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**Title**

Perspective and Critical Thinking About Existential Psychotherapy

**Abstract for**

Short Communication

**Abstract**

Perspective is an optical, spatial, metaphor that can help us think critically about existential psychotherapy. I will describe several forms of perspective: 1. Nietzsche's critical perspective, or what Ricoeur called "methodological disillusionment." 2. Otto Rank's concern about the influence of ideologies on psychotherapeutic practice. 3. The importance of ironic perspective on ourselves, & 4. The notion that wisdom is acting from a meta-perspective.

Nietzsche is known for self-awareness and self-criticism, a relentless perspective on himself. As the first psychologist, his efforts were intimidating to Freud, who denied his influence. Ricoeur describes Nietzsche's "pitiless taste for unmasking the moral and spiritual falsehoods on which our culture is built," and uncovering a "powerful and wily instinct for dissimulation...at the center of human existence" (1967, p 207). Nietzsche reveals unquestioned assumptions underlying our beliefs, that a critical phenomenology must take into account. As he says, "...the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own perspectives, and only in these. We cannot look around our own corner." (1974, p. 336)

Otto Rank is the psychologist who, beginning in the nineteen-twenties, and influenced by his reading of Nietzsche, began questioning the method in which he had trained: psychoanalysis. He thought psychoanalysis, as practiced by Freud and his closest associates, had become ideological. With the unique perspective of an insider become outsider, Rank cautioned that ideologies are entrenched and tenaciously held beliefs to which individuals or groups become committed. The current ideology is the prevalent belief system, the background against which we think, the unconscious values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and habits of mind and heart we have taken for granted, that constrain our vision of what is possible. But we may realize we have been thinking in a way we assumed was the only way. For Rank, being-in-relationship with another, as experienced in therapy, provides a way beyond one's ruling ideologies—the lack of perspective that prevents intimacy and obscures the richness and diversity of human interactions. It is a new experience in psychotherapy when one discovers it is possible to withdraw projections and release identifications, allowing a real relationship to form between therapist and client.

Ironic perspective is artistic distance that encourages us not to take ourselves too seriously. It is important to be able to laugh at ourselves, because, as Nietzsche again notes, "we must occasionally find pleasure in our folly, or we cannot continue to find pleasure in our wisdom."

Finally, regarding the conference theme, the systematic study of wisdom, as part of the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm, reveals that meta-perspective, the ability to view from a distance and see the multiple dimensions of a situation, is a critical component of wisdom.

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