

Cicero wrote:

Litterarum studia adolescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, in adversis (rebus) solacium praebent

The cultural studies nourish youth, brings joy in old age, enriches our future lives, and offers comfort in times of difficulty.

So, let us rejoice! I'm rejoicing, and I believe that some of you who, like me, are no longer so young are rejoicing too.

As many of you will be aware, the purpose of this conference – organized by the Scuola di Psicoterapia neoEsistenziale of the Istituto di Scienze Umane ed Esistenziali, together with the Federation for Existential Therapy in Europe – is to stimulate a renewed discussion on the training paths of young professionals and the need for psychotherapists to keep up to date.

Reflecting on the theme of our meeting, I identified a few issues among many that I believe should be addressed in our discussion. I now propose them to you, in no particular order, as a kind of brainstorming.

- 1) In the global landscape of psychotherapies, Cognitive Behavioral Therapies (CBT) dominate in terms of popularity. Their history tells us how the need arose to combine cognitive work with early behavioral techniques. For this reason, the word “cognitive” is already part of their name. As a result, many clients, and even many experts, are led to believe that only psychotherapies following this approach deal with the cognitive sphere. But is that really the case? On the contrary, I believe that very few psychotherapies are truly “non-cognitive,” and existential psychotherapy certainly is not among them.
- 2) The basis of our psychological approach is that branch of philosophy known as defined as “existential”, that is, the radical thought that, through anthropo-phenomenological reflection, arrives at the philosophy of existence. But does this philosophy truly align with the current pragmatics of existential therapy in the world? I notice many overflows or slippages from this ideal foundation.
- 3) Our model, as we know, doesn't pursue deterministic psychologies. However, it cannot ignore the evolutionary capacity of the human mind. Will the comparison with neurosciences, whose theories sometimes seem to me, more enchanted by fantasy than committed to scientific rigor, be able to explain when and why the evolutionary process led to the emergence of noesis in human animals? Will it help us understand the appearance of the capacities of meta-consciousness and the capacity for creative sublimation?
- 4) In light of the many questions and reflections on our therapeutic approach, as outlined in the collective work many of us contributed to a decade ago under

the guidance of Stephen Diamond, would it not be more appropriate to define our therapy as “esistentiell” rather than “existential”? Here, the Italian terms help us better emphasize the difference between the two adjectives. The existential/esistentiell dichotomy sounds like this in Italian: esistenziale/esistentivo.

All these considerations I leave to the dialogue we will have in the coming days. In short, I believe that the hallmark of our training – the legacy we pass on to our trainees – is our “mental attitude”, the attitude that enables us, as existential psychotherapists, to stimulate the autonomous self-reconditioning of the client (ricondizionamento autonomo), as Ferdinando Brancaleone suggests. But is it not a paradox to stimulate another’s autonomy? Is this not a kind of oxymoron? Not for our approach: the one who stimulates is not the therapist or the consultant, and the self-reconditioning does not belong to the client/ patient/ consultant, rather both the stimulus and the autonomous self-reconditioning live within and belong to the dialogue itself, that is the true phenomenological-existential "actor", that "breathing together" as described by Ernesto Spinelli.

Because of this peculiarity, because of the mental attitude that characterizes our training, I feel justified in considering existential – or rather, esistentiell – therapy not just as one form of psychotherapy among many, but as a true METAPSYCHOTHERAPY.

Precisely because of its formative role, it appears necessary for all those who encounter others at critical moments in their existence and strive, through dialogue, to help them.

The mission of this conference is to validate this formative role of existential therapy: a meta-psychotherapy freely open to all— psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors at various levels, educators, nurses, social workers, coaches... I apologize to those I have not mentioned, but many professionals could benefit from this training!

32 years ago, James Hillman and Michael Ventura published a book entitled ***We’ve Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy – and the World’s Getting Worse***. As we approach 150 years of psychotherapy, it doesn’t seem to me that the world is getting much better and I don’t believe that any psychotherapy, including the one we’re discussing here, can stem “the negative liquidity” in our world.

I can only hope that existential therapy and us as existential therapists will help each and every person to fall deeply in love with life.