Annotated existential therapies reading list

This is a selective, and inevitably subjective, annotated list of key readings on existential therapeutic practice and philosophy. It was developed as supplementary reading for: Cooper, M (2015) Existential psychotherapy and counselling: Contributions to a pluralistic practice (London: Sage). References in bold are strongly recommended.

Mick Cooper, Professor of Counselling Psychology, University of Roehampton
mick.cooper@roehampton.ac.uk
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Introductory/general texts


Philosophy

General


and black identity.


**Buber and relatedness**


Atterton, P., Calarco, M., & Friedman, M. (Eds.). (2004). *Levinas and Buber: Difference and Dialogue*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquense University Press. Fascinating collection of overlapping essays which draw out and debate the differences and similarities between Buber and Levinas, particularly focusing on such differences as the 'height' of the Other, whether the I-Thou relationship is symmetrical, formalism, and different perspectives on Judaism.


Farber, L. H. (1967). Martin Buber and Psychotherapy. In P. A. Schlipp & M. Friedman (Eds.), *The
philosophy of Martin Buber (pp. 577-601). London: Cambridge University Press. Wide-ranging discussion of therapy from Buberian position, critiquing the notion of transference, and suggesting that therapy starts to work when client pities therapist.


von Hildenbrand, D. (2009). The nature of love (J. F. Crosby, Trans.). South Bend, IN: St Augustine. Drawing on Scheler, argues that love is a response to beauty in other.


Camus


de Beauvoir


de Unamuno


Gibran

Gibran, K. (1923). The Prophet. London: Penguin. Beautifully written and deeply profound series of 'lessons' on topics from parenthood to freedom, many of which have a distinctly existential/humanistic flavour -- great quotes for essays (and weddings, barmitzvahs, etc.!).

Heidegger


Husserl/phenomenology


Jaspers


limit situations, what is philosophy, and ciphers.

Kierkegaard


Levinas


Levinas, E. (1969). *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press. Levinas's key work: arguing that the fundamental grounds of human being lies in our relationship to an other and our ethical duty to respond to them. Enormously difficult and complex, particularly towards the end, but concludes with a relatively lucid summary.


Levinas, E. (2001). *Existence and Existents* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press. Fascinating, magical and impenetrable in equal parts, this 'preparatory' work for Levinas's major text, Totality and Infinity, focuses particularly on the 'anonymous', 'rumbling' and 'horrible' nature of the 'there is' which precedes 'selfhood' and freedom, and can only be escaped through a relating with the Other.


Marcel


Merleau-Ponty


Nietzsche

Sartre
Laing, R. D., & Cooper, D. G. (1971). Reason and Violence: A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy. Concise expositions of Sartre's later works, particularly the Critique of Dialectical Reason, which attempt to incorporate existential thinking into a more socially-orientated, Marxist framework.

Sartre, J.-P. (1958). *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (H. Barnes, Trans.). London: Routledge. Turgid, dense and highly inaccessible, but Sartre's magnum opus provides a brilliant analysis of the human condition - in all its freedom, absurdity and nothingness - and is one of the most important and influential existential texts.

Sartre, J.-P. (1962). *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (P. Mairet, Trans.). London: Methuen. Brief book that presents an existentialist perspective of the emotions, arguing that they are a volitional act: an attempt to 'magically' change a world that will not conform to one's desires.


Scheler

Schopenhauer

Tillich


Psychology


Jacobsen, B. (2007). *Invitation to existential psychology*. Chichester: John Wiley. Review of the psychology of a range of existential issues and tensions, such as love and aloneness.


the former, highlighting some of the reasons why practitioners of the latter tend to reject the findings of the former, and suggesting that the main value of research for existential therapists is as a source of challenge for our sedimented beliefs and assumptions.


Supportive-expressive group therapy and distress in patients with metastatic breast cancer - A randomized clinical intervention trial. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 58*(5), 494-501. RCT showing small but significant effects of SEGT on mood and trauma in cancer patients.


*Psychosis*

*Workplace*

**Existential approaches**

**Applied existential psychotherapy**

**British school**
existential therapy from a contemporary British School perspective.


Contextual therapy

Daseinsanalysis
Binswanger, L. (1963). Being-in-the-World: Selected Papers of Ludwig Binswanger (J. Needleman, Trans.). London: Condor Books. Collection of Binswanger's case studies and key papers, particularly those outlining his theory of the existential 'a priori' (as opposed to his work on love and 'we-hood'). Includes an extensive introduction to this aspect of his work.
Boss, M. (1965). A Psychiatrist Discovers India (H. A. Frey, Trans.). London: Oswald Wolff. A personal and revealing account of Boss's journeys through South-East Asia, describing his discussions with the wise and the holy, and exploring the commonalities and differences between Eastern thought and Western philosophy and therapeutic practice.
as the psychoanalytic approaches it rejects.


**Dialogic**


**Existential-humanistic**

Brown, L. S. (2008). Feminist therapy as a meaning-making practice: Where there is now power, where is the meaning? In K. J. Schneider (Ed.), *Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy: Guideposts to the Core of Practice* (pp. 130-140). New York: Routledge. explores links of existentialism with feminism.


Farber, L. H. (2000). *The Ways of the Will* (exp. ed.). New York: Basic Books. Collection of essays by one of the idiosyncratic greats of existential therapy, who is only now beginning to receive his just recognition. Essays address a range of psychological and therapeutic issues (e.g. jealousy, sex, death), many of which revolve around Farber's distinction between the unconscious, spontaneous will and conscious, deliberate wilfulness; as well as the anxiety endemic in trying to will what can not be willed.


(2nd ed.). Amherst, NY: Humanities Books. Construes consciousness as an ‘expansive-constrictive’ polarity, with psychopathology a morbid dread of either pole. Considers the therapeutic implications of this model.


Schneider, K. J. (Ed.). (2008). Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy: Guideposts to the Core of Practice. New York: Routledge. Revised and updated version of The Psychology of Existence, which introduces existential-integrative therapy, illustrates it through numerous case studies (and with diverse populations) and explores its links with other therapeutic approaches.


Focusing


Laing and the post-Laingians


Laing, R. D. (1967). *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. Laing at his most lucid, rhetorical and revolutionary. Argues that society, and particularly the family, serves to massively alienate people from their authentic possibilities and experiences, and that 'schizophrenia' is one strategy that some people invent to try and survive in this insane world.


Laing, R. D., & Cooper, D. G. (1971). *Reason and Violence: A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy*. Concise expositions of Sartre's later works, particularly the Critique of Dialectical Reason, which attempt to incorporate existential thinking into a more socially-orientated, Marxist framework.


Laing, R. D., Phillipson, H., & Lee, A. R. (1966). *Interpersonal Perception: A Theory and a Method of Research*. London: Tavistock. Theoretical and empirical investigation of the field of interpersonal perceptions, examining the conjunctions and disjunctions between perceptions (the other's view of me), meta-perceptions (my view of the other's view of me), and meta-meta-perceptions (the other's view of my view of the other's view of me).


### Meaning-oriented


**Fabry, J. B., Bulka, R., P., & Sahakian, W. S. (Eds.). (1979).** *Logotherapy in Action*. New York: Jason Aronson. Mixed bag of papers on the fundamentals of logotherapeutic thought and practice, and their application to a range of settings (e.g. nursing), problems (e.g. addiction, delinquency), community concerns (e.g. new careers for offenders) and forms of counselling (e.g. marriage counselling, counselling the elderly).


**Frankl, V. E. (1984).** *Man's Search for Meaning* (revised and updated ed.). New York: Washington Square Press. Bestselling account of Frankl's experiences in the death-camps, arguing that meaning, freedom and dignity can still be found in the midst of the most horrendous suffering. Includes a concise introduction to logotherapeutic principles and practice.


Längle, A. (2003). The art of involving the person -- Fundamental existential motivations as the structure of the motivation process. *European Psychotherapy, 4*(1), 47-58. Introduces more intersujective concepts of will and meaning into logotherapeutic analysis, and introduces several core triads of the model.


New York: Routledge. Explores relation between meaning and self-determination theory, arguing people find meaning if basic needs catered for (cf Maslow) and meanings are intrinsic.


**Relationship to other approaches**

**Acceptance and commitment therapy.**


**CBT.**


**Humanistic.**


**Mindfulness.**


**Person-centred.**

Cooper, M. (2003). Between freedom and despair: Existential challenges and contributions to person-centred and experiential therapy. *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies, 2*(1), 43-56. Explores the contribution that existential thinking and practice can make to person-centred therapy, with specific regard to four areas: freedom, limitations, meaning and meaninglessness, and relationships.


**Philosophical counselling.**


**Psychodynamic.**


**Solution-focused.**


**Transpersonal.**


**Pluralistic/integrative.**


**Modalities**

**Brief therapy**


**Children and young people**


**Coaching**

**Creative therapies**

**Family work**

**Older adults**

**Relationship therapy**


**Supervision**


**Themes**
Freedom
Marien, H., Custers, R., Hassin, R. R., & Aarts, H. (2012). Unconscious goal activation and the hijacking of the executive function. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 103*(3), 399. Important study showing that unconscious activation of goals impedes executive functioning - with greater impediment the more important the goal.


Death
Becker, E. (1973). *The Denial of Death*. New York: Free Press Paperbacks. Argues that social and psychological structures are a desperate attempt to stave off the reality of existence, particularly the fact that we will die.


Embodiment and sexuality


Milton, M. (Ed.). (2014). *Sexuality: Existential perspectives*. Ross: PCCS Books. A fascinating and, at times, controversial collection of chapters that significantly extends the boundaries of existential thought and therapeutic practice. This is an invaluable resource for existential therapists, and for all counsellors and psychotherapists with an interest in the sexual choices, givens and dilemmas at the very core of human existence.
Tensions

Meaning
(see also meaning-oriented therapies)

Relating and dialogue

Specific difficulties

Addictions

Anxiety
Eating problems

Health

Personality problems