

# THE EXISTENTIAL HUMANIST

*Celebrating Our Diversity of Existence and Being*



Editors: Nader Shabahangi  
and Sonja Saltman

## 2019 EXPERIENTIAL TRAINING DATES

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**May 23rd, 2019  
through  
May 28th, 2019**

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## THEMES COVERED IN TRAINING INCLUDE:

- *the here-and-now*
- *the inner search process*
- *subjectivity and encounter*
- *the therapeutic relationship*

These experientially oriented courses teach existential-humanistic concepts of: resistance, meaning and alignment, existential spirituality, and integrative existential practice.

[www.ehinstitute.org](http://www.ehinstitute.org)

## EH I RESIDENTIAL RETREAT TRAINING MAY 2019

*6-day Annual Residential Immersion Training in  
Existential-Humanistic Psychotherapy at Beautiful  
Westerbeke Ranch in Sonoma, California.*

EHI, believing in the meaningfulness, intrinsic value and diversity of life, teaches principles of existential-humanistic psychotherapy and offers in-depth trainings in the practical application of those principles.

The annual experiential residential is the core of EHI's training. It allows licensed professionals and graduate students in psychology or counseling programs to come together in a safe environment, get to know one another, and experience how E-H therapy is practiced up close and personally.

EHI Faculty emphasize the key ingredients of the E-H approach, including empathy, acceptance, and genuineness, to model how trainees can create safe, collaborative and life-changing therapeutic encounters. They demonstrate how the therapeutic relationship, in and of itself is a vehicle for healing and change and how therapeutic "presence" cultivates sensitivity and appropriate responsiveness to clients' emotions, relational patterns and inner worlds. These two essential principles: building the therapeutic relationship and working in the "here and now" are the foundational blocks of E-H therapy and EHI training.

# EMBRACING SUBJECTIVITY

By Bob Edelstein, L.M.F.T.

James F. T. Bugental, Ph. D., served as the first president of the Association of Humanistic Psychology in 1962. He also helped organize the Old Saybrook Conference in 1964, a gathering of great minds which helped clarify the vision of humanistic psychology in the United States. Among those present with Jim at this seminal conference were his close friends, colleagues, and mentors – George Kelly, Rollo May, Abraham Maslow, and Carl Rogers.

I interviewed Jim for the February/March 2003 issue of the AHP Perspective. He told me he most wanted to be remembered for “more legitimacy for the subjective life. At a time when I was most productive, I was always trying to storm the wall of psychological science.”

In 1964, when Jim and his colleagues were convening at Old Saybrook, psychology emphasized the objectivity of science and the physical world. In training therapists the emphasis was on behaviorism and environmental interventions. There was a minimization or even dismissal of one's subjective life. Jim and his colleagues emphasized and popularized humanistic psychology, which

was termed the third force in psychology. This perspective included a focus on subjectivity as the main energy source and guiding force in our lives. Subjectivity is the accessing of one's inner life – including thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, memories, images, hopes, fears, expectations, anxieties, perceptions, etc. Another focus is to translate one's subjectivity through expression and actualization into the outer, objective, physical world. This was based upon the belief that we are beings-in-the-world.

One way Jim facilitated his clients and students moving deeper into their subjectivity was through the inward searching process. This entails paying attention moment by moment to the inner flow of consciousness moving through you. He emphasized that the present moment is the only true reality we have. Each of our present moment realities are uniquely ours. Jim encouraged us to trust that in each moment we would be pulled towards the direction that is right for each of us. And there is always something more, as one moment leads to another with a new set of awarenesses.

Or as Jim liked to say, “And now... And now... And now...”

## Wanting to be an Existentialist

*When she was 14, being an Existentialist meant watching French movies With actors so ugly they were beautiful, It meant cropping her hair like a boy And wearing her sweater with the buttons backwards, While quoting lines from Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. She walked on cobblestone streets of her small town, barefoot, With the son of the General who was going to get hell from his father Giggling like the naughty children they were Drunk on their existential power to choose Trusting, believing the choice was theirs, however minute. Existence. Pure.*

~ Sonja Saltman

Bob is in private practice and founder/president of **Existential-Humanistic NorthWest** a professional organization advocating existential-humanistic values and philosophy.

# THE COARSENING (AND HOPE) OF THE AMERICAN MIND

By Kirk Schneider, Ph.D.

*[Author's Note: This article is adapted from an article by the same title published at Tikkun.org. An expanded version of this article can be found on my Psychology Today (psychologytoday.com) blog called "Awakening to Awe".]*

Babies being wrenched from parents, racist epithets flung at countries south and east of us, alarming levels of civil and political discord--this is our country in the summer of 2018. There are also positive developments to be sure, but can anyone say how they will endure?

While many of us are wringing our hands asking ourselves "how in the world we got here?" Perhaps the more accurate question is "Why, given our mercantile-materialist past, shouldn't we have gotten here?" In his 1978 book *The Illusion of Technique*, public philosopher William Barrett forewarned of the damage being done through our overreliance on things--rather than people--to staunch our moral predicaments; and we should have paid more attention.

Today we are stained with the legacy of all those who fell -- wittingly and unwittingly -- under the spell of things;

the machine model for living. This model emphasized efficiency (or what many called efficiency): speed, instant results, appearance and packaging; and it lured millions to the marketplace--or killing fields.

The result however was anything but "efficient" in the larger sense. We created convenience, ease, and an unprecedented sense of personal power, to be sure. But the advances were largely external--relegated to what we wore, how fast we drove, how quickly we ate, how many profit margins we met, how many gadgets we owned; our interior life, however, our capacity to feel and reflect and communicate was left bereft.

The result is that, today, too many of us have become calculative and consumerist giants but emotional and imaginative dwarfs, steely and impenetrable, but bereft of nuance, attunement, and depth; and this is precisely our quagmire at this crossroad of our history. From my standpoint as a psychologist, there are two likely outcomes issuing from this alarming

state of affairs: One, our citizenry will devolve into drone-like functionaries, programmed for elemental self-interest or two, we will confront the moral crisis of our time--the quick fix instant results society--and engage our abilities to be more fully present, both to ourselves and those about us. In my view, such engagement would be most welcome, but it would be no panacea. By contrast it will be a rebuilding project--"brick-by-brick"--that will nudge us toward recognition of each other as complex human beings; persons with painful differences but also ennobling commonalities.

While there are many paths to the latter and more hopeful alternative of engagement, the grass roots phenomenon known as dialogue groups is exciting particular interest.

Consider, for example, the group that was featured in a February 16th, 2018 article by New York Times columnist David Brooks called the "Better Angels."

*Continued...*



## THE COARSENING (AND HOPE) OF THE AMERICAN MIND CONTINUED

Better Angels, comprised of ordinary and concerned citizens, is bringing liberals and conservatives together for “living room” dialogues throughout the U.S.

These in-depth potentially bridge building conversations are gathering momentum. According to a CBS News report of March 26, 2018, over a thousand people had taken part in Better Angels’ workshops across 31 states, and almost 150 towns and cities will be launching workshops this year. USA Today has estimated that as of June 26, 2018 Better Angels had 3100 dues-paying members, and philanthropic organizations from the left-leaning William and Flora Hewlett Corporation to the right-tending Koch Corporation are supporting its cause.

This is a remarkable development that resonates with our democratic tradition of tolerance for and discovery of the “other;” and it has the potential to reshape voting patterns. Indeed if the movement becomes large enough and enough voters see its logic, it could signal a new centrism in our country that prods voters from a fear-based sectarianism to a more discernment-based ecumenism.

Or to put it more broadly, it could shift voters from what I have called a “polarized mind” or fixation on a single point of view to the utter exclusion of competing points of view, to a more flexible, adaptive mentality. This mentality, as social theorists from Eric Fromm to Jeremy Rifkin and Jonathan Haidt have contended, both acknowledges differences but also upholds human dignity; it promotes empathy, discovery but not at the cost of human individuality.

How then do we actualize this mentality? We will need many more living-room style dialogues promoted by groups

like Better Angels (such as the Nonviolent Communications networks, Bridge Alliance, and Experiential Democracy forums); many more encounters with living persons as opposed to the stick-figures portrayed in media or at political rallies. In short, we will need a larger vision, not only of our country, but of life itself; a vision that jars us out of our comfort zones and opens us to the wonder, adventure, and indeed awe of coexisting with diverse lives.

*Kirk J. Schneider is current president of EHI and a member of Better Angels. He is also the author of **The Polarized Mind** and **The Spirituality of Awe**.*



In this age of behavioral protocols and managed care, EHI offers therapeutic providers opportunity to engage in hands-on training and learn an effective therapeutic perspective grounded in existential, experiential and relational theories.

# A TASTE OF EHI'S ANNUAL EXPERIENTIAL TRAINING

By Troy Piwowski, Psy.D.

When friends, colleagues, and family members hear that I'm an Existential Therapist, I often get blank looks that seem to say "what the hell is that, exactly?" To be honest, I struggle to find a brief answer, partly because so much of what I do as a therapist and as a teacher is experiential, not just words or philosophy.

So, I've decided to share a small taste of our 5-night/6-day residential annual trainings and what we're all about. Read on!

## What is Existential Therapy?

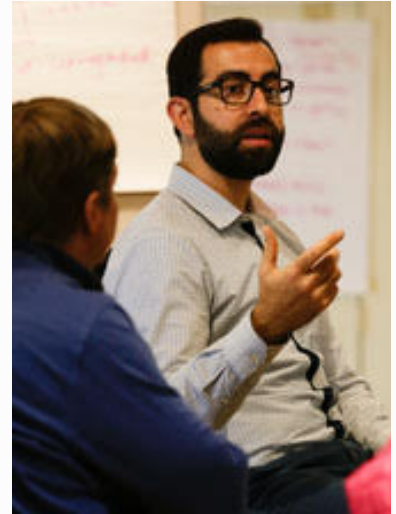
How shall we live? How are we living right now? What truly matters, and how do we go about attaining what is meaningful in our lives? These are the primary questions that drive the Existential-Humanistic therapist's engagement. E-H therapy is, at its foundation, experiential and relational.

As human beings, we are "all in the same boat," existentially-speaking. We all long for freedom from limitations, and we all grapple to some degree with our limitedness.

Cosmologically, we all are subject to "existential givens": That we are alive, that we all must die, that we are both free and limited, that we share responsibility for our own lives, and that life is inherently ambiguous in regard to meaning, so we must find or make meaning for ourselves.

If we face our life-limiting patterns (including our existential givens) and if we work to integrate them, we experience more fulfillment, joy, satisfaction, and a greater range of possibilities in our lives. Facing our life-limiting patterns requires more than talking or even insight—it requires the client to have deeper contact with ways they are constricting their lives, and integrate parts of self that have been disowned.

Because this kind of contact is often threatening to our sense of comfort and identity, we provide our clients someone who is willing to accompany them in as authentic and relational way possible. We often invoke The Divine Comedy, wherein Dante must walk through hell, but makes it through because of his companion Virgil.



The intensive retreat is the heart of EHI's programs. Participants gain hands-on training with faculty; immersing themselves in existential-humanistic therapy perspective.

## The Relational Foundation of Existential-Humanistic Therapy

As Irv Yalom succinctly puts it, "it's the relationship that heals. E-H therapists strive for connectedness with their clients and so pay close attention to what's happening relationally in the therapeutic encounter. It is an attitude of "I am with you and I am for you." This implicit message of connection, safety and intimacy sets the stage for the work to be done.

*Continued...*

## A TASTE OF EHI'S ANNUAL EXPERIENTIAL TRAINING CONTINUED....

The relational space is an environment with unconditional acceptance. This allows shameful, guilty and disowned feelings that have never seen the light of day to be acknowledged, explored and worked through. New narratives about self, others and the world are constructed. In order to cultivate this space, we find ways to communicate a different power dynamic that is less hierarchical and more of an equal playing field. A dynamic in which therapist and client are collaborators or "fellow travelers."

A relational focus also directs our client to the relationship as it is unfolding in the here and now.

Thus, the healing potential of the therapeutic relationship is determined by the relational

patterns of client and therapist, and the degree to which they can successfully navigate and work through disowned patterns together.

### The Experiential Foundation of E-H Therapy

The experiential foundation of E-H Therapy emphasizes:

- a) the "here-and-now," i.e., what is most alive in the moment,
- b) an expansion of client's primary experiencing and an exploration of client's secondary experiencing, i.e., meanings made, and
- c) a focus on the client's unique personal and relational processes (ways of being) over and above a focus on the "story," i.e., the content presented.



Westerbeke Ranch, 2018.

## Annual Experiential Training

Existential-Humanistic Retreats  
6-days in May

[www.ehinstitute.org](http://www.ehinstitute.org)  
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### How EHI trains therapists in Relational and Experiential Principles of E-H

Students often do a combination of personal and clinical reflection throughout the training. We create space for intensive work, contemplation, and play throughout the week. Students leave the training having an inside-out experience of the power of embodied existential psychotherapy and a deeper sense of what they as clinicians bring to the table.

**If you have any questions about E-H Therapy or would like to find out more about EHI's training offerings, please contact me at [info@ehinstitute.org](mailto:info@ehinstitute.org).**

Troy is EHI's Clinical Director. He is a depth-oriented psychotherapist in private practice, an author, teacher, and is co-founder of the Bay Area men's group, **In Real Life**.



## OUR HOME: THE EXISTENTIAL-HUMANISTIC INSTITUTE

By Nader Shabahangi, Ph.D.

The forward march of bio-psychiatry and neuro-psychology continue as do the many behavioral and cognitively based approaches to the care of the human psyche. As studies have shown, each of these approaches provides some benefit for the person seeking help. However, today we find that the biological, neuro- and bio-psychiatric view of understanding and working with a human being in distress, is increasingly dominating our mindset. Rather than being a supplement to care, medication has often become the first line of treatment.

The forward march of bio-psychiatry and neuro-psychology continue as do the many behavioral and cognitively based approaches to the care of the human psyche. As studies have shown, each of these approaches provides some benefit for the person seeking help. However, today we find that the biological, neuro- and bio-psychiatric view of understanding and working with a human being in distress, is increasingly dominating our mindset. Rather than being a supplement to care, medication has often become the first line of treatment.

The challenge of this approach resides in the oversimplified way the human being is perceived. In this approach principles are applied that might be valid for inanimate and non-human objects but not for the complex and truly mysterious workings of the human psyche.

Treating a broken leg, a ruptured appendix or a blocked artery is not comparable to caring for the human mind and psyche. Yet, mainstream academic psychology and psychiatry continue to not see this difference and regard the truly unfathomable dimensions of the human mind like some clock or computer-like machine that can be manipulated, adjusted, repaired and/or reprogrammed.

In contrast to this dominant view that is based, so I believe, on a fundamental misunderstanding of the essential nature of the human being, stands an existential-humanistic attitude and approach. This view holds that life has meaning, that any psychic distress or disturbance that befalls us (the root meaning of the word symptom is 'to befall') has meaning and wants to be understood. Thus, from an existential point of view symptoms have meaning, they serve an important role for the so affected individual. Not to understand the meaning of a symptom means, in the words of the German poet Rilke, to 'waste our suffering'. We forgo our ability to understand more about the depth of life and living, forgo our ability to become more aware.

Our ability to become more aware can only be helped, so we existentially oriented therapists believe, if we do not pathologize our symptoms but appreciate them through unfolding their purpose in an individual's life. Among others, it was especially Jim Bugental's

legacy to show us therapists how we can help clients search for their particular meaning. This meaning was obtained not as much through the intellect, through interpretation, but through awareness of the lived experience in the moment, with therapist and client in the room. Jim gave us many ways for following clients' processes and for facilitating their inner searching and knowing. He believed that only in as far as we therapists helped clients stay in their subjective selves were we any true help to them, were we allowing life-changing therapy to occur. For him the way we could help our clients to Wake Up, so Jim poignantly wrote, was by not objectifying human beings:

"Objectification of human beings is the insanity that is the toxic pollution in the sea in which we swim, the world in which we try to live. We have been hypnotized from our earliest years to believe that it must be so. I want to say that which we learn not to say. I want to stand outside the universal post-hypnotic suggestion, and shout: 'Wake Up!'"

It is our continued hope at EHI that we will help train and teach tools as well as attitudes that will 'stand up for our subjectivity by countering the toxic pollution of the objectification of human beings.' Please join us.

*Nader is EHI Vice President, a Processwork therapist, a humanistic care advocate, trainer and coach. He is founder and CEO of AgeSong and Eldership Academy.*



EHI Faculty from left to right: Troy Piwowski, Sonja Saltman, Doug Silberstein, Doug Silberstein, Nader Shabahangi, and Kirk Schneider. It is our goal to provide students and professionals interested in a humanistic, existentially informed attitude to helping our clients, a home where they feel supported for their non-mechanistic, more complex and validating approach to psychotherapy.

## THE EXISTENTIAL-HUMANISTIC INSTITUTE

EHI offers courses in the principles of existential-humanistic practice, existential-humanistic theory and practice. Most of EHI's instructors have studied extensively with such masters as James Bugental, Irvin Yalom and Rollo May, and are, like Kirk Schneider, acknowledged leaders within the existential-humanistic movement today.

The institute, via its curriculum, website and newsletter, supports existentially & humanistically oriented psychotherapists throughout the world.

### Our Vision

*EHI, believing in the meaningfulness and intrinsic value and diversity of life, teaches principles of existential-humanistic psychotherapy and offers in-depth trainings in the practical application of those principles.*

### CONTACT US

If you have questions about EHI, the Existential -Humanistic education offerings or the E-H training programs please contact us. We would like to connect with you!

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