

**You are encouraged to read the whole book, and please make a proper citation if needed.**

Yalom, I.D. (1982). *Existential psychotherapy*. Basic Books.

1. Existential psychotherapy is a dynamic approach to therapy which focuses on concerns that are rooted in the individual's existence.
2. The existential position emphasizes a conflict that flows the individual's confrontation with the givens of existence. And I mean by "givens" of existence certain ultimate concerns, certain intrinsic properties that are a part, and an inescapable part, of the human being's existence in the world.
3. Heidegger always spoke of the human being as *dasein*. *Da* ("there") refers to the fact that the person is there, is a constituted object (an "empirical ego"), but at the same time constitutes the world (that is, is a "transcendental ego"). *Dasein* is at once the meaning giver and the known. Each *dasein* therefore constitutes its own world; to study all beings with some standard instrument as though they inhabited the same objective world is to introduce monumental error into one's observation. Heidegger referred to the individual as *dasein* (not as "I" or "one" or "ego" or a "human being") for a specific reason: he wished always to emphasize the dual nature of human existence. The individual is "there" (*da*), but also he or she constitutes what is there. The ego is two-in-one: it is an empirical ego (an objective ego), something that is "there," an object in the world) and a transcendental (constituting) ego which constitutes (that is, is "responsible" for) itself and the world.
4. Forgetfulness of being is the everyday mode of existence. Heidegger refers to its as "inauthentic" – a mode in which one is unaware of one's authorship of one's life and world, in which one "flees," "falls," and is tranquilized, in which one avoids choices by being "carried along by the nobody." When, however, one enters the second mode of being (mindfulness of being), one exists authentically (hence, the frequent modern use of the term "authenticity" in psychology). In this state, one becomes fully self-aware – aware of oneself as a transcendental (constituting) ego as well as an empirical (constituted) ego; one embraces one's possibilities and limits; one faces absolute freedom and nothingness – and is anxious in the face of them.
5. Kierkegaard was the first to make a clear distinction between fear and anxiety (dread); he contrasted fear that is fear of some thing with dread that is a fear of no thing. One dreads (or is anxious about) losing oneself and becoming nothingness.

...It is dangerous to venture. And why? Because one may lose. Not to venture is shrewd. And yet, by not venturing, it is so dreadfully easy to lose that which it would be difficult to lose in even the most venturesome venture...one's self. For if I have ventured amiss- very well, then life helps me by its punishment. But if I have not ventured at all – who then helps me? And, moreover, if by not venturing at all in the highest sense (and to venture in the highest sense is precisely to become conscious of oneself) I have gained all earthly advantages...and lose myself. What of that?

6. This book deals with four ultimate concerns: death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness.
7. Death is the condition that makes it possible for us to live life in an authentic fashion. An awareness of death shifts one away from trivial preoccupations and provides life with depth and poignancy and an entirely different perspective. Death helps us understand anxiety, offers a dynamic structure upon which to base interpretation, and serves as a boundary experience that is capable of instigating a massive shift in perspective.
8. A “boundary situation” is an event, an urgent experience, that propels one into a confrontation with one's existential “situation” in the world. A confrontation with one's personal death (“my death”) is the nonpareil boundary situation and has the power to provide a massive shift in the way one lives in the world. “Though the physicality of death destroys an individual, the idea of death can save him.” Death acts as a catalyst that can move one from one state of being to a higher one: from a state of wondering about how things are to a state of wonderment that they are. An awareness of death shifts one away from trivial preoccupations and provides life with depth and poignancy and an entirely different perspective.
9. Responsibility is inextricably linked to freedom. Unless the individual is free to constitute the world in any of a number of ways, then the concept of responsibility has no meaning. The universe is contingent; everything that is could have been created differently. Sartre's view of freedom is far-reaching: the human being is not only free but is doomed to freedom. Furthermore, freedom extends beyond being responsible for the world (that is, for imbuing the world with significance): one is also entirely responsible for one's life, not only for one's actions but for one's failures to act.
10. One is thus guilty to the same extent that one is responsible for oneself and one's

world. Guilt is a fundamental part of *Dasein* (that is, human be-ing). Guilt is thus intimately related to possibility or potentiality. When the “call of conscience” is heard (that is, the call that brings one back to facing one’s “authentic” mode of being), one is always “guilty” – and guilty to the extent that one has failed to fulfill authentic possibility. Each human being has an innate set of capacities and potentials and, furthermore, has a primordial knowledge of these potentials. One who fails to live as fully as one can, experiences a deep, powerful feeling which I refer to here as “existential guilt.”

11. Memory (“the organ of the past”) is concerned with objects; the will is concerned with projects; and effective psychotherapy must focus on patients’ project relationships as well as on their object relationships.
12. The therapist helps the patient realize that not only is the individual responsible for his situation but that only he is responsible. The corollary of this realization is that the individual is also solely responsible for the transmutation of his or her world. In other words, no other can change one’s world for one. One must (actively) change if one is to change. When one fully experiences conflicting wishes simultaneously, one must face the responsibility of choosing one and relinquishing the other. Simultaneous ambivalence results in a state of extreme discomfort, it is extremely important that the therapist avoid diluting the pain or the autonomy of the patient. If one is able to confront deeply and with full intensity all one’s relevant wishes, then one will eventually fashion a creative, innovative solution – a solution that another could not have foreseen.
13. Decision is the bridge between wishing and action. To decide means to commit oneself to a course of action. I shall argue that insight effects change through (1) facilitating the development of the therapist-patient relationship, and (2) a series of maneuvers that help the therapist liberate the patient’s stifled will: these maneuvers are designed to enable patients to realize that only they can change the world they have created; that there is no danger in change; that to get what they really want, they must change; and that each individual has the power to change.
14. Existential isolation refers to an unbridgeable gulf between oneself and any other being. It refers, too, to an isolation even more fundamental – a separation between the individual and the world.
15. Buber believed that longing for relationship was “innate” and given. “Man,” Buber stated, does not exist as a separate entity: “Man is a creature of the between.” There are two basic types of relationship – thus, two types of in-betweenness – which Buber characterized “I-Thou” (sometimes translated as “I-You”) and “I-It.” The “I-It” relationship is the relationship between a person

and equipment, a “functional” relationship, a relationship between subject and object wholly lacking mutually. The I-Thou relationship is a wholly mutual relationship involving a full experiencing of the other. It differs from empathy because it is more than an “I” attempting to relate to an “other.” “There is no ‘I’ as such, but only the basic world I-Thou.”

To Man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude.

The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks.

The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words.

The one primary word is the combination **I-Thou**.

The other primary word is the combination **I-It**; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words **He** and **She** can replace it.

Hence the **I** of Man is twofold.

For the **I** of the primary word **I-Thou** is a different **I** from that of the primary word **I-It**.

16. One may fail to relate by relating only partly to the other and partly to some fantasized other person(s). In assessing the nature of my relationship with a patient, I find it helpful to inquire of myself, “How many people are in the room?”
17. It is the relationship that heals. Patients who grow in psychotherapy learn not only the rewards of intimacy but also its limits: they learn what they cannot get from others.
18. “Meaning” refers to sense, or coherence. It is a general term for what is intended to be expressed by something. A search for meaning implies a search for coherence.
19. Camus used the word “absurd” to refer to the human being’s basic position in the world – the plight of a transcendent, meaning-seeking being who must live in a world that has no meaning. A human being, Camus believed, can attain full stature only by living with dignity in the face of absurdity. In summary, then, Camus started from a position of nihilism – a position in which he despaired at the lack of meaning (and, thus, lack of purpose and values) in the world – and soon generated, gratuitously, a system of personal meaning – a system that encompasses several clear values and guidelines for conduct: courage, prideful rebellion, fraternal solidarity, love, secular saintliness.
20. Our human needs for overall perceptual frameworks and for a system of values on which to base our actions together constitute the “pure” reasons that we

search for meaning in life.