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Existential Therapy: Relational theory and practice for a post-Cartesian world, Volume 1

Yaqui Andrés Martínez Robles. (2015). Mexico: Circulo de Estudios en Psicoterapia Existencial.

I am left with an overwhelming sense of inspiration after I finish Yaqui's book. As a trainee existential therapist, it has provided me with a fresh understanding of, and curiosity around, some of the central underpinnings of an existential-phenomenological approach. I feel renewed excitement as I begin to forge my own unique existential therapy way.

Having read a number of set texts for my training, I can honestly say that Yaqui's book stands out as one that covers a vast and diverse theoretical landscape with clarity, uniqueness and personality. His style is accessible, welcoming and questioning. I felt empowered and encouraged to consider my own responses to the theory and practical anecdotes offered. Yaqui's character and own personal style of existential therapy, which includes enriching perspectives from Mexico, contributes to a depth and breadth I have at times found lacking in other existential texts. The theoretical ground covered is broad, and my understanding has developed considerably through Yaqui's concise and clear writing.

More than merely educational however, for me the experience of reading this book was enlivening and thought-provoking. I devoured it within a couple of weeks and have already returned to it a number of times. Both in

style and content, it is a uniquely exciting and enriching book, and I hope it gets the place it deserves on all existential-phenomenological reading lists.

The book explores all the main themes and topics I expected to find in such a volume, but the way in which he explored them is distinctly unique. He is engaging in how he combines a breadth of perspectives from across the existential-phenomenological world, integrating them in a unique and exciting manner. It helps the book stand out from some of the more repetitive ground covered in many other such works.

The book begins with a stimulating foreword by Ernesto Spinelli, who rightly warns the reader to prepare to be “challenged, surprised and entranced”. The first chapter outlines existential therapy as a philosophically-inspired approach that steers clear of techniques and clinical tendencies to pathologise. Yaqui explores what he means by the ‘therapeutic world’ and considers some of the similarities and differences between existential therapy and existential coaching, prompting the reader to make their own connections.

In the following chapter, Yaqui provides a comprehensive and accessible history of the phenomenological-existential perspective, taking the reader through the developments in phenomenology, hermeneutics and phenomenological psychology, before going on to explore their contributions to existential-phenomenological therapy. He then, helpfully and succinctly, considers some of the main thinkers and pioneers of existential therapy, including some from South American and specifically Mexican traditions, which I have found to be missing from other texts. The chapter concludes with a look at the key differences between the existential model and other approaches to therapy, a section, which I found especially helpful in enabling me to clarify through my own experience why this particular approach resonates with me and why others may not. This part of the book was helpful in prompting me to clarify what it is that I find to be unique about an existential-phenomenological approach, and its compatibilities (or not) with other styles, particularly in regard to its particular view of personhood. Yaqui’s exposition of existential philosophical foundations, his description of his therapeutic attitude or ‘ethos’ and his exploration of the phenomenological method are helpful and enlightening.

Rightly so, in my opinion, the next chapter is by far the longest. It covers a huge amount of ground exploring the relational paradigm. Following an initial comparison with the intrapsychic paradigm, Yaqui discusses the foundations of a relational view of existence, as well as some of the difficulties of accepting such a perspective. He moves on to discuss how the relational view applies to therapy and the therapeutic relationship. For me, this is the most enriching section of the book. Yaqui takes the reader through an exploration of therapeutic dialogue, the art of listening and the move away from a one-way perspective towards a reciprocal one. He describes with enthusiasm the importance of an attitude of not-knowing, and how the

uncertainty that comes with it opens up a spaciousness within the therapeutic encounter. I found his notes on transference and counter-transference helpful; as he acknowledges, questions around these concepts arise frequently amongst his students. He clarifies why, phenomenologically speaking, it makes no sense to distinguish between a transferential relationship and a real one, noting that the therapeutic relationship is always real and always mutual (and always requiring elucidation). Yaqui concludes this chapter with a persuasive argument for a relational approach as a necessary and important post-Cartesian proposal.

The final chapter explores existential therapy as a post-modern approach and interpersonal encounter. Yaqui describes how a relational, process-based, non-dualistic approach goes against claims of any theory as truth, including existential perspectives themselves. He argues that a loyalty to phenomenological principles requires us to accept that none of us knows the truth of the human condition – all we can do is analyse and reflect on our experiences of it. Yaqui goes on to explore the possible scope and objectives of existential therapy as an interpersonal encounter. He discusses who the existential therapist might be, emphasising that ultimately what matters most is who the therapist is, not what they do; the how rather than the what of our encounters with clients. As fully human, fully fallible co-adventurers, Yaqui reminds us that ultimately “all we have is our experience, and our inter-relational way of experiencing it” (376).

His writing manages to maintain clarity and accessibility without compromising on nuance; he has a way of describing complex ideas by bringing them to life through his own practice and lived experiences. The examples and vignettes peppered throughout his exploration of the theory are invaluable, as well as often fun and moving. He does not shy away from difficult topics or uncomfortable moments with clients. His honesty and experiential inclusivity shine throughout the book in a way that I think anyone interested in the existential approach, however experienced, will find enriching. Not least, this is clear through his integrationist mestizo approach and the unique perspective he brings from the Mexican School of Existential Therapy. This book is an exciting addition to the existing literature; an important reminder of the fresh definitional possibilities each and every one of us bring as existential therapists, and a call to seek out plurality and diversity in our reading, connections and dialogues.

Yaqui's book is more than mere words and abstract theory. Reading it was an enriching experience that far exceeded a mere intellectual activity. I was left with that feeling of disappointment and loss that comes when you finish a really good book, as well as an energy and inspiration that I must confess I have not always felt when finishing other theoretical texts. As I embark on my training, I am reminded to actively seek out a diversity

of voices, ideas and influences, and to question what perspectives I might be missing. Before being gifted this book I did know I was missing it. And yet I now await with impatience for Volume 2 to be published in English.

Sarah Hopkins

In the Wake of Trauma: Psychology and philosophy for the suffering other

E.R. Severson, B.W. Becker & D. M. Goodman (eds.), 2008. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Upon receiving *In the Wake of Trauma*, I was keen to jump straight in. The cover depicting a solitary tree with calming sun on one side and a moody storm on the other was tantalising. The sub-heading, *Psychology and philosophy for the suffering other*, further hinted at an enthralling read. Upon completion, I cannot confess to it being an easy read. However, it is a worthy addition to any trauma library. The following review will attempt to pull out the key aspects of the book.

The editors' opening introduction sets the book's objective clearly; the aim is to start a conversation. It brings together a set of chapters, not necessarily to offer any ground-breaking new theories on trauma, but to instigate thought, critical thinking and to collate some of what is already laid out before us in the trauma field. The book also positions itself more towards client-facing readers, conveying thoughts on how the text can be applied in a therapeutic setting. As with any book that is a collection of papers, the reader finds oneself drawn to some chapters while less captivated by others. For me, it was more a case of a book of two halves, with half filled with trauma as represented in the arts and the other half more traditional philosophy and psychology writings.

In that vein, the chapters that position trauma in the context of its portrait within the arts do so predominantly in play and literature. I felt the offer of a pre-reading list might have been useful. A chance to refresh on texts such as James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the biblical book of Job would have made for a more informed read. In parts, I forgot I was reading chapters on trauma rather than literary critique. However, there was much to be considered from the offerings, especially in terms of how practitioners might use the texts to reflect on client's trauma within the therapy room.

Chapter One documents a conference discussion between those defined as scholars, namely Severson, Critchely, Pellegrini, Kearney and Skerrett. What transpires in the debate is an agreement that *Hamlet* is a text about failed mourning, love and desire. In considering the notion of suicide is the thought that beliefs about an afterlife are often paradoxical, between belief in an afterlife and belief in nothing following life. Observing how