

**Psychology 8884  
Pro-seminar  
Fall 2009  
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Office Hours: by appointment  
Class Meetings: Mondays 5:30-8:00 PM**

**Course Theme:**

The Application of Existential Psychotherapeutic Understandings in facilitating Positive Social Action and Individual and Community Transformation

**Texts:** Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy: GuidePosts to the Core of Practice Edited by Kirk Schneider. Routledge Press 2008

Existential Psychology East-West Edited by Louis Hoffman, et. al. University of the Rockies Press, 2009

**Other Readings Distributed in Class**

**Course Objective:** This course is designed so that the student, in a collaborative environment, can learn how to apply the theoretical understandings and related praxes found in Existential Psychotherapy to social action resulting in individual and community transformation.

**Course Rationale:** In a critique of humanistic psychology, Lyons (1996, p. 301) *asserts that humanistic psychology is sometimes perceived as displaying an excessive preoccupation with enhancing the psychological wellbeing only of the affluent, of those who can afford therapy, or who have medical coverage.* Too, he points out how narcissism and attitudes of self-indulgence are often associated with humanistically oriented therapies. Although I am speaking here of humanistically influenced therapies, I consider European existentialism to be the theoretical foundation of humanistic psychology while its methodology is grounded in phenomenology (Rice, 1977; 2009). To be sure, while humanistic psychology has matured in the intervening years and one can find many examples of humanistic social action, albeit in a “hodge-podge fashion (Rice, 2002), I contend that the ideals and principles embodied in Existentialism offer a more salient approach to the issues under consideration.

More specifically, beyond the texts, which represent contemporary applications of Existential principles and ideals, we will explore some of the foundational sources found in the writings of Jean-Paul Satre, Merleau-Ponty, Martin Buber, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Viktor Frankl, Franz Fanon and R.D. Laing. The French Existentialists were particularly attuned to social action. Spiegelberg (1954) points out that “no other feature of French Existentialism has achieved so much notoriety as its social philosophy.” To this end, Maslow (1954) suggests that if psychotherapy could be tremendously extended, we would have a healthier society. One way to extend the benefits of Existential Psychotherapy principles to a wider audience is through the development or modification of community based programs that reach out to many in the community. As Maslow argues, this would help to generate a way of life not only for the individual, but also for the same person as a social being, a member of society.

Another important aspect of this approach is to have cross-culture awareness. The text, “Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy” provides that context. The text “Existential Psychology East-West” extends this awareness as we contemplate the similarities and differences between philosophies of the East and West. Existential questions such as “who am I,” “being and non-being,” etc., have been addressed in differing ways in various Eastern traditions. Hence, we will explore their efficacy for individual and community transformation.

**Class Format:** The class will be dialogical in nature, sharing and exchanging ideas drawn from readings and our own extrapolations from the reading material.

**Class Requirements:** Beyond regularly scheduled class attendance, the major requirement is to develop a protocol/template for how you would apply the principles learned to a social, community, governmental, educational, business, or religious organization. You may choose to focus on an organization that’s real and one that you have some familiarity; or you may create a fictional organization that influences real issues and affects the lives of individuals. The purpose is to discover how positive change can occur at the micro and macro level; and to remember that transformational change always takes place at the individual level and that social institutions evolve more slowly.

