

EDITORIAL

In our last editorial we talked about how the ability to protest, in various ways, is a response to feeling that things are not the way they ought to be. These different responses are, of course, context dependent; some actions are appropriate for some settings and some are not. But action of some sort is an existential necessity.

Nevertheless, sometimes our protesting voice just seems not to get heard, or perhaps what needs to change just appears

so big, so impervious to change, that the action of a single person feels irrelevant. Protest just seems futile, even self-indulgent. It is at this point that another response, Doomism, presents itself almost as a rational response. Protesting seems so pointless that it is easier to give up. The argument goes that if the world, aka human beings, has already lost the battle against global warming and international conflict, then there is no point doing anything or hoping for anything. Doomism also plays into the narrative of populist leaders who, with their sound-bite solutions, cast themselves as saviours, when they are in fact the opposite.

It will not have gone unnoticed by readers that the word ‘existential’ is being used more and more in the popular press. This can only be good, although on many occasions it is employed simply as a synonym for ‘big’. In another sense its use is possibly, but unwittingly, accurate, since any change can be existential. The change does not have to be materially ‘big’; even a small change can be ‘big’ if it makes a difference to how we are in the world. The adoption of Doomism as a basic stance towards adversity can also be an existential change because it suggests choosing passivity rather than activity, denial of responsibility rather than taking responsibility, and a rejection both of our being-in-the-world, and that we are beings in the world. If we ever feel like succumbing to Doomism, we could do worse than to recall the words of the Manic Street Preachers, “If you tolerate this, then your children will be next”. By thinking globally and acting locally, it is then possible to say “I did what I could”. This is what Kierkegaard meant by living with faith.

If being existential means anything at all it means not losing sight of this. It also means acknowledging that since most of the issues that confront us are human made, they can be changed. And the ones that are given, i.e. not human made, we have the freedom to choose our stance towards them. The world is not just given to us, it is given to us to make something of. We also have an responsibility in the wider world not only to correct inaccurate or loose uses of the word existential, but also to model responsibility not merely on a micro, interpersonal, level, but also on a macro, sociopolitical level. This is what Sartre, Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty meant by being *engagé*.

There is also much talk recently about the possibilities offered by AI. Whatever happens, one thing is certain, it is that we have not yet exhausted the capacity of HI (human intelligence) to generate solutions to problems we ourselves have created. One of these may well be AI.

All the papers in this issue, as always, demonstrate our capacity to understand the relationship between the human world and non-human world, and to suggest solutions. So long as this happens, there is hope.

This year saw the Third World Congress of Existential Therapy, held in Athens in May, in which some two hundred and fifty presentations and workshops were given by existential thinkers from around the world. Many international contacts and relationships were made and re-made both in the formal sessions and informally in the social programme. Our thanks and gratitude are due to the organisers of this inspiring event.

Of the twelve papers in this issue, four originated in this event. We hope to have more contributions by presenters and attendees in future editions. A useful way to think about the papers is in terms of subject matter and the range of subjects and genres in this issue is especially encouraging. Ontologically, human beings are researchers, so we are also pleased to have five papers that are wholly or partly based on formal research. Additionally, five papers are about the process of becoming an existential therapist, while four are based strongly on clinical experience and two are theoretical explorations. Also, it is easy to forget that existential therapy is only one rather specialised application of existential ideas and five of the papers in this issue have a direct connection with the *sine qua non* of existential ideas – everyday life.

In this issue, we felt it was important to preserve the spirit of the papers from non-English speakers, which has meant that we have foregone some of our usual English grammatical rules in some instances.

As always, we include a number of book reviews which reflect not only this range, but also the skills of the reviewers to do more than just give a summary the works in question. They are reviews and, as such, they resemble academic papers in their own right.

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