

EDITORIAL

We have come a long way in a comparatively short time since 1992, two years before the first *Existential Analysis*, when Francis Fukuyama announced the end of history. His work and especially this phrase has been debated since then and is frequently misunderstood. He was writing in the heady days of the dismantling of the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union and the potential establishment of cooperative liberal democracy as a world model of government.

He suggested that eventually the principle of liberal democracy would become established across the world, albeit in local forms. There would be no other form of government that could supersede it. While in some ways his thesis can be said to be naive and US/European centric, in one other conclusion he was in agreement with Nietzsche. As we know, Nietzsche was not a fan of nineteenth-century post-Enlightenment egalitarian democracy because he saw it as fostering a disabling desire for comfort.

He said a post-Christian technocracy, which we are now in, would be like a non-secular religion that would celebrate the mundane, facilitate the development of the ‘last man’ and mitigate any aspiration towards the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche would have had little time for the contemporary comforts of liberal democracy and the distractions of consumerism that together conspire to prevent any serious consideration of the existential truths that we are thrown into. Shopping malls are our cathedrals.

However, with some prescience, Fukuyama also warned that advances in technology and consequent increases in economic inequality would inevitably bring substantial challenges that have to be met and countered if human freedom is to flourish. Freedom is a natural human quality and as Simone de Beauvoir said, “To will oneself free is also to will others free”. My primary responsibility is towards the facilitation of freedom and I am not free if my brother or sister are not free. More significantly though, freedom has to be fought for, it will not happen by itself, it is a constant struggle, human agency is the driver and the real danger is complacency.

Wisely, Fukuyama did not put a time scale on when liberal democracy would become widespread but a look around the world tells us that it will not be any time soon. In fact, there is now less than there was in 1992. Wealth inequality is growing with the top ten percent of adults holding roughly 75 to 85 percent of all global household wealth, while the bottom half holds just one to two percent. Totalitarianism, corruption and imperialism has returned to the former Soviet Union and confected divisions are common in many liberal democratic countries.

While freedom is an ontological given, an inevitable visible consequence

of totalitarianism and its younger sibling populism is the curtailing of individual freedom, and by extension individualism. It is indeed curious that a movement that can claim to support and promote individual freedom – populism – can do so much to reduce it.

It is not new. George Orwell called it doublethink. It is when a population, and it is always a cultural phenomenon, holds two conflicting beliefs as truth which are at odds with the members own personal truths. Its effect and intention is mystification and the curtailing of critical reflection and dialectical reasoning. It is the opposite of Keat's negative capability when two or more ideas can be held such that something new can arise.

In totalitarianism and populism, power is passed, entrusted, to leaders who initially pose as persecuted rescuers but then become exploiting persecutors and then imagine it is them who is powerful. This is existential plagiarism. All are complicit, freedom is ontological, it can never be removed, only denied in bad faith. The powerful are always aware of their weakness, their mortality, they know how much they have to lose.

Hannah Arendt said totalitarianism works by leaving the individual no independent space and this is why such regimes come for artists and the human sciences first. The subversive power of phenomenology is that it is founded on the simple fact that perspective is always based in temporality and relative to viewpoint. Kierkegaard reminds us not just that life must be understood backwards but that it must be lived forwards. Since we are always in flux, this existential fact means life can never really be fully understood by those alive because at no particular moment is there a fixed vantage point. We always see things from where and when we are. It is constantly changing. It is never absolute or fixed.

Montesquieu noted in 1748, forty years before the French Revolution, that "the deterioration of every government begins with the decay of the principle upon which it was founded", and commenting on this decay Arendt also said that any ideology can become totalitarian, all that needs to happen is that it be reduced to a single simplistic idea (for example 'take back control' or 'make [...] great again') backed up by a denial of temporality buoyed up by a bogus myth of nostalgia that draws power from the idea that a return to the past is the only way to approach a perpetually uncertain future, and that the single simplistic idea has always been anchored in the traditions of the so-called dominant culture. This is then enforced by fear and terror manifested on a scale from prejudice, cancellation and lies, to imprisonment and death. Climate change denial is one particular way that denial of temporality manifests. Ronald Reagan, in his inaugural speech as Governor of California in 1967, said with some prescience and knowledge of history, "Freedom is a fragile thing and it's never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by way of inheritance; it must be fought

for and defended constantly by each generation”.

Another practical consequence of totalitarianism and populism is the restriction of a free and independent press. With the rise of totalitarianism as a cultural as well as a state-sponsored phenomenon, attacks of various sorts on journalists, writers and editors are growing. At its most extreme, opponents of the truth simply kill their enemies. In 2025, 129 journalists and media workers were killed. That is the highest figure since the Committee to Protect Journalists began collecting data more than thirty years ago. Fifty-four of those killed were Palestinian journalists in Gaza. Meanwhile, the tech owners of information outlets of all sorts design addictive algorithms that maximise their influence at everyone else's cost. Editorial independence is undermined in the name of the single dominant ideology and one of the most significant of these attacks is that of the flow of misinformation that is controlled and disseminated by phenomenally wealthy individuals and institutions, not all governmental, whose sole objective is to increase their own wealth and influence. This power can lead some of these people to see themselves as special and as somehow immortal and somehow outside everyday temporality. Sartre reminds us that a life is only complete on death and therefore that no one can decide on their legacy while they are alive. When someone dies, their freedom also dies and it is up to those still alive to decide how the person will be remembered. The lessons of history tell us that the moment an individual rewards themselves with a material legacy marker – for example a statue, prize or a currency – is the point to no return. In Jungian terms he (and it is usually a ‘he’) sees himself as an immortal, an archetype, not as a fallible mortal. This is psychosis. And also that it never ends well. Pride always comes before a fall and although it can only end badly for the leader, it may end well for everyone else...but this is never guaranteed.

Which brings us inevitably to football.

Although Camus's hopes of being a footballer, principally a goalkeeper for Algiers Racing University (RUA) stopped when he contracted TB, its influence informed the rest of his life. Returning to Algiers to escape the publicity after having been awarded the Nobel Prize, he was delighted when a taxi driver recognised him not as a famous writer, but as the former RUA goalkeeper.

Interviewed in his fifties he said, “After many years during which I saw many things, what I know most surely about morality and the duty of man I owe to sport and learned it with RUA”. He felt that the embodied-in-the-moment struggle of playing a football match reveals people to themselves. For Camus, complete freedom is an illusion; all freedom is contextual, and the context is the rules of the game. In football, each player has the freedom to express themselves towards the communal aim – the team

winning the game. But inasmuch as freedom is about responsibility, the footballer knows instantly what the consequences of his actions are and he has to take responsibility for them. No one else kicks the ball for you. No one else can be blamed. These are as much the rules of life as they are the rules of football. Playing football strips away our everyday pretences and tendencies to narcissism and demands instead that we generate an almost telepathic trust with our teammates such that we transcend the duality of either /or and become simultaneously both individuals and also a member of a group, operating as one. When this happens, something quite magical occurs. This is why we watch football and other team games. Like all life-changing experiences it is rare and because of this it is something we all strive for. Also, in order for the match to happen at all, both teams need to have a respect for each other and for the physical, spatial and moral context of the game. As soon as someone plays outside the rules they take whatever sanctions apply. No one, but no one, is above the rules of the game. Cheating, reversal of the officials' decisions is an existential crime. It benefits no one and will likely come back to haunt the cheater.

Last but not least, ultimately a game of football is absurd. In the scale of things, it really doesn't matter who wins, it's a game.

Maybe it is an almost natural human conceit to see every moment as being the end of time because what happens next is obviously always unknown. Although this does not stop us thinking about it and making predictions based on limited knowledge and a personal mix of optimism and pessimism.

What matters is the game; that is, the way we are with each other. Not who won. As in football, so in life.

Turning to the current issue of the Journal, we were saddened to learn of the death in April of Professor Rimas Kočiūnas. Rimas was a champion of existential therapy in Eastern Europe and for many years served as a member of our Editorial Board. We are grateful to be able to include three appreciations of him, one co-authored by Paulius Skruibis, Professor of Psychology at Vilnius University. Paulius has joined our Editorial Board, together with Dr Xuefu Wang, and Dr Evgenia Georganda, who will be known to readers as founders of existential training schools and leading exponents of this approach in China and Greece, respectively.

With regard to content we find that, as usual, contributors address a wide range of topics of relevance to existential-phenomenological theory and therapeutic practice. We open with the paper 'Psychophobia: How does it come into our practice and how might we reduce its impact?', authored by Professor Carla Willig and Dr Anna Vincent, and based on their presentation at the 2025 Society for Existential Analysis Annual Conference. This is followed by papers on subjects as diverse as exercise addiction, the relationship between Christian eschatology and existential

therapy, and Sartre's 'Look', considered through the writer's lived experience of squint.

Dr Irina Valentin and Dr Eleonora Ramsby Herrera discuss aspects of working therapeutically with trauma in papers which have important implications for clinical practice. Dr Jim Palmer proposes a concept of 'existential health' which he argues is "a public good essential for navigating twenty-first-century crises". Dr Michael Montgomery reimagines the story of Icarus as a lens to explore the complexities of psychosis and the therapeutic encounter.

On a different note, Claire Phoenix's 'Lou Andreas-Salomé (1861-1937): Fictional writings' continues the discussion of this important writer that was begun by Prof Digby Tantum in *Existential Analysis* 36.2, while Prof George Berguno, in his paper, illustrates how Gabriel Marcel's existential philosophy can be employed to understand film narratives.

We are pleased to include Andreas Ioannou's paper exploring the developmental perspectives of John Bowlby and Martin Adams; as ever we invite doctoral researchers to submit papers to the Journal so that readers have the opportunity to keep abreast of current research in our field.

Finally, we are delighted to be able to publish a very moving paper The Twelve-Day War Experience: A phenomenological-existential reappraisal submitted by Dr Rezgar Mohammadi from Islamic Azad University, Tehran, who describes himself as "a certified and self-taught phenomenological-existential psychotherapist."

As always, we conclude with a number of book reviews which reflect not only the range but the skills of the reviewers to do more than merely provide a summary of the texts in question. In the depth of their exploration and analysis they resemble scholarly papers in their own right.

Prof Simon du Plock
Dr Martin Adams