Society for Existential Analysis Conference held in London on 14 November 2020. Each of these papers reflects in some way on the prescient overall theme of the Conference, ‘This Is Not What I Had Planned’, and the majority in some way address some aspect of the new conditions, one of which is the apparent randomness of its severity and symptoms, and restrictions that we all – therapists and clients alike – are experiencing as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic and other global changes and challenges, whether they manifest socially, like issues of inequality, or climactically, such as global warming. The issue of human intervention in the generation of these challenges will of course continue to be researched, but what is crystal clear is that the issues are here and the solutions, such as they are, are in our hands. They constitute our existential situation. Consequently, we have all been forced through circumstance, through the current givens of our existence, to find new ways of being and new ways of talking and listening to each other about what matters.

The conference was the first to be run entirely online and the papers in this issue that came out of it all attempt to get to grips with this both in their content and their process. Existentialists have always been keen to embrace new challenges and develop new ways of being that emerge out of a new appreciation of the vicissitudes of freedom and responsibility. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, was made aware of her freedom by her lack of it, both as a woman, and also politically through the Nazi occupation of Paris. Much has been written on face-to-face existential therapeutic practice but almost nothing has so far been written on ways of teaching and writing that are consistent with existential philosophy. Each of the presenters at the conference attempted to get to grips with, and understand, the online gap between talker and listener, and all constitute examples of how we are all independently and collectively learning new ways of presenting and engaging with each other online. Each of these will, we are sure, enhance and inform the way the all treat each other, whatever the context.

We begin with the Keynote by Professor Kevin Aho, who offers a phenomenological analysis of Heidegger’s account of ‘the uncanny’ (*das Unheimliche*) as it relates to the Coronavirus pandemic. This is followed by Damien Stewart’s *The Worst Thing, that was the Best Thing, that Ever Happened to Me* – an account of the personal and professional experience of being diagnosed with hereditary rheumatoid arthritis. Stewart reflects on his transition from policing to psychology, and how this informs his current practice with clients presenting similar concerns. The next paper,

by Tabitha Draper, is based on her Conference presentation and takes off from the impact of COVID-19 lockdown to examine the role and meaning of existentially understood frames in being-with the challenges of trauma. We are also pleased to be able to include more informal presentations by Diana Mitchell, Hugh Knopf, and Dr Rosemary Lodge and Zoe Gelis which each give a sense of the lively and stimulating atmosphere of the Conference.

Two further papers included here were not part of the Conference offering, but nevertheless make significant links to the new conditions under which we find ourselves living. Dr Simon Wharne's paper exploring the experience of being dyslexic draws on a research project completed in 2019 and includes reflections on self-isolation necessitated by the current pandemic. Olga Tolmachova's research also focuses on the phenomenon of self-isolation – this time among, predominantly, Russian-speaking residents of France. Dr Verity Gavin, meanwhile, proposes several linked terms intended to contribute to our explorations of the lived experiences of clients living through what she terms the CoVIEd context, and the Blast of Beirut, just two very different potentially traumatising events of the past few months. Drs Fabíola Langaro and Daniela Ribeiro Schneider refer obliquely to self-isolation but their research, in fact, takes us to a new area, namely the experience of loneliness in palliative care.

We must mention, finally, the inclusion of a second paper from Dr Ken Bradford, which follows on from his *The Subject Matter of Psychology: Psyche, Dasein, non-self*, which readers will find in *Existential Analysis*, 31.2; and Professor Robert Spillane's fascinating essay tracing Thomas Szasz's intellectual development from the social behaviourism of George Herbert Mead to a dramaturgic-existentialism which reinforces and extends his critique of mental illness.

Regular readers will notice the cover this issue. It continues a tradition begun in the last issue of a single colour, in this case, white. This shift represents both a *tabula rasa* in the world's thinking, and an opportunity to view afresh current global circumstances and the way in which we are all, always, immersed in them.

This edition closes, as usual, with a number of interesting and informative book reviews.

Prof Simon du Plock
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