Yalom ↓

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p214
Huxley 1962 Eiba

12/30/85

Dear Irvin —

I start this letter at Bonaire, where family and I have been enjoying a year-end vacation. When Marguerite first got her copy of Existential Psychotherapy I did peruse it; but now I took it along and read most of it.

Is this a bit late? Nevertheless I want to thank you for an audacious, admirable and impressive work. It was almost all familiar (as you say it will be to therapists) but it offers system, depth and bibliography (and how I do value that!) on many matters of everyman's existence. It also revealed to me with endearing intimacy a side of your person that I know less well than I would prefer (part of that is to be sure post 1978 development), and reminds me how I have missed your company since we left California. We were in Palo last August per usual but found you away when we called your home. Do let us know when either of you is again in N.Y.C.

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Of course I have a few comments.

Least important is my categorical divergence from your reaction to natural beauty (p. 219) I've been snorkeling this week too; but my analogous experience was off Heron Island almost 30 years ago. (It took me a couple of days here to get past not being 30 years old any longer; even a little anxiety doesn't help when the salt water

drops into your face mask & your snorkel — but happily we stayed here long enough for me to relax into what I can still enjoy). It is exactly the "cosmic view" that saves me from the solipsism. The beauty of the fish, the coral, sharing their water-borne weightlessness is not an artefact of my consciousness; it is a return to my evolutionary origin, a reassurance of a place in Scala Naturae.*

Your self-account was extraordinarily helpful to me for the insight it gave me how deeply people could differ on matters so important that I take them for granted.

Now some details.

(262, 460) Schizophrenia, by your own account of it as a biochemical lesion, is a drag-in to relate it to psychotherapeutic improvements via locus of control, PIL scores. Your remark that electroschock improves such scales deserves more than a passing footnote (lip service) about the directions of cause and effect. I.A. there is a clear research paradigm: the effects of medication & psychotherapy on such scales.

My own amateur reading is the vicious cycle of dysfunction and loss of self-esteem, one that

* I give you enclosed something I wrote a while ago on the need to sustain ambiguity about that. If you remember that my research embraces molecular microbes and planetary explanation you will recall still more reason.

demands intervention by any available modality. I know you agree apart that vicious cycle; have I missed where you say so?

On death anxiety. [N.B. – need I capitalize that this is my 60th year.]

My own terrors have little to do with non-existence. I have lived several careers, and no living future could possibly match what was my great fortune to experience. But decrepitude .... for just those reasons might be the hardest to bear.

Have I missed your treatment of the inevitability of those numerous small deaths? (My father "survived" a stroke for 14 years. That kind of survival is becoming the norm precisely a/c "medical progress" to which I contribute *

Personal control of one's dying is not realistically accessible – thinks of family's ambivalences on one side; the legal and medical professional as well.

Is this not an overarching existential problem in today's culture? Don't you see it in your practice?

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* So I have a second contribution for you, above noted. [Hahnemann – a note to myself].

Re biography.

One "reason" I took E/P along is that I have been scaffolding an autobiography, and been reading widely on the methodology and principles of telling lives.

A useful compendium is also here: W. M. Runyan "Life Histories and Psychobiography" — esp. for its bibliography. Existential is not in the index; there is a paragraph on Sartre (on Flaubert).

Knowing your literary interests I thought you'd have something to say about how to tell a life history. Your aversion to the past in therapy probably answers me. ... (you put astrology on the same footing as Freud)
The totality of your rejection of psychodynamic theory crept up on me as I progressed through the book. Was that your personal experience?

How did the Establishment review you. (I am quite sympathetic to your complaints about the academic paradigm

262) locus of control again

Isn't there a lot of empirical evidence that this is strongly culturally and class-determined? I thought this was a cardinal mark of the proletarian, more than current income. Are the studies corrected for that aspect?

Well, Ivo, I would appreciate your acknowledging your getting, even more reading this letter. Don't feel you have to answer it, or at least no more obligation to talk over sometime when you're at in 1986. Have you written, are you writing the further "discourse needed to modify and enrich it?"

Yours,
John.