

THE PLAY OF UNCONDITIONED PRESENCE IN EXISTENTIAL-INTEGRATIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY

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ABSTRACT: Psychology has been bedeviled by dualistic thought since its inception. Although Existential Philosophy is a principal intellectual inspiration of Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychologies, the challenge it poses of understanding human nature by undercutting the subject-object split has yet to be fully taken to heart. This article reviews the principal elements of the Existential-Integrative approach to psychotherapy and sharpens its focus, informed by both Existential and Buddhist understanding, according to the nondual potentiality, or play, of empty-openness (*sunyata*), the elusive heart of experientially-keyed psychotherapy. In this discussion, a distinction will be made between a threshold therapeutic presence of mindfulness and a more saturated, unconditioned presence.

Psychotherapy is not a learning to adjust; it is a facing of infinite un-adjustability.

—James F.T. Bugental

Going beyond thought is open to all of us in so far as the mystery of life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to experience.

—Alan Watts

In 1958, during first light of what was to be the dawn of Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychologies, Rollo May introduced the radical thought of Existential-Phenomenology to American psychology. He wrote, “***Existentialism, in short, is the endeavor to understand man by cutting below the cleavage between subject and object which has bedeviled Western thought and science since shortly after the Renaissance...***[this has been called] the cancer of all psychology up to now... the cancer of the doctrine of subject-object cleavage of the world” (p. 11, emphasis added in original). The “disease” of dualistic thought, bedeviling psychology since its inception, bedevils us still. The Buddha and mystics of many stripes join the Existentialists in identifying dualistic vision as the fundamental mental disease of all time, the basic misperception upon which all other confusion, anxieties and depressions depend.¹ Within the corpus of Western philosophy, Existential thought succeeds most clearly in identifying this basic problem and in envisioning nondual alternatives.² However, this radical thought has proved so foreign to the Western worldview and poses such a profound challenge to our modern

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idolatry of the self, that it has remained dormant at the edges of psychological thought these many decades, beckoning, but not taken to heart. It is high time we blow the dust off of this penetrating insight, take it seriously (which means experientially discovering if it is true), and fold it into therapeutic thought and practice.

A large part of the difficulty integrating a nondual existential sensibility into the art of psychotherapy lies with Existential Philosophy itself. As philosophy proper, it does not provide a way of putting its own profound thought into practice. Even though an enduring impetus of philosophy, as Aristotle suggested, is to rediscover an originary sense of wonder, when it is limited to conceptual theorizing alone, philosophy is not well able to induce a non-conceptual, *felt experience* of awe. At its most psychotherapeutic, philosophy promotes critical thinking in the direction advocated by Socrates: engaging in inquiry in order to better “know thyself.” Applied philosophy is at its therapeutic best when it aims at self-knowledge practiced as reflection on the tacit assumptions of one’s self and world constructs. The result of disciplined self-reflection is that one can come to recognize irrational, unconscious or self-limiting beliefs and so change that view to one more reasonable and inclusive. This kind of critical thinking is not to be underestimated, as it can have far-reaching effects for coming to a less confused/more conscious understanding of self and world. Still, as John Welwood (2000a) points out, conceptual self-reflection remains a function of dualistic thought and is not yet an awakening to non-conceptual wisdom (*jnana*) such as was taught by the Buddha.

Accepting the existential challenge of undercutting dualistic experience requires more than self-reflection alone. The leap from seeing things more clearly to actually living according to that clearer vision is typically fraught with resistance. Even though I want to be less anxious or depressed or more compassionate or happy in any number of ways, there remain inner forces that resist such change. This, of course, is the *raison d’être* of both psychotherapy and meditation practice. It is not enough to have a nondual view, as does Existential philosophy and Buddhadharma; we must engage in some sort of inner “work” in order to realize that vision. Realization requires an experiential *path* to aid us in its embodiment. Since Existential philosophy lacks a set of practices for embodying its wisdom, it is “all wind and no sail.” Alternatively, psychology has an able set of practices for working with resistances, but its therapies are “bedeviled” by dualistic thought, a way of seeing which misunderstands, and in misunderstanding, both underestimates and obscures the authentic, empty-open (*sunya*) nature of human *being*. Based on a worldview that conceives of an isolated self separate from its world, contemporary psychology (with notable exceptions such as Transpersonal, Cybernetic, and Phenomenological Psychologies) has not yet learned the nondual lesson or accepted its challenge. Psychology does not yet know how to dependably set its sails to catch the playful wind of unconditional awareness that is, “essential to psychological health” (Welwood, 2000b, p. 137).

There are two general ways to reset psychology's sails. On the one hand, it is possible – if one has discovered the possibility - to begin immediately within the unconditional presence of “beginner's mind,” a mind empty-open, unfettered by dualistic assumptions and emotional fixations attached to concepts of I and not I. This nongradual approach begins at a beginning which is also the end of confusion, the goal of the Buddha's path of liberation. Without succumbing to the separation of an inner “I” separate from an external “Other,” problems and resistances pertaining to a separate self do not arise. When we are thus present, there is no need to do any work of psychotherapy, or for that matter, of meditation. Unfortunately, the inevitable problem with being open, opened, and opening in the world, is that it is notoriously difficult to sustain a naked presence, as undigested emotional compulsions, persistent conceptual fixations and a general “nostalgia for *samsara*” (as Trungpa observed, quoted in Chodron, 1997, p. 68) tend to yank us back into the suffering of dualistic experience to which we have become habituated.

On the other hand, in a process of gradual unfolding we begin as we find ourselves, in the middle and muddle of our confusion, confronting inner conflicts while we are in their grip, and by dint of effort gradually work through dense resistances to more subtle holdings, arriving eventually on an unconditioned threshold of wonder. Undistracted and feeling-saturated, we might then let go – abandoning the effort to change - into the gaps between thoughts, into the suchness of *being (tathata)*, in which even subtle fixations and resistances dissolve spontaneously. In the Dzogchen tradition, such natural release is called “self-liberation” (*rangdrol*). This does not refer to the liberation of a “self”, but to the effortlessness of fixations liberating themselves. This is a more precise explication (and reveals the more radical potential) of what in the Existential tradition is understood as *authenticity*. In its strong sense, Jim Bugental (1965) notes, “*authenticity amounts to [nothing less than] the resolution of the subject-object split, the self-world dichotomy.*” He then adds, “As one approaches the stage of letting go to the suchness of *being* without striving against it, one is attaining to full authenticity” (p. 33, my emphasis). Jim describes the goal of intensive psychotherapy as being a “search for” and “approach to” authenticity, rather than an attainment of any particular (authentic) state of being. In this, he announces the true heart of any existentially-rigorous psychotherapy, as well as its indelible paradox: authenticity is no-thing that can be attained, yet without attaining to it, authenticity cannot be found.

This article adheres to a *gradual* approach to psychotherapy, except when it does not. Situated within the Existential-Integrative Model, therapy is understood as a graduated search for authenticity. At the same time, it is recognized that authenticity cannot be found, and, that the recognition of this non-finding is itself the immediate, *non-gradual* finding of authentic presence.

A WORD TO THE WARY

I know there are those among us who are confused by or skeptical of this “nondual” business, who may not experientially know what “unconditioned presence” refers to, and want to know what this “non-”, or “un-”, looks like and how it might be described phenomenologically. This desire for a clear and distinct description is completely reasonable. It is also next to impossible. The authentic nature of human *being*, whether articulated by Heidegger as *dasein*, or by the Buddha as *sunyata*, is not a “phenomenon” and does not exist in the phenomenal world. (Unconditional presence is neither an “ontic existent” in Heidegger’s philosophy nor a “*dharmā*” in Buddhist psychology.) Neither does it exist outside or beyond the phenomenal world. Ineffable, unconditioned presence is not any thing, object or noema that an observing subject can ever adequately describe. Even the Buddha could not find words for it. How much more inadequate must my own attempts be? However, this is very good news: it is precisely because human nature is not bound within the (dualistic) limitations of discursive thought and language that it is able to be inherently liberating. If this sounds perplexing, that may be because it *is* perplexing to conceptual thinking that separates perceivable objects from a perceiving subject. In order to shift from a *gradual* approach to knowledge that remains firmly within the constructs and subject-object dichotomy of discursive thought to a *nongradual* actuality that is non-conceptual and already free of self-limitations, a leap of recognition is required that is beyond the comprehension of conceptual cognition.

In order to appreciate the distinction between conceptual and non- (or pre-) conceptual cognizance, which is roughly the distinction Heidegger (1959/1966) made between “calculative” and “meditative” thinking, we must somehow find ourselves recognizing unconditioned presence recognizing itself. Some nondual wisdom traditions have specific transmissions conducted between teacher and student to facilitate this leap. For instance, in Zen, this is done in a “whispered lineage,” in Dzogchen through “direct introduction,” and in Advaita Vedanta through the transmission of “self-knowledge” (Fenner, 2003). Of course, psychotherapy does not (yet) belong to these traditions and has not (yet) developed comparable skillful means. But this is not necessarily a problem. Since the authentic nature of human *being* is already unconditionally open, flashes of recognition can and do occur outside of formal teaching lineages at any time. Glimpses of the unconditioned radiance of *being* occur spontaneously in orgasm, while out in nature, in times of deep tranquility and in other surprising moments. Might it not also be possible, within the intimate exchanges of psychotherapy, for a therapist suitably trained and a client suitably prepared, to allow for face to face recognition of the unconditioned nature of their conversation when no-thingness becomes apparent? To allow that is, for a goal of therapy to not be limited to the resolution of problems or the cultivation of insights, but also for the recognition, wonder, and inhabitation of unconditional presence.

Once recognized, whether through a client’s spiritual practice or otherwise, why could a course of therapy not be at least partially devoted to the

strengthening of that person's capacity to embody such presence, particularly in the face of disturbing emotional upwellings and subtle egoic fixations? For those attracted to nondual teachings, and who are already practitioners on a spiritual path, the big challenge is not that of having a glimpse of nothingness, but of embodying the nakedness of this knowledge in the throes of daily life.

THE EXISTENTIAL-INTEGRATIVE MODEL

While there have been a number of attempts to weave nondual sensibilities into the practice of psychotherapy, whether from within Psychoanalysis, Transpersonal, Humanistic or Existential Psychology itself, no coherent set of practices has yet emerged that is situated within a view of human *being* that undercuts the subject-object split. Among the more serviceable efforts to link Existential theory to a coherent set of practices is the work of Kirk Schneider (2003, & with May, 1995), who has drawn upon the kindred clinical contributions of master therapists, including James Bugental (1965, 1978), Wilson Van Dusen (1965) and Eugene Gendlin (1962, 1978), combining them into an “Existential-Integrative Model” [E-I].

The E-I model considers the essential practice of psychotherapy to be an *inward search process* (Bugental, 1978) combining four general elements. As an experience-near inquiry, this process involves the activation of “*ontological attention*” (Schneider & May, 1995, p. 152), which is akin to the kind of attention which Freud (1912) described as “evenly suspended”, or which Husserl (1931/1962) described as phenomenological. The practical purpose of such attention is to relax the fixity of dualistic thinking so to encounter others as they are, rather than as we interpret – and misinterpret - them through our own opinions, expectations and clinical theories. As a therapist gives way to a more relaxed, open presencing, this influences the intersubjective field in the direction of evoking authenticity. This “giving way” is not only an attuning to unconscious *contents* which have been repressed, it is also an attuning to the *something more, or not yet*, authentic potentiality of the client, which cannot be found in repressed contents. Such therapy is, “Beyond *repairing...wounds.*” (Schneider & May, 1995, p. 152) Schneider has identified the key elements of the E-I approach as, **(a) cultivating therapeutic presence, (b) invoking the actual, (c) working through resistance, and (d) the search for meaning.** To these, should be added a fifth element, recognizing *authenticity as the play of unconditioned presence*: the empty-open ground of *being* in which each of the four elements are rooted as well as the fully mature goal of the inward search process.³

It is possible to consider the elements of E-I Therapy sequentially, as steps in a gradually deepening therapeutic process, or as I prefer, inter-dependently, as a *mandala* of mutually interacting skillful means. These elements bear review, as they have not received the breadth of circulation they deserve.

The emphasis on *being* is the single most defining characteristic of Existential Psychotherapy. But what is *being*? As a term, “being” is notoriously slippery, pointing both at existence and at the potentiality of existence. Rollo May (1958) thought that since the word was a simple noun, it inadvertently inferred a misunderstanding of “being” as a static something, thus occluding *being*’s dynamic potentiality. Better, he thought, (p. 41) to speak of *being* as *becoming*, which more accurately conveys the sense of human existence as an on-going process. But “becoming” is also rather obscure. The word “presence,” on the other hand, is more experientially accessible. It is easy to ask, for example, whether or not I am present here in the moment. Thus, it is commonplace in experiential therapies to monitor if the client (and therapist) is attentive to what matters in her life and if she is present to the felt sense of that which she is talking about. Clearly, “being present” is not a specific state; one can be more or less present. Buddhist psychology for example, observes various kinds of presence. For our purposes, a rough distinction can be made between a gathering therapeutic presence focusing on the here and now which requires a deliberate effort of attention and an already gathered, unconditional presence which is effortless.

Typically, people come to psychotherapy feeling in some way overwhelmed, splintered, or disconnected from themselves and/or others. Since any depth therapy seeks to address some sort of estrangement, the cultivation of *therapeutic presence* is the foundation for any existentially-keyed psychotherapy. Minimally, this means that the therapist invites the client into the therapeutic conversation by being undistracted herself and giving the client her undivided attention.

Bugental (1978, 1987) has described presence in terms of an attitude and activity requiring both intention and effort. The therapist “gets present” by collecting himself in a way that calms and clears his mind for an in-the-moment encounter. As he (1978) puts it, “*Presence* is the quality of being in a situation in which one intends to be as aware and as participative as one is able to be at that time and in those circumstances....[It] is being there in body, in emotions, in relating, in thoughts, in every way.” (pp. 36–37) More specifically, therapeutic presence displays the two aspects of *accessibility*, which is “having the intention to allow what happens in a situation to matter, to have an effect on one” and “*expressiveness*...the willingness to put forth some effort...the intent to let oneself be known by [and to dynamically respond to]...the other without distortion or disguise.” (p36) These two general aspects are characterized by specific qualities of relational mindfulness, such as empathic attunement, reflective listening, intuitive understanding, and therapeutic courage (Bradford, 2001).

Bugental (1987) further describes how the various qualities of presence do not exist as fixed states, but are fluid capacities of moment-to-moment experiencing, arising from varying depths of intersubjective communication. Therapeutic dialogue that is not based on conceptual reflection alone, but on

a process of experiential searching, allows for an “evolution of presence” in the direction of deepening intimacy of and between therapist and client. R. D. Laing (1985) was in tune with this approach in describing Existential Psychotherapy as a form of “interpersonal meditation.” Being in the here and now, it is a recalling of both therapist and client from being in some “there and then,” distracted in a mental-emotional construct that is self-contained and self-perpetuating. The intersubjective nature of therapeutic presence as an opening to and with an Other is thoroughly empathic. Yet empathy is but one resonance which arises within a shared presence. As Hart (2000) and Prendergast (2007) have discussed, a deepening empathy allows for increasing permeability of self and other, which may mature into nondual presence and selfless compassion (*karuna*). That conventional therapy has understood the instrumental value of empathy primarily as a means of knowledge about a client does not mean that it appreciates the full reach and range of compassionate co-presence. Informed by Buddhist psychology, further therapeutic qualities of mindful attunement such as equanimity (*upeka*), skillful responsiveness (*upaya*), incisive understanding (*prajna*), joyful contagion (*mudita*) and loving-kindness (*maitri*) might also spontaneously arise.

Being open and in the moment with an Other is already a therapeutic “intervention” because it tends to break down the sense of isolation of a separate, estranged selfhood. In this sense, the cultivation of presence is both the ground and, once fully inhabited, the ultimate goal of psychotherapy. Still, it is useful to identify the elements of *inward searching* in greater detail in order to differentiate a threshold therapeutic attention, involving the effort of mindfulness, from a more saturated presence which is effortless and naturally resilient.

INVOKING THE ACTUAL

Being present in the moment, the inward search process proceeds by *invoking the actual*. As Van Dusen (1965) observes, “Words and symbols are lifeless unless they choke up, frighten, bring tears or alert like the actually numinous” (p. 67). Although the therapist may succeed in cultivating an accessible, expressive presence, this does not mean that the client is so attuned. To facilitate a client’s self-attunement in such a way that he is not merely treading the water of conceptual reflection, it may be necessary to deepen his immersion in felt experiencing by directing his attention to his embodied actuality. Of course, care must be taken to monitor the client’s readiness to do so. That is, it is important to notice when he is neither too rigid nor too terrified to shift from emotional venting and conceptual ruminating to a more “in touch” experiential presence .

In psychoanalytic terms, we would note the obvious: that “unconscious organizing principles” are found nowhere else than in the here and now subjectivity of the subject. The repetitive, habitual organization of unconscious structure is rooted not in an experience-distant dimension of cognitive reflection, but in the palpably near fear and confusion of embodied, *pre-reflective* experiencing. Especially in the often superficial and dehumanizing

world in which we dwell and through which we come to know ourselves, it usually takes deliberate effort to turn and face our raw experience. Rather than being satisfied with conceptual reflection alone, any course of therapy aspiring to “depth” must engage and invite expression of *felt* actualities. When we touch and are touched by the “thump” of the actual, we have delved under the stories we tell ourselves to the malleable – pre-conceptual - fabric of subjectivity. It is within felt experiencing that we come into direct contact with subjectivity in the making, or unmaking. It is only when we leave the distance of *thinking about* ourselves for *immersion in* the actuality of our subjectivity that we are able to come to deeper terms with the embeddedness of the conflicting emotions that underlie and motivate the particular constrictions of our self and world constructs.

For instance, Brandon was talking about an incident between his wife and him in a kind of rambling monotone, which was a typical manner of speech for him, lacking vitality and making me drowsy.

Ken: Brandon, the way you are telling me this story sounds like a 6 o'clock news report.

Brandon: (continuing in monotone) Oh? Well, I'm just trying to fill you in. I just can't seem to get through to Jill when there's something important to talk about, she doesn't listen or maybe I'm not saying it right or....

Ken: (interrupting) What about right now? Do you feel you are getting through to *me*?

Brandon: (stops and glances at me for a moment, a bit unnerved) I don't know; I wasn't thinking about it.

Ken: I hear the facts of your story just fine but I can't hear if the facts *matter* to you.

Brandon: (monotone breaking up) Well, it does matter. I mean I'm just sick of this distance between me and Jill. I've got to find a way to get through to her (looking me in the eye).

Ken: OK, *now* I get it! This is no small thing, is it?

Brandon: (with real feeling) No, it's huge.

Ken: Brandon, you say that with such conviction; there's no mistaking what you feel now.

Brandon: Huh. That's what Jill keeps asking me for, saying she doesn't know how I feel. Is this a “guys are from Mars” kind of thing?

Ken: Sure. But do you hear the feeling in your voice now? Your words have a lot more of *you* in them.

Brandon: Yea. I feel more energy. Maybe this would help Jill get that I really do care about her.

From ruminating *about* a concern, Brandon came to speak more directly *from* his concern. He got more present as his felt actuality was invoked, and a connection was made between thinking and feeling, reducing that inner split.

WORKING WITH RESISTANCE

As Freud observed almost a century ago, a single occasion of insight rarely results in lasting change. And this is so even when an insight feels like a major breakthrough, since we are not yet habituated to being more opened-up in the world, with others or with ourselves. Although we seek greater freedom and have tasted it, we are still habituated to the old constructs which continue to govern us in spite of ourselves. We both seek freedom and avoid it. The measure of the “depth” of intensive psychotherapy is the extent to which our resistances to change are “worked through.”

“Resistance” has traditionally been understood as the key obstacle to the psychotherapeutic process which the patient needs to overcome. This definition depicts resistance as an undesirable activity with which the therapist needs to do battle and the patient is called to renounce. As James Hillman (1972) wryly observed, this notion of resistance has thus come to resemble a modern psychological “sin.”

Bugental (1965, 1987) (joined by relationally inclined psychoanalysts) reconceived resistance in broader, more complex terms. Understanding resistance as, “the impulse to protect one’s familiar identity and known world against perceived threat” (1987, p. 175), he acknowledges that it has an egological protective function similar to that of the immune system, which by resisting infection protects us physiologically. However, unlike the functioning of the immune system, enduring psychological resistances do not necessarily promote psychological resilience. When resistance to the world, to others and/or to our own experience hardens too much, resilience suffers and we find ourselves living a narrowed existence lacking suppleness. Thus the paradox: resistance serves as a constructive buffer against overwhelming feelings and/or shattering realizations which might swamp a fragile sense of self, thereby serving to constrict openness and responsiveness in the world, leading to a more isolated and fragile sense of self, brittle and easily swamped. Working with resistance behooves us to hold both sides of this dilemma. To one-sidedly advocate either for the lifting of resistance or for supporting resistances as protective self-limitations, is to lose touch with the complex, emergent potentiality of the whole person.

Alternatively, empathically attuning to the felt necessity of a resistant buffer while simultaneously observing the constriction it engenders creates an optimal attitude in which resistance can naturally loosen. Within the choiceless awareness⁴ of ontological attention, neither supporting nor resisting a re-

sistance, the therapist contributes to an opening within the intersubjective field which allows the felt cost-benefit of a constriction to become apparent, and not merely as a conceptual reflection, but as a felt actuality.

Working with resistance proceeds through sustaining subjective immersion during a process of *felt sensing* (Gendlin, 1978). Since reflective self-understanding alone does not seep into the “prereflective unconscious” (Orange, Atwood, & Stolorow, 1997), it will not allow for a thorough release of a fixated self/world construct. This is why, contra psychoanalysis, Existential therapy emphasizes felt experiencing over conceptual understanding. Existentially-oriented work deals less with *what* is resisted, be it an emotion or a belief about oneself, and more with *how* whatever “it” is is being resisted. In this way, the *structure* of subjectivity, the mental-emotional constructs one is living in and through, are worked with directly.

Linda entered therapy calling herself a “packrat,” and sought my help specifically to address her problem with hoarding. She lived in an apartment filled with clutter which packed her shelves, lined her walls, and was piled high on floors and tabletops. She wanted to get rid of the mess, which she felt contributed to her “scattered” mindset. After several weeks of tackling the problem in a cognitive-behavioral approach aimed at getting rid of the stuff, little progress was made. Linda wanted to change very badly, to the point where she was in real anguish about this. But at the same time, she came to see that something in her did not allow her to do so. At this point, I suggested, and she agreed, mostly out of desperation, that we shift the focus of her therapy from the *what* of the clutter and her hoarding behavior to the *how* of her ambivalence toward it. In terms of E-I Therapy, the challenge for Linda was not invoking the actual. She was well able to access and express her feelings, but it was difficult for her to be present to and with her ambivalence. Rather than trying to overcome her resistance, Linda’s therapy shifted to working with it, as the following exchanges display.

Ken: We’ve been trying to get you to change your behavior, but not only is it not working well, it seems to make you feel even worse about yourself.

Linda: Yes. I feel like such a failure (shoulders slumping), its like I just can’t do anything right.

Ken: You can’t do “anything” right? That’s painting with a pretty broad brush, don’t you think?

Linda: Well, it seems like that (a long pause). What do you think I should do?

Ken: Well, rather than get back into what you should or should not do, just now I’m struck with your saying you can’t do anything right. (Focusing on the resistance rather than what is being resisted.)

Linda: (a pause, then with heaviness in her voice) That’s a really old thing. Nothing I did was ever good enough, at least for mother... hardly ever did I

get a kind word or approval from her. My dad was better about that....But I don't ever remember mother hugging us....

Ken: (in a subsequent session) Linda, you are pretty clear about being fed-up with the clutter in your apartment and how it doesn't serve you, yet you continue to keep it around. That has me wondering if there is some way your stuff does serve you.

Linda: (a ponderous silence)

Ken: As we quietly sit here, I have the sense a lot is going on inside you. Is that right? (Linda looks up with a sense of recognition, a hint of hopefulness.)

Linda: I was just thinking that sometimes my stuff feels like it keeps me company. It's kinda comforting somehow. That's pathetic, isn't it?

Ken: Oooo! That's a quick self-judgment.

Linda: Augh. It's so automatic (and she visibly slumps back into a sullen silence).

Ken: Linda, what's happening? It's like the air just came out of you.

Linda: Gees, I'm feeling,...I dunno, like it's stupid to get comfort from things; it's just stuff.

Ken: (interjecting) But it *does* give you comfort.

Linda: (looking up at me) Yes. (more animated now) It feels like home, like being at home.

Ken: Is that OK, to feel comfortable at home?

Linda: Yea, sure. But no, I'm not comfortable living in a mess!

Ken: Except that you are.

Linda: Augh.

Ken: You are *and* you are not, both. Can you let yourself feel the *bothland* of this? (a pause) What is happening on the inside as you sit with all this?

Linda: (a pregnant pause) Sadness. I feel...like I used to as a kid, missing mom, waiting for her to get home. God, (tears well up) I felt so alone, like there was something wrong with me that she wasn't there, and no good...and still feel that way...

(later in the session) I had collections: Barbies and stamps and things, and they made me feel better, I didn't feel so alone.

Ken: Now I better understand why it's not so easy for you just to get rid of stuff. How about you?

Linda: (softer, yet still with difficulty accepting it) Yea. I guess so.

With the focus shifted from the *what* to the *how* of resisting, Linda became more subjectively-present and so more able to inhabit, and so work with, the *way* in which she was participating in her inner conflict. Opening to her ambivalence allowed Linda to become aware of how collecting things had been a viable coping strategy of self-soothing in the absence of a nurturing mother. And, that the soothing it once gave her has turned into an entrapment which is decidedly unsoothing and humiliating. Linda became increasingly able to be with her resistance to change things as well as with her resistance to accept things as they were. Of equal importance to her therapy, is that the same thing could be said of me. Because I initially took the side of her self-improvement project by trying to help her get rid of her clutter, I opposed her hoarding tendencies, and so lent inadvertent support to her self-judgment in that regard. It was only after I recognized my own resistance to her clutter that I was able to suggest an alternative approach.

Working through resistance in this existential sense is not about getting over resistances, but about getting more intimate with them. A working through that leads to the release of a habitual buffer occurs through *being with* that buffer, without trying to change it. In this sense, what is worked through is the paradoxical conviction – and the effort stemming from the conviction - that there is something that needs to be worked through. Trying to change myself (or you), even for the better, is another way of resisting myself (or you) as I (you) am (are). By the same token, *not* trying to change, in being complacent about my (or your) inner conflicts and hidden hypocrisies only sustains the habitual fixation. *Being with* resistances entails being present to both the fear and the exhilaration of being opened more fully in the moment and momentarily dissolves some degree of inner separation. Becoming more patient with implicit complexities without irritably rushing to resolve them is essential to working with resistance in the here and now.

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING AND DIALECTICAL INQUIRY

Working with resistance is typically conducted in the service of insight, as *a search for vital meaning* according to which one can reorient one's life. This is the usual understanding of the search for authenticity: discovering a way to live according to one's inner sense rather than in obedience to or rebellion against the dictates of others.

One remarkable example of tapping the depths of meaning is found in Viktor Frankl's (1963) autobiographical chronicle of his imprisonment in Auschwitz.

There, in the most dehumanizing hell imaginable, where prisoners were stripped of every tangible shred of their identity, where their dignity was denied at every turn and where they were cruelly herded toward death, there seemed to be nothing to live for. Indeed, under such conditions of abject meaninglessness, it is normal to give up hope altogether or to surrender one's dignity in the numbing fight for physical survival. But even in this most desperate situation, Frankl discovered he was still free (as discussed by May, 1981, Ch. 3) to choose his attitude toward this unfree situation. Even in the terror of the concentration camp, Frankl discovered it was possible to exercise freedom and find purpose in life by reflecting on and living in accord with his innermost values. Rather than losing himself, he found himself anew in deciding to practice generosity, simple kindness, and understanding in spite of the hellishness of the prison. Frankl's response was supremely creative: he found meaning where there was none, as well as the courage to put it into practice.

If we understand how to search for vital purpose in life, and can find the courage to live according that purpose, then any life situation can be found meaningful and worth living. Of course, in the conditions of modern life in the first world, we typically find ourselves in an opposite situation from Frankl: our external situation is relatively easy and free, but we can live within an inner concentration camp, suffering all manner of anxieties and depression. Whether we find ourselves in an external or internal prison, the challenge is the same. The search for meaning directs us to look into our subjective reactions to whatever happens to be our objective life circumstance, and to make sense out of what seems to be non-sense.

The search for meaning is thus keyed to subjective inquiry, the nature of which is *dialectical*, moving between conceptual knowing and pre-conceptual felt sensing (Gendlin, 1962, 1973, 1978; Welwood, 2000a). Research on the effectiveness of psychotherapy has found that the capacity of a person to successfully engage in psychotherapy depends on one's ability to engage in this dialectic (Gendlin, 1973, 1978).

Congruent with the E-I privileging of felt sensing, recent relational developments in psychoanalysis (for instance, Mitchell & Aron, 1999; Mitchell, 2000; Orange, Atwood, & Stolorow, 1997.) emphasize the importance of affect theory as they move away from the classical analytic privileging of conscious insight toward more feeling-keyed modes of understanding. Even so, in these developments the accent remains on conceptual understanding and the discovery/construction of meaning. The prime value of empathy in psychoanalysis is to facilitate a felt attunement with the patient *in order to* stimulate the patient's conceptual self-reflection. As Kohut (1984) saw it, empathic "understanding" is in the service of conceptual "explanation"; the enduring goal of psychoanalysis lies on the one-way street of making the unconscious conscious. In contrast to this, the E-I perspective sees therapy as a two-way street, promoting conscious understanding, yes, but not as the ultimate goal. Conceptual reflection, however penetrating the insight, is still a creation of meaning, a mental construction of some kind. And since any construction – mental or physical – is impermanent, it cannot be an end in itself, even though

we may wish to make it so. Any meaningful insight we want to hang onto will slip through our fingers as the vibrant experience that animates it passes. As we close our mind around an insight, we are likely to lose touch with the vibrancy of its felt import, not to mention the empty-openness which allows its arising, finding in its place only a mental construct in the form of a memory.

An unavoidable paradox in the search for meaning is that with greater understanding comes greater mystery. The more we open ourselves, the more we are open to. Indeed, the repressed unconscious may be lifted in such a way that we are free from an old weight. But this increased *lightness of being* can seem, as Milan Kundera noted in his novel of the same name, *unbearable*. With greater freedom comes greater awareness of the unpredictability and unsettledness of existence, and so of our vulnerability in the world. Recognizing the open-endedness of existence, including the knowledge that any self-understanding is only a temporary, limited construct, confirms that there is no place – no final, fixed insight – upon which to stand, and so no escape from, as Keats (1935) famously put it, the “uncertainties, mysteries and doubts” of human being. Perhaps this is what the gifted Nazarene meant as he waxed poetic in the phrase, “the son of man hath nowhere to lay his head.”

The consolation, or adventure, for Existentialists is the recognition that the mystery of *being* is inexhaustible. So, when lightness becomes unbearable, or when it dims, one can search for fresh meaning in felt depths that might reveal clearer and more substantial understandings, in an unending dialectical exchange between knowing and unknowing. This dialectic proceeds in the manner of the “hermeneutic circle.” Unlike a vicious circle, in which repetitive and self-contained “circular thinking” refuses to admit Otherness into its closed narrative, a hermeneutic circle opens to Otherness. It submits to what Heidegger (1977) described as the “essence of truth”: the freedom out of which authentic understanding arises.

The recognition that truth is based on the capacity for emptying and opening oneself is what marks the existential breakthrough dissolving the object-subject split. Rather than seeking truth within the constructs of an objectivized reference system or a self-contained subjectivity, Heidegger (1977) locates truth in an “open region”: the potential space between and encompassing knower and known. The essence of truth is neither objective nor subjective, but an “emerging presence....through which an openness essentially unfolds” (p. 129). Authentic understanding emerges as a play of unconditioned presence, in the to and fro between conceptual knowledge and felt sensing.

The following dialogue is a condensed example of this dialectical search process.⁵

Jackson: There’s something about dealing with this porn addiction that I don’t get. It’s that First Step: accepting that I don’t have the power to overcome it myself and to submit to some higher power. That doesn’t work. I pray to God to help me, but I just can’t stop. How can I stop if I don’t try to? God is not coming through here (a pause, shoulders slump).

Ken: (sincerely concerned) That *is* a dilemma. Take a moment to just be with it and listen inside.

Jack: (after a pause) Here's something: when I'm watching the porn, right at the moment I get off sometimes I see Carol. At that moment it's not about the porn star, its all Carol.

Ken: Really?

Jack: Pretty sad, huh?

Ken: Take your time now, don't try too hard to figure it out. Listen in to your gut to that sadness.

Jack: (sensing within) There's some weird shit between us. When we do finally have sex its just "same old."

Ken: Doesn't sound very robust.

(a dull silence in the room)

Ken: So Jack, when you do make love with Carol, what are you doing?

Jack: That's a good question (some moments pass in what seems to be a fertile silence). I was just imagining having sex with her and then disconnecting, breaking the connection (with a shakiness). That is how I make love with her. Wow. I haven't seen that before.

Ken: Stay with it, you're right on it.

Jack: (a pause) It's not about Carol (feeling flushes his face). God! Its like I don't deserve it.

Ken: (clarifying) You mean the intimacy and connection...

Jack: Yea. I don't allow myself to have it and shut down. And I lose touch with Carol (a pause). No wonder she doesn't want sex: I check out, off in my own head. Like I'm punishing myself or something (face softens, body visibly relaxes) And her too....

A point of clarification is called for at this point. We have been discussing *searching* as a dialectic between thinking and feeling, which makes sense within a psychological frame. But within the larger ontological frame, the dialectic that makes more sense is that between knowing and unknowing. For example, in the above vignette, exchanges between thinking and feeling occur when I encourage Jackson to take time to feel into rather than think about his experience. Both feelings and thoughts are sense datum. Percepts and concepts are things which can be identified: this feeling or that thought; and both are forms of knowing, different though they may be. However, this way of

conceiving of the therapeutic dialectic does not take into account the fundamental openness which allows for either a felt sense or cognitive understanding to arise. A strictly psychological framing lacks (an ontological) appreciation of the *capacity* for thinking and feeling, the *nature* of human being as a fundamentally unobstructed “open region.” In any of the vignettes, notice how it is often the pregnant pauses which allow for an unexpected insight or feeling to emerge. In such gaps, the client is engaged in felt sensing but does not yet have either a specific felt sense or a clear insight. A more inclusive frame of reference takes this fertile *not yet* space into account, conceiving of the dialectical process as occurring between knowing (both felt and conceptual), and vital unknowing (*sunyata*).⁶

The crucial turn in discovering genuine meaning is to appreciate that it will arise from where it is not. A moment of authenticity, as distinct from an effort to redefine, reconstruct and so fix oneself, occurs when one looses and loses oneself, when – in a kind of leap - one releases on a fixed position or an intention to be fixed. Heidegger (1927/1962, Division 2) spoke of such a moment as “being towards death”: a breaking open of self-centeredness. This strong understanding of authenticity refers to an experiencing that is not self-referential, but a *yielding to unconditional liveliness, the ever-renewing source of a meaningful existence*.

PARADOX AND PLAY

While the dialectical search process of E-I Therapy appreciates that any discovery of meaning remains transitory and incomplete, it still tends to subtly privilege the discovery of meaning side of the dialectic over the not-yet discovered side. True to Western psychological tradition, at the end of the day, E-I Therapy wants to “come up with something,” especially some meaningful insight upon which to inspire and/or redirect one’s life. In contrast, Heidegger’s philosophy and Buddhist psychology emphasize “releasing on something” in the spirit of the non-grasping that marks the Buddha’s awakening. Recognizing both the transience of insights and that the enduring cause of anguish comes from clinging to mental-emotional constructs, nondual wisdom privileges the release of fixed meanings, no matter how compelling they are in the moment. Release not into a meaningless nihilism or passive resignation, but into “a freshness in the center of the chest....A spring overflowing its springbox,” as Rumi (1995, p. 178) picturesquely put it.

In noticing that the essence of truth is “unconcealment” (*aletheia*), Heidegger (1977) recognized that revelatory knowing emerges out of a more fundamental concealment. This led him to paradoxically conclude that the essence of truth as clear knowledge belongs to the non-essence of truth as sheer “mystery” (p. 132). This is a paradox that he felt would only be confusing to most people, accustomed as we are to dualistic thinking. But this need be confusing only to the extent we are compelled to resolve paradox rather than develop our capacity for accepting it and the playfulness it invites.

Lest we forget, resolving paradox is not necessarily in the service of enhanced sanity. Winnicott (1971) acutely observed, “The resolution of paradox leads to a defense organization...in the adult” (p. 14). He recognized that the impetus toward resolution can be a defense against the openness of inter-being, or as he put it, “the intermediate area of experience...between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world.” (p. 64) He advises therapeutic exchanges to, “afford opportunity for formless experience, and for creative impulses, motor and sensory, which are the stuff of playing...[since it is the] unintegrated state of the personality” (p. 64) which allows for creativity. Winnicott suggests that a more potent therapy is able to linger in the unresolved and unsettled *potential space between* self and other, this and that, in the *play* in and between knowing and not knowing. He thus emphasizes opening to the mystery of *being* over the discovery of specific meanings.

Looking deeply into a conditioned state of mind, we discover an unconditioned potentiality of experience. Settling into this unsettledness reveals how knowing belongs to unknowing. This marks the dissolution of dialectical inquiry into open-ended paradox. What happens if we allow the play of unconditional presence, groundlessness itself, to serve as the ground of therapeutic conversation?

Near the end of his therapy, Carl, a veteran of the psycho-spiritual self-improvement movement, addressed this question as he spoke about the value he found in strengthening his capacity for being with insecurities, uncertainties, and unintegrated states with unconditional presence. He also speaks to the difficulty of conceptualizing therapeutic exchanges which are non-conceptual.

Carl: My friends ask me what do we do in therapy, and I say I don't know (laughter). They ask, ‘What is Ken's style?’, and (reaching for words) I don't know what to say. I've had a lot of therapies, and when I'd bring up a problem, the therapists would keep asking me to get into it and think about it. So we would chatter on thinking about it, but in a certain way never getting anywhere. I'm finding it's far better with you staying with the simple fact of being caught up, without trying to do anything about it.

....I'm so much more relaxed and at peace in my life through being with you....and me [in this way]. I don't get so caught up in conflicts. Like now, I'm in the middle between two of my publishers who are in a conflict, and they're each trying to get me on their side. In the past, I'd be a wreck with this.

Ken: They want you to take on *their* conflict.

Carl: Yes, but I'm not doing that and it's so much better. I just listen calmly to them and let them handle it (a pause). It's a hell of a lot of fun to live this way! (laughter)

We can now more clearly specify how presence is both the precondition for experientially-keyed therapy as well as its goal. To review: therapeutic

presence, in orienting the work, has a particular focus, a specific concern or problem that is to be addressed. Of course, this focus is “broadband” in that we inquire with the fullness of our *being*: thought, emotion, imagination, and kinesthetic sensibilities, attending closely to felt experience. The hallmark of such therapeutic presence is that the partners are not distracted, but mindful to what is happening here and now. Unconditional presence is just this undistractedness but without the urgency to focus on any particular something.

The key to psychological change is not only that self-knowledge can be liberating, but that we have the innate *capacity* for a way of knowing that is liberating. This human capability is a spring of *natural resilience* (Bradford, 2002): an ever-present and ever-readiness to wake up and release a self-limitation whenever we become present and ready to do so. Resistances and defensive structures *can* be released because their nature is inherently unsettled and impermanent. As mental-emotional constructs, psychological fixations of all kinds arise from and belong to unstructured openness. The lightness of human intelligence can flex, either becoming frozen in a particular fixation or remaining fluid, lucidly aware. Entranced by the apparent solidity of our self and world constructs, we lose touch with the lightness which bears that weight. *Being’s* openness is only felt as unbearable because we are not accustomed to it, habituated as we are to the gravitational field of our consensually supported self/world views. Lightness of being is only unbearable because we cling to the heft of our certitudes, afraid to let go of our familiar, narrowed existence. The beckoning therapeutic challenge is to dare to touch the unconditioned nature of our existence and then to learn to more deeply trust the resilient lucidity of this naked awareness.

Any therapeutic release that goes deeper than conceptual reflection requires at least a moment of unknowing presence, otherwise there is no decisive break in the continuity of the self/world structure. It is through a gap in self-told storylines that a “felt shift” (Gendlin, 1978) occurs, resulting in liberating insight and emotional reorganization. While psychotherapies typically focus on the *what* that emerges through an opened-upness in terms of further developing a meaningful understanding, therapy might also relax into the opened-upness itself which makes possible the momentary lifting of confusion, the releasing of tensions subtle and gross and the discovery of vital meaning. While fixations can seem immutable as we experience ourselves as hopelessly stuck in one way or another, this is because we do not recognize the actual nature of fixations. Although we may be honest enough to recognize that we suffer because of our closed minds and hearts, we have not yet thoroughly explored the nature of this closure. Should we look more deeply into the nature of the enclosed self/world in which we or our client are held, we may find as the Buddha did that this closed-inness is only apparent; a mental-emotional construction which lacks any separate or enduring existence, the nature of which is not closed, but radically open. When appropriate, which is to say, when oneself and one’s partner are present and ready for it, the incredible lightness of being can be acknowledged and more fully inhabited. Although the potentiality for nondual experiencing is the true meaning of authenticity and part of the Existential intellectual heritage, its practical application has remained largely beyond the

scope of psychotherapy. That scope could be extended, however, to the degree that therapists and clients are prepared to do so.

Just as the double goal of E-I Therapy is to address a client's presenting problem like any other psychotherapy, as well as to teach the skill of inward searching that a client can apply to subsequent life problems post-therapy, a third goal is to facilitate a client becoming more familiar with their *ground of being* in its groundless, unsettled, open-endedness. In a therapy informed by this possibility, there is neither the urgency to create meaning nor an evasion of meaninglessness, insecurities, etc. Instead, therapy is emboldened to focus both on the propensities for becoming fixated as well as to relax into the potentiality for being unfixated. Sharing moments of unconditional presence, beyond mental constructs yet with the mind resting wakeful and emotionally alert, the "work" of therapy proceeds effortlessly. As an open-ended play of presence, therapy repeatedly comes to no thing. As fears or hopes arise, wrenching client or therapist this way or that, therapeutic exchanges may become that of noticing the distraction and the kind of hold it has on us, relaxing (into) the fear or hope, rediscovering that at bottom "it," whatever "it" is, is insubstantial, leaving us again empty-open. Repeated inquiry of this kind allows for a working through in the most profound sense: a working through of the dualistic vision in which we are perpetually entranced.

Matilda had spent many years avidly working on herself in both psycho- and somatic therapies, as well as being a *vipassana* meditation student who was introduced to the nondual teachings of both Zen and Advaita Vedanta. An important thread in her therapy was in addressing her dilemma as to whether she is truly incomplete, inadequate, and neurotic, thus in need of therapy and meditation to remedy her flaws (the dualistic assessment), or, if she is complete as she is, flaws and all (a nondual assessment), and so challenged to release on her personal "enlightenment project." At the time of the following exchange, she had recently completed a master's degree in Clinical Social Work and was beginning to work as a death, dying, and grief counselor. Gazing out of the picture window in my office, which opens onto a treescape, she began a session as follows.

Matilda: The trees are just where they should be,...the light today is strange and perfect. Like a sandtray or Japanese garden: everything is in its place.

Ken: ah...mmm... (I think to myself, "mahamudra," then let this thought dissolve... I am not certain what her actual experience is, but I choose not to obscure the delightful empty-openness of my own experiencing and whatever influence this spaciousness may exert on the intersubjective field....a shared silence, then, noticing her face is flushed, and without any intention in mind, I speak.) There's a lot going on for you.

Mattie: I'm kinda disoriented after the week of [counseling] training. It's like I'm overwhelmed with the effort and intensity. It's been so much about doing the correct procedure, like suicide assessment and intervention, learning the regulations, how to do case notes; so boring and accomplish-

ment-focused. But (brightening) there was a presentation yesterday where this guy, Dr. S., read some poetry which reconnected me to the reason for my doing this whole thing.

Ken: (after a pause) A complexity.

Mattie: Yes, that's the word...I'm trying to master the complexity. I'd like to let things be, but it's like a compulsion comes over me to master and understand everything.

Ken: You're minding your own business when this old thing comes over you.

Mattie: About 60% of the time. (Her face visibly tenses.)

Ken: It's here just now, the struggle to master something, isn't it?

Mattie: (her face flushes) I am so moved by being a "counselor." That these strangers would come and open themselves to a perfect stranger. Just give me the keys to their house!

Ken: Placing their trust in you.

Mattie: And then do it all over again the next day or next week.

Ken: (Mattie has been working on an old tendency of mistrusting herself, therefore feeling that she has to overcompensate by being super responsible and masterful, and has also explored how this is linked to her childhood relationship with her parents. In a flash I remember this, but decide not to emphasize these things, since she already seems unconditionally present to her experience. Directing her into cognitive reflection runs the risk of lifting her – and me - out of this palpable, opened presencing. Instead, I lend my authority to deepening the resonance of her seeing herself as trustworthy.) Yes.

Mattie: It's just incredible! (a smile, mixing incredulity and wonder, breaks over her face) If only they knew that I don't know what I'm doing! They come and see a counselor without thinking if I'm experienced enough or not.

Ken: (with an exaggerated and conspiratorial wink) Because in a few years you'll know everything perfectly well.

Both: (shared laughter, followed by a ponderous silence)

Ken: (I begin to wonder if I've said too much or confused her with my facetious comment. I want to know, so I gently ask,) What's happening?

Mattie: I'm thinking that if I'm not identified with my anxiety about having to get things right, then who am I?

Ken: (relieved, and refocused) Indeed. Who are you?

Mattie: (looking me in the eye) I don't know...

Ken: (Sustained mutual gazing in silence. I feel that unmistakable gravity of weightlessness that at times accompanies a moment of unconditioned presence and so defies description. It occurs to me, in a playful Zen style perhaps, to risk breaking this lovely spell for the sake of more deeply inhabiting it.) Well, who *aren't* you?

Mattie: (eyes dancing, smile expanding) I don't know....(a quiet laugh) But the light is perfect, and the trees, and everything...

Ken: (quiet laughter, delighting in the shared lightness)

Mattie: Including even my trembling in this "gap," as [the author] Annie Dillard says.

Ken: (resonating with this, knowing as I do the work of this author) "...the gaps..." between thoughts...

Mattie: Yes. Wow. How alive and remarkable this space.

In this exchange, Matilda and I were "doing therapy" in the sense that we attended to an on-going cause of suffering for her: her compulsion to "master" whatever situation she finds herself in, as well as in the sense of deepening her sense of awe and appreciation that she is truly engaged in a meaningful career. Yet, we also participated in therapeutic "non-doing," in the sense that we lingered in unconditional liveliness doing nothing in particular, thus strengthening her (and my) capacity for bearing the lightness of *being*, the terrible (undefended vulnerability) and wonderful basic sanity of selflessness—and this not as some moral or spiritual imperative, but as an existential actuality.

As Peter Fenner notes (2003), unconditioned presence allows for problems to dissolve spontaneously, especially when the therapist neither gives them energy nor takes energy away from them. Psychology has tended, inadvertently perhaps, to contribute to the reification of problems. Personal problems and the search for solutions has been the dominant focus of psychotherapy to date. But rather than investing principally in an effort to solve problems, a therapist informed by nondual awareness has the latitude to notice the tendencies of both oneself and one's client to perpetuate fixations by charging them with their own anxieties, including the therapeutic ambition to have them change. Of course, the readiness of a client to bear unconstructed presence must be gauged with the same therapeutic judgment as one would gauge the client's readiness to engage in any of the elements of inward searching.

Of equal importance is the therapist's own readiness to recognize and bear opened presence. Even though Freud wrote that the essence of psychoanalytic practice involved adopting an unconditional attention, this has remained more

an ideal to aspire to than a specific practice to master. As with Existential philosophy, psychoanalysis provides inadequate training in nondual awareness. In contrast, Transpersonal Psychology has been singularly innovative in offering exposure to and training in meditative practices, as the recent explosion of interest and research in mindfulness attests (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). Still, training in nondual presence per se remains rare even within the Transpersonal field, requiring as it does a degree of open responsiveness difficult to sustain and embody, not to mention the challenge of teaching this with sufficient clarity. Thus, it falls primarily to the contemplative traditions of the East to provide the practical direction for cultivating this capability.⁷

A LAST REMARK

The play of unconditioned presence can be understood as the fifth and highest stage in E-I Therapy, the liberative challenge in which the earlier steps culminate and for which they are foundational. Understanding that psychotherapy unfolds gradually and methodically has the advantage of emphasizing the preparatory work of penetrating self-deceptions through working with resistances in a consistent, ever-deepening way. In particular, the deceptions of “spiritual materialism” (Trungpa, 1973) and “spiritual bypassing” (Welwood, 2000c) can be identified and released through a progressive process of deconstructing gross to more subtle fixations. Of equal importance is working with the often hardened superego convictions of shame and self-hatred. While the current “age of narcissism” has gotten much play in contemporary literature, it is apparent that narcissism is often a sorry consolation prize to offset a deeper sense of lack, self-loathing, disconnection, and inadequacy that pervades our age (Johnson, 1987; Loy, 1996). Working through the internalized conviction that I am less than whatever it is I think I should be helps clear the way to accept the possibility that I am far more than I could ever imagine I might be.

Alternatively, opening oneself non-gradually and unconditionally facilitates both the recognition of self-limiting constructs and the release of unconditioned clarity and compassion that exerts a gravitational force within the intersubjective field in the direction of evoking naked awareness and natural resilience *just now*.

NOTES

¹ For example, see. Chuang Tsu, 1974; Fenner & Fenner, 2001; Merton, 1951; Bhagavad Gita, 1944; Shantideva, 1997; Tolle, 1999; Norbu, 1995; and Welwood, 2000b.

² For example, Heidegger, 1927/1962; 1959/1966; Husserl, 1929/1973; Jaspers, 1935/1955; and Merleau-Ponty, 1968.

³ Schneider (in press) is currently modifying the E-I Model in a direction similar to that of unconditioned presence by including “the rediscovery of awe” as a potentiality within the search for meaning.

⁴See, Bradford, (2007) for a more thorough discussion of “evenly-suspended attention” as choiceless awareness.

⁵More extensive examples are documented by Gendlin (1973) and Bugental (1976, 1999), among other Existential authors.

⁶Still more, the notion of the dialectic itself can be misleading. Naming the two sides of a dialectic insinuates an invisible and privileged third vantage point from which we can observe the two sides in dialogue arrayed in front of us. Conceiving of a dialectic between knowing and unknowing is already an artifact of only one side of that exchange: the side of conceptual (thus dualistic) knowing. We are using words like “unknowing,” “unconscious,” “mystery,” or “empty-openness” as if they designate something, and then attribute that something to one side of a dialectical exchange. But this neat binary arrangement is a wholly conceptual construction. When we refer to the actual unknowing ‘side of the dialectic,’ we are referring beyond constructs to we know not what. See Kaisa Puhakka (2007) for a further exploration of this mystery.

⁷In particular, teachers of Zen, Tantra, Dzogchen, and Advaita Vedanta, are ever more available in the West to provide training in nondual wisdom. In addition to the many primary resources in this regard, anthologies exploring the psychology-contemplative interface include, Prendergast & Bradford, 2007; Prendergast, Fenner, & Krystal, 2003; Safran, 2003; Watson, Batchelor, & Claxton, 2000; Suler, 1993; Wilber, Engler, & Brown, 1986; Welwood, 1979.

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G. Kenneth Bradford, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist in private practice, specializing in Existential-Contemplative psychotherapy. He is an Adjunct Professor at John F. Kennedy University and CIIS; formerly, Co-Director of Maitri Psychotherapy Institute. Ken has been a practitioner in the Theravada and Tibetan Buddhist traditions for over 30 years, and is professionally engaged in applying meditative sensibilities to psychotherapy practice. His recent publications include, *Listening from the Heart of Silence: Nondual Wisdom and Psychotherapy, Vol. 2* (with John J. Prendergast), and articles on “Therapeutic Courage” and “Natural Resilience: A Heart Sutra for Psychotherapy.”

Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy promises to be a landmark in the fields of psychotherapeutic theory and practice. A comprehensive revision of its predecessor, *The Psychology of Existence*, co-edited by Kirk Schneider and Rollo May, *Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy* combines clear and updated guidelines for practice with vivid and timely case vignettes. These vignettes feature the very latest in both mainstream and existential therapeutic integrative application, by the top innovators in the field. The book highlights several notable dimensions: a novel and comprehensive theory of... Integrative psychotherapy takes into account many views of human functioning: psychodynamic, client-centered, behaviorist, family therapy, Gestalt therapy, Reichian-influenced body psychotherapy, object relations theories, and psychoanalytic self psychology in addition to transactional analysis, which forms the main basis of our theory and method. Each provides a valid explanation of psychological function and behavior, and each is enhanced when selectively integrated with the others (Erskine & Moursund, 1988).

Contact and Relationships. A major premise of integrative psychotherapy is that the need for relationship constitutes a primary motivating experience of human behavior, and contact is the means by which the need is met.

The Play of Unconditioned Presence in Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy By Bradford, G. Kenneth
Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2007. Read preview [Overview](#).

Comprehensive Handbook of Psychotherapy (Vol 3: Interpersonal/humanistic/existential) / Comprehensive Handbook of Psychotherapy (Vol 4: Integretive/eclectic) By Northey, William F., Jr. Primer, Vicky
Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, Vol. 30, No. 2, April 2004. PRPEER-REVIEWED PERIODICAL. INTEGRATIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY

The history of psychotherapy has had a number of movements and models that in different, and sometimes similar, ways aim to treat psychological disorders. There exist over 400 varieties of psychotherapy approaches (Garfield & Bergin, 1994) that can be defined and classified in several ways according to their theoretical model (i.e., behavioral, systemic, cognitive, analytical, etc.), format (i.e., individual, family, group), temporal length and frequency of the sessions, as well as any possible combination of these elements. Due to their different epistemologies and attempts to create rigid boundaries around the theories, dialogue among these models has been limited.