

EDITORIAL

One of the things we do as editors of *Existential Analysis* is to read all the submissions and talk to the authors about their papers. We want to ensure that everything published meets the highest professional standards. This means that the points that the authors wish to make need to be coherent, well-argued, respectful to others with alternative views and demonstrate a profound understanding of the pre-existing literature. We frequently make suggestions about how the paper may be adjusted to enhance these qualities and these suggestions are welcomed. We are particularly on the lookout for unsubstantiated opinion, misleading inferences from references and incorrect quotations.

Something that has begun to appear recently however is rather different. It is that authors of submissions that meet these standards have then told us that they do not want their submission to be published. Not by us or by anyone. The reasons are that the authors feared reprisals.

These ranged from loss of employment and expulsion from their adopted country to fear of professional attacks and professional marginalisation. It is important to note that in all the cases, the submissions in question contained nothing that was criminal, or advocated criminality, or was libellous or slanderous. They simply contained ideas that had been in the public domain for many years and the argument and the conclusions that were drawn were enlightening, insightful and deserved being published in a journal such as *Existential Analysis*. It will probably not come as a surprise that the battleground is what has become known as culture wars, or identity politics.

Moreover, the ideas would have not provoked such a reaction if they had been published even a short time ago. It goes without saying that the people and institutions who are feared have never put up a coherent argument opposing the views held by the authors. They work instead by instilling fear. This cannot be right. An argument based on superlative adjectives, unsubstantiated opinion and innuendo is no argument at all. It merely demonstrates weakness.

Nevertheless, this did not stop the authors fearing that they would be the target of unprofessional, illegal or criminal actions. This too cannot be right. It goes against everything that we at *Existential Analysis* stand for and everything that existentialism stands for.

This has not arisen in a vacuum. It echoes a growing intolerance to particular views in some parts of the world, fuelled by social media that reinforces power and disinformation without responsibility. This has occurred in parallel with some national leaders believing they can intimidate or

threaten individuals, organisations and other states in the knowledge that there will be no sanctions. Universities and other centres of learning are, unfortunately, usually the first to feel this sort of repression. In 1933, the year Heidegger joined the Nazi party and Sartre went to Berlin to study phenomenology, Freud exclaimed, with a remarkable lack of prescience, “What progress we are making. In the Middle Ages they would have burned me. Now they are content with burning my books”. He died before the whole truth was revealed. People who say they are not interested in politics are missing the point: politics is very interested in them and the more interest we take in it the greater the hope for the future can be.

We generally have only the faintest grasp of the ultimate impact, even the meaning, of events we live through as they unfold. It is only afterwards, often many decades after, that we start to understand their impact. We know this both personally and politically. Nevertheless, existentially we have a responsibility to act in accordance with our system of values. Any alternative is letting ourselves down. We could do worse than to adopt the environmental maxim of ‘think globally, act locally’. Research has found that non-violent protest is more effective than violent protest. The latter is usually, as we know, met with even more violent state repression. It only takes 3.5 percent of a population to protest non-violently in order that authoritarian regimes back down. Of course, this 3.5 percent has to be backed up by a tacit agreement from many more and also be consistent in its aims and actions. Splits only play into the hands of authoritarian leaders. This is the power of the individual and George Eliot in *Middlemarch* reminds us of this. She says of Dorothea Casaubon, the main female protagonist of her novel:

But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

Both existentialism and phenomenology have always been about the relationship of the person to the world, in the world, and the Existential Movement was formed in 2023 at least in part to promote existential ideas in the wider world. We are, then, delighted to be able to include nine papers in this issue that are based on presentations given at the Existential Movement’s inaugural conference held online in February 2025. Each presenter takes their inspiration from the Conference title ‘Into the Wild Woods: Existential Responses to Turbulent Times’. As the Conference publicity states, each of us is currently confronted with the very serious existential challenges of the climate emergency, social division and unrest, and the pervasive

threat of global war. This crisis reverberates in our personal lives in numerous profound ways, and it can feel as though we are lost in the Wild Woods as we are confronted with previously hidden threats and fears, and lose our usual sources of solace and sanctuary. The directions taken by each author are different, but each offers a creative engagement with turbulence, and a sense of how an existential approach can help us, and our clients, make sense of and navigate these turbulent times rather than attempt to evade them or lapse into passivity and hopelessness.

Further papers engage with a very wide variety of topics, including a phenomenological enquiry into the concept of 'home', the potential for renewal through resolute engagement with uncertainty and difference, and communication styles in the context of couples therapy. A penultimate paper, authored by Anna Kourtis, is based on a presentation given at the 5th European Conference for Existential Therapy which was convened in Istanbul in May 2024. It explores the tragicomic nature of human existence, emphasising the interplay between rupture and repair within life's unpredictable narrative, and within the therapeutic encounter. Our last paper, by Prof Digby Tantam, is on Lou Andreas-Salomé, an often overlooked existential thinker. We hope that this might herald a series of papers on female thinkers whose contribution to existential theory and practice merits greater attention.

As usual, we conclude with a selection of book reviews which go beyond a mere description of a text and, in their richness and comprehensiveness, constitute academic papers in themselves.

Prof Simon du Plock
Dr Martin Adams