

# Psychological Crisis from the View-point of Existentialist Philosophy and Psychotherapy

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‘...since the solution can never be drawn towards particulars respectively, but only towards the whole, [...] crisis is always necessarily existential, experiential and inevitable.’

Béla Hamvas (1983: 45).<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract:* The homo patiens, Viktor E. Frankl’s human person (2010) of suffering, is capable of discovering meaning in his existence through the ability of suffering: in the dimensions of consummation and despair, even in fatal failure he is able to realize himself. The human being suffering in a crisis may discover the possibility of finding a higher quality, a more profound meaning. In this respect, suffering becomes a meaning potential. In our approach the phenomenon of psychological crisis may define our relationship to existence and the basic issues of being. While thinking over different modes of resolutions emerging in crisis, we are able to gain a deeper insight into ourselves. The present study provides some new points of view by the cross-section of the existentialist approaches analysed: first, crisis as transcendental operation and as the result of liminal situations of fundamental existential conflicts (Jaspers 2000) is scrutinized. An attempt is made to investigate crisis in a new interpretation framework leading us to a deeper understanding of the transcending process between two Heideggerian modes of being: (1989), ‘forgetfulness of being’ and ‘being-uncovering’. Next the functions of anxiety and despair –as strongest predictors of suicidalism – in crisis situations are analysed from an existentialist view point. We shed light on crisis as a reflective process leading towards self-knowledge through the ills that emerge in our lives, considered as drama in phrase of Hamvas’s (1983), by analysing those processes that are wished to be banished.

*Keywords:* crisis, existentialist philosophy and psychotherapy, meaning potential, reflective process, self-transcendence

The roots of existentialism lead back to the oeuvre of the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, who obliged himself to investigate his own

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations from Hungarian sources were translated by Imre Radnai.

existence in the first decades of the 1800s, his ideas – about anxiety as the fundamental fact of existence and about loneliness as the tragedy of human condition – all became basic questions of existential philosophy succeeding World War I.<sup>2</sup>

According to the summary of Hans Joachim Störig, the renowned German professor of philosophy (1997), the following basic characteristics describe the schools of existentialist philosophy: 1. Man always has his own mode of existence in the focus of attention. 2. Existence is always considered as an individual mode of existence, thus it is always subjective and cannot be derived and further analysed. 3. Regarding methodology existential-philosophical approaches are all phenomenological. 4. Existence is dynamic and essentially bound to time actually it is being in time. 5. The schools direct attention to the individual, however, at the same time they are not individualistic, since they never aspire to isolate the individual; human existence is always being in the world and it is always being together with others. 6. Often existentialist philosophers gain inspiration from an ‘existentialist experience’ that makes their frame of reference highly personal in which a final question, a liminal situation is processed.

Regarding their essence the fundamental conflict in different approaches of psychotherapy based on existentialist philosophy is the same: the individual faces the conditions of his existence. Conditions are interpreted as ultimate questions to be resolved, particularities that have to be faced with, that are inseparable constituents of existence. Jaspers, Frankl, Yalom and the existentialist psychiatrists in general frequently use and modify certain conceptions of philosophy in order to approach different phenomena from the ground of praxis; likewise an attempt is made in this study to apply philosophical constructs to generate a new horizon in the understanding of psychological crisis. Existentialist psychotherapy is one of the forms of dynamic<sup>3</sup> psychotherapies which for its fundamental conflict concentrates on deep structure, the facts of existence, on ‘ultimate problems’ and regarding its content – according to Yalom’s (2003) summary – the attitude to four fundamental anxieties make up the subject of investigations: that of death, freedom, separation and *meaninglessness*, and their related conscious and unconscious fears.

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<sup>2</sup> One of the main tenets of Kierkegaard is that *truth* lies in our own subjectivity; our intimate inwardness has existential priority above the systematic philosophical constructions.

<sup>3</sup> The expression dynamic generally refers to the primary meaning of the Greek word: strong, powerful; and has a technical reference as well: being in motion, non-static, here referring to psychic impulses, driving forces, that in the world of existentialist psychotherapies aim some kind of an ultimate question pending throughout one’s lifetime.

In psychoanalysis always some kind of instinctive is raised into consciousness, in existential analysis the spiritual becomes conscious instead of the instinctive (Frankl 2002: 16), and as the spiritual fundament of human existence is organised around the phenomenon of responsibility. The issue of depth has peculiar emphasis in the existentialist approach (Yalom 2003), which in Freudian and Neo-Freudian schools always means the exploration of different layers of the psyche with great care, till the earliest most fundamental conflict is reached leading to one of the traumas in psychosexual development. Whereas existentialist psychotherapy cannot be aligned with the development model with respect to the approach understanding depth not as the exploration of the past, but as interrelationships belonging to the individual's existence independent of time, including the individual's consciousness and the space surrounding him. It queries what the individual is, instead of prying how he has become that. The past is important insofar as it is part of the individual's actual condition of existence and has contributed to the development of present attitudes to existential problems. The most significant tense for the existentialist approach is: future that is becoming present.

The questions posed by existentialism – that are difficult to be made the subject of empirical investigations beyond measure – aim to stride over the chasm between the subject and object of the investigation by postulating man as a conscious being who himself is participating in the creation of reality.

## The issue of transcending – the psychological crisis as liminal situation

Yalom reads in his influential work *Existential Psychotherapy* as: 'Although the physicality of death destroys man, the idea of death saves him' by 'not only vesting human life with reality as being, but also as meaning' (Yalom 1980: 30). Heidegger thinks being conscious about death helps *Dasein*<sup>4</sup> to accomplish the change between different orders and qualities in the modes of existence – between the states 'forgetfulness of being' and 'being-uncovering'. He reads in *Being and Time* as follows: 'With death, *Dasein* stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. [...] Thus death reveals itself as that *possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped*. As such, death is something *distinctively impending*' (Heidegger 1962: 293–294).

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<sup>4</sup> *Dasein* – in Mihály Vajda's and his fellow researchers' translation – is being in presence, man who understands the existent in its existence as presence, that is he understands it with respect to a given modus in time, to the present.

For man, impending death has always meant a liminal situation. The conception of liminal situation was moved to the focus of Karl Jaspers's thinking – the prominent German philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who changed his praxis of the psychiatrist to the contemplation of the existentialist philosopher – in which death appears as a compelling circumstance. Death, the inevitability and immutability of death, derails the individual from his routine mode of existence and assists him in approaching a conscious mode of existence. Jaspers held: there are liminal situations in life in which the suppressed idea of death emerges back to the surface; the liminal situation may be a tragedy or great joy, covering an event that derails one from daily, routine situations and inevitably faces him with the ultimate questions: what the meaning of life is, or whether we are needed or not by anyone at all.

The psychological crisis as liminal event is expressed through liminal-metaphors both in Hungarian and English language communities (B. Erdős 2005). Márta B. Erdős (2004, 2005) compared the characteristics of crisis-discourse based on investigations in the Hungarian and English speaking world. Her point of departure is the theory of Van Gennep's from 1906 about rites of passage (Van Gennep 1960; Turner 2002) identifying three subsequent phases in the rites of passage: separation, liminality and reincorporation, reintegration. In the phase of separation the person finds himself in a system of relations beyond ordinary roles and norms, throughout which one loses the identity created by previous relationships. In the liminal interim state, without any name and status, the person exists as Nobody, there is nothing to limit or enable certain of his actions. During the phase of reintegration or fitting up, one arrives at new roles, into originally and previously existent norms that have been acquired differently in the possession of new experiences. Crisis is a phenomenon apparently analogous to the rites of passage – finds B. Erdős – and based on the analyses of English language in this respect by McNamee (McNamee cited by B. Erdős 2005) infers that on the one hand language usage draws from the source range of 'edge/verge' and on the other hand from that of 'falling' to its metaphoric equations (B. Erdős 2005: 44). B. Erdős directs attention to such phrases of folk wisdom and everyday language usage expressing crisis as: characteristic of the person, as his property, or as something that is happening to him. (Such typical comments are like 'the person gets into crisis', 'one is in crisis', or 'he reached a critical stage in his life'.) According to her conclusion throughout psychological crisis, regarding language usage, the lack of control as an idea becomes emphatic, just like in the experience of 'falling'.

In the background of dialogues, as the subject of communication-theoretical, psychotherapeutic and philosophical investigations – whether directly or hidden – usually the topic of transcendence lies. Researchers in their

conceptions and enquiries exert themselves to explore, seize the ‘forces that are considered independent of the material world and are supernatural’ while investigating transcendence.<sup>5</sup>

Jaspers considers existence as ever unseizable, calls it ‘all-embracing’. The ‘all-embracing’ can never be manifest for us as horizon, it cannot become the subject, and we only may become aware of it as *limit*. The steps made towards the ‘all-embracing’ means the subject of basic philosophical operations. *The execution of operations in liminal situations actually is transcending*. The primary condition of transcending is the ‘radical openness’ formulated by Jaspers, referring to a disposition for any new experience that renders the knowing of the ‘all-embracing’ – including the world and every existent in the world – possible. Thus, transcendence is the absolute ‘Hypotenuse’, the ‘all-embracing’ hypotenuse of all hypotenuses (Jaspers 2000; Störig 1997).

Transcendence is ‘a paradigm that renders the objects and the situations of our life extraordinary, making them ascend to the level of an extraordinary symbolic force’ (Gargani 1998: 115). The fire of heavens is the same idea as the fire of hell says Gargani (1998: 114) the Italian philosopher, since heaven and hell are just two opposite poles of a relation to the same fire. ‘Suicide obviously has psychological concerns, but in addition has transcendent ones as well – although, the latter is rarely mentioned, since this plane cannot be grasped by the acknowledged tools of our culture related to suicide’ – reads Márta B. Erdős in her volume, *A nyelvi kapcsolat (The Lingual Relation)* (2005: 27). Her reasoning finds its roots in an approach that analyses man as a ‘bio-psycho-social’ being capable of executing all its operations without the transcendental references of humans. One of the focuses of B. Erdős’s investigations is the role of the dialogical relationship in crisis intervention with its qualities and characteristics. ‘Quitting the universe determined by former meanings at the same time entails that one has to go beyond the world experienced in its actuality. [...] The context concerning strategies of life cannot be else than the transcendent faculty’ – she points out (B. Erdős 2005: 179).

The participation and partaking in certain qualities of communication make the availability to the transcendental faculty possible. In this respect both the approach by Bateson, regarding the third level of his learning theory (Bateson 1971; B. Erdős 2005), as well as the fourth type of communication by Jaspers (Jaspers 2004) are especially noteworthy. Bateson’s 0 level refers to the mere transmission of information, level 1 is learning in its ordinary sense of the word,

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<sup>5</sup> Providing a review of dialogue-research is not possible here, considering the vast amount of literature, however, the approach related to crisis is inevitable to be imported into our discourse to be able to unfold the subsequent train of thoughts.

level 2 stands for learning how to learn, thus finding the most effective strategies. Level 3 at Bateson is existential or spiritual in character, where the absolute significance and aim of the process is the question itself.

Out of the four types or levels of personality images enumerated by Jaspers – mere being, consciousness as is, the level of the spirit and finally that of existence – the first three cannot enable us for realization. That takes place only at the fourth level, at the level of man as existence, thus ‘the realization of the liminal situation is, in a certain respect, equal to the «coercion» of man into existence’ (Csejtei s. a. 24). Considering the levels of human existence Jaspers differentiates four types of communication (Jaspers 2004; Juhász – Csejtei 2004): 1. communication at the level of mere being in which the struggle is for power to one’s own interest – regardless of others; 2. entirely rational communication that takes place at the level of consciousness as is, aiming the maintenance of communication between people; 3. communication taking place at the level of spirit making it possible to share common ideas, values, norms and principles; 4. the existential communication, unlike the first three levels with their objective characteristics, is originally non-objective and cannot be mediated by any techniques. It can be realised through participation from the other or through communication in silence. Jaspers considers the mentioned level of existence eminently important, since it includes the quality of openness to transcendence. One of the central principles and concepts of the existential-analytic logotherapy elaborated by Frankl, *self-transcendence* addresses a similar approach, whereas man only wins himself, provided he can intend something that points beyond instincts and psycho-physiological needs (Sárkány 2008).

## The possible role of crisis in transcending between the modes of existence regarding Heideggerian ‘forgetfulness of being’ and ‘being-uncovering’

The interpretation of psychological crisis as liminal situations offers both a framework and content to the understanding of the change between the modes of existence regarding Heideggerian ‘forgetfulness of being’ and ‘being-uncovering’. In existential psychotherapeutic deliberations the concept of *Dasein* by Martin Heidegger – who, however, never defined himself as a philosopher of existentialism – got a significant role (Yalom 1980; Heidegger 1989; Fehér 1992) in expressing the idea that human existence simultaneously provides and carries meaning. According to Yalom (2003) it appears in two forms of manifestation:

once as the ‘empirical I’, in the form of the present existent object, and as the one who creates the world, as the ‘transcendental I’.

We could seize the two fundamental modes of existence described by Heidegger (1989) as follows:

1. The forgetfulness of being (*Seinsvergessenheit*): is a state when one forgets about being and actually lives in the world of objects, immerses oneself in the everyday routine and as described in therapeutic praxis – is ‘moving on the surface’.<sup>6</sup> Yalom describes the mentioned state as inferior. His statement of the given hierarchic-structural view may be disputable by becoming more acquainted with Heidegger’s approach. In Heidegger’s works the concepts of ‘authenticity’ and ‘inauthenticity’ that are parts of the always ‘in each case mineness’<sup>7</sup> are accented and related to the forgetfulness of being state. The possibility of authenticity is based on the idea that man ‘is in each case essentially its own possibility, it can, in its very Being, ‘choose’ itself and win itself; it can also lose itself (Heidegger 1962: 68). It is only possible because ‘it is essentially something which can be *authentic* – that is, something of its own’ (Heidegger 1962: 68). The modes of existence regarding authenticity and inauthenticity are ‘both grounded in the fact that any *Dasein* whatsoever is characterized by mineness’ (Heidegger 1962: 68). The authentic and inauthentic modes of Being are possible since man maintains a relation to his own Being; he is free to undertake his Being and to escape from it. In this ‘each case mineness’ Heidegger directs our attention exactly to the fact that inauthenticity ‘does not signify any ‘less’ Being or any ‘lower’ degree of Being’ (Heidegger 1962: 68), since ‘it is the case that even in its fullest concretion *Dasein* can be characterized by inauthenticity –when busy, when

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<sup>6</sup> The four characters conceived by Béla Hamvas could be correlated with the state of the ‘forgetfulness of being’ and the first character – borrowing Antal Szerb’s expression – he called the lotus eater. The most characteristic feature of the lotus eater is that he lives in a peculiar stupor regarding the serious nature of his situation, as if there were no crisis. He strives to ‘forget the time’ he is in, in which he is living. Nevertheless, the lotus eater is a characteristic crisis-aspect, since forgetfulness is only present in relation to those instances he wants to forget about. He believes whatever he has given a miss has not been noticed by him either. Though, by doing so, his vulnerability is even greater, since he is permanently bound to turn his back on the actual crisis situation and its solution that would be best to be ‘forgotten’. The second type is different, it is the situation of the outsider who is totally aware what is happening, but he is in a belief he has been honoured and possesses the solution. Hamvas reckons the political parties, the social movements and the representatives of different ‘subfields of sciences’ (e.g. psychology /sic!/, statistics, economics) to this category. He considers the outsider to the crisis ‘out-of-date’, since he was born out of date and has no real relation to the present, moreover, he has never had. One ‘fallen behind’ cannot move with his times. The time lag is gradually growing between him and his times, losing his presence in time, thus a ‘coefficient of anachronism’ arises in his conduct of life and the distance between his individual fate and common human fate becomes greater (Hamvas 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Among others, Heidegger considers ‘always-being-my-own-being’: death, anxiety and conscience as well.

excited, when interested, when ready for enjoyment.’ Heidegger’s further very important inference is about the relation between the two modes of Being that ‘inauthenticity is based on the possibility of authenticity’ and continues ‘Inauthenticity characterizes a kind of Being into which *Dasein* can divert itself and has for the most part always diverted itself; but *Dasein* does not necessarily and constantly have to divert itself into this kind of Being’ (Heidegger 1962: 303).

2. ‘Being-uncovering’ (*Entdeckendheit*): the state that awakens the consciousness of Being, when the individual is conscious of his Being and the responsibility for Being. ‘Being-true as Being-uncovering, is a way of Being for *Dasein*’ – reads Heidegger (Heidegger 1962: 263). ‘What makes this very uncovering possible must necessarily be called ‘true’ in a still more primordial sense. ‘The most primordial phenomenon of truth is first shown by the existential-ontological foundations of uncovering’ (Heidegger 1962: 263). According to the above mentioned approach, this is the very existential-ontological mode in which man is related to his self-creating ability, only from here is he able to change himself; leading to the conception of ‘understanding Being’ and Heidegger expounds on it as follows: ‘But Being “is” only in the understanding of those entities to whose Being something like an understanding of Being belongs. Hence Being can be something unconceptualized, but it never completely fails to be understood’ (Heidegger 1962: 228).

Man characteristically lives in the first mode, in the ‘forgetfulness of being’ that is his ordinary mode of existence. In this ordinary mode ‘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’ (Yalom 1980: 31). One lives in the uncovering mode of being authentically in the original sense of the word. He is coming to know his ‘transcendental’ power and his empirical (created) self,<sup>8</sup> awakens to the consciousness of his possibilities and limitations realizing them as such.<sup>9</sup> Then facing absolute freedom, nothingness, one becomes anxious.

Psychological crisis as liminal situation can be interpreted as awakening: as the transcendent faculty of transcending between the two modes of being, forgetfulness of being and uncovering of being.

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<sup>8</sup> Yalom interprets this conception here as creative power.

<sup>9</sup> Most psychotherapeutic schools have inauthenticity, standard everydayness for their goal. For psychotherapies with philosophical background, however, to exist as a principle is far more important than to ‘function easier/better’. Philosophical psychology has a more radical approach to the goals and methods of psychotherapies based on philosophy par excellence (see Sárkány 2008: 70).



## The potential functions of anxiety and despair in the crisis-situation

Anxiety is triggered off by the attitude to nothingness that is difficult to be treated because of its nature, since its localization is almost impossible. ‘This unobjectified fear subsists on the intuition that man’s destination is more than mere physical existence’ (Rácz 1993: 218). Man realized the synthesis of body and soul by the spirit. His body and soul are the finite components that belong to the realm of temporality, while his Self capable of self-relation and his Spirit belong to the sphere of the eternal. That is the Self we do not want to take note of at certain stages of despair (see Kierkegaard 1993a 155). Thus, anxiety emerges at the intersection of the two worlds that of the spiritual and physical realms, or the divine and animalistic, including the possibility for ‘salvation and sin’. The objectification of anxiety, the transfer from nothingness to something is regarded as the way of healing by Kierkegaard. Through reflections we bring into our consciousness anxiety and nothing is gradually turned into something, but in this case we cannot talk about the original (antecedent to sin) meaning of anxiety any longer (Gyenge 2007: 223).

Going further with the thought, Rollo May applying an existentialist psychotherapeutic approach concluded that anxiety rising from all sides at once aspires to transform into fear, thus becoming the target of struggle strategies through different forms of magical rituals or comprehensive social attacks or evasions. The other work of Kierkegaard’s with great impact on psychotherapeutic practice is *The Sickness unto Death* in which he designates the disorder developed in the personality for the reason of psychic illness (Dévény 2003). A most serious form of disorder is despair, the giving up of hope; postulating such despair in the background – that pries faith in success – questioning whether one ever succeeds in *becoming his own self*. The state of Kierkegaardian despair is on the boundary of suicide: but the agony of despair is exactly caused by the fact that death is a kind of escape from the creation of the authentic self. The issue of hope-despair – with its detailed discussion in the very volume under the chapter on crisis intervention – appears as the most indicative predictor regarding suicidalism (Fekete – Osváth 2004). Hope is actually the human capacity to permanently believe in the fulfilment of desires, thus having confidence and belief in a possible alternative of future,<sup>10</sup> while the

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<sup>10</sup> We are indebted mainly to Kelemen and B. Erdős (2004) and Kelemen (2001, 2011) for introducing the term ‘liveable alternative’ into the Hungarian literature of psychotherapy and addictology.

ideas, conceptions about it become centrally important: since hope is founded on plans.

Although not referring to it markedly, Karen Horney (1951) clearly relies on the ideas of Kierkegaard's when constituting her conception about neurotic disorders (Dévény 2003). Horney differentiates between two major types of neurosis: on the one hand those disorders in which the personality escapes from itself and would like to forget;<sup>11</sup> and those in which the personality desperately would like to fulfil its potentials. She postulates the major elements of neurotic conflicts unconscious and observes that this is the marker to help differentiate between a healthy and neurotic personality: a healthy person can bring the subject, content of the conflict to his consciousness anytime. The neurotic personality is dread of the power in the conflict, thus desperately refusing to undertake his existence. The outcome of such a process – based on her clinical experiences and observations – cannot be else than losing faith in oneself to ever become human (Dévény quoting Horney in 2003: 56). The patients complain and ask for advice, because they have headaches, sexual disorders or cannot work, but they never talk about the problem of *losing contact with their spiritual centre* (Dévény 2003: 257).

## Exiling the 'ill', the 'drama'

In the course of civilisation, as the result of modernisation and technological development people gain control over more and more areas of life that are considered negative, unfavourable, destructive, all in all regarded as 'drama', in processes qualified as 'ill' – in Hamvas's use of the words. Crisis – reads Hamvas – 'on the one hand is disaffection – escaping to a dream world – fear of reality – distancing in life, on the other hand it is: creation – reality – heroic attitude, interwoven by its own reverse, having evolved to a complete mentality' (Hamvas 1983: 40). He designates this dramatic clash the most inward experience of modern European man. Only that man has 'complete and true presence in time, who can actualize the drama, and the more one actualizes it the more presence he gains. The more alien he is to it and the more superficially one undergoes it the less he lives in the present of his time' (Hamvas 1983: 40–41). Death as 'drama', in Hamvas's sense gradually moves away and is in exile from the lifeworld of man.

Death, dying and attitude to death as an area of inevitable dramas can be defined from the 19<sup>th</sup> century on. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century people were eager

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hamvas's *lotus eater*.

to synchronize withdrawal from society with that from life. The in-between zone, that the socially inactive old age meant, began to shrink, for a while people did not incline to grow old, next they did not want to die. Up until the mid-1600s people were perfectly accustomed to the coexistence of the quick and the dead, moreover, to the deceased ones as well as to their own death (Aries 1987). Death to the 19<sup>th</sup> century became a disgraceful event and a taboo: the environment started to spare the dying person, then to conceal the seriousness of the case from itself. Truth became a question, since ‘one must be happy’.<sup>12</sup> Fate emerges more in death than in any other moments of life – claims Aries – and while the attitude towards death used to mean that man could give himself up to his destiny, for today death has become impossible to be named.

In Hamvas’s approach the same process takes place with the representatives of authority,<sup>13</sup> whose existence gradually channel ‘less and less transcendental security towards people’, until coming to an end. Thus, royalty is first exchanged by priesthood on power, next aristocrats – the power of knights –, finally the bourgeoisie and the proletariat follow. This is the course of humanisation according to Evola in which the means of life have become more important than life itself moreover, the means degraded life to mere means (Evola – Hamvas 1983: 27).<sup>14</sup> For a parallel he finds the ‘heavenly becoming earthly’, designating a process in which wisdom, sacred knowledge is converted into science with an aim to provide knowledge available for everyone. A direct relevance could be found with the idea of Max Weber’s (1995) on the demagicalization of the world in which Weber states: the traditional metaphysical status of God has been shaken by the scientific and technological revolution of the pre-modern that actually drove spirits out of the world, thus turning the world into a cognizable reality with its particular rules open for systematic scientific discovery. God the omnipotent creator became a cosmic clockmaker who had to observe the rules of his own creation.

Dezső Csejtei in his work entitled *The Problem of Intelligence in Philosophical Thanatology* (2004) finds the phenomenon of death may be grounded on two major bases, on the biology and hermeneutics of the death phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> From

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<sup>12</sup> The watchword that leads to America is: ‘To live in the moment without any consequences. Relax; take it easy, it is nothing serious!’

<sup>13</sup> Power at him conveys a specific content: the one who owns it has authority by heavens, and is not only present through his actions, but through his emanation, indicating and representing the supernatural.

<sup>14</sup> Hamvas formulates the fundamental issues of consumer culture theory, namely, man becoming a consumer, a taxpayer.

<sup>15</sup> Regarding the summary of philosophical thanatology see Dezső Csejtei’s work quoted above and the same author’s academic thesis entitled *Az egzisztencia tükré* (The Mirror of Existence) (2003).

the view point of our topic and possibilities here and now, mainly expounding on the first approach seems to be relevant which has the term *medicalized death* by Ivan Illich in focus and its *first major circumstance* is that death disappears, it is *devisualized*. Medicalization is such a prolific, bureaucratic programme that is based on the refusal of the inevitable human condition, of facing death and disease (Csejtei 2004: 32). Norbert Elias remarks, the dying person is removed from the scope of the living in a hygienic way and is placed behind the social scenes. The hospital is the typical institution of devisualization nowadays, the distinguished locus of 'hidden death'.<sup>16</sup> *The second significant circumstance* is the technologization of death, *thanatocracy*.<sup>17</sup> As a result of the very civilizational process disease and death have become rivals that 'must' be fought with all the possible means until the end.<sup>18</sup> Aries (Aries 1987 quoted by Csejtei 2004) took notice of the phenomenon that the dying person is increasingly considered as a 'serious patient', who can be saved from death. One's past recovery is regarded as a serious disease and the patient has to be removed from the way of approaching death at any cost, thus transforming the intransitive process into a 'delay'.<sup>19</sup>

The processes mentioned above substantiate and support the assumptions by the author that in human thinking ill qua ill is banished. The demand by humanity to be able to have total control<sup>20</sup> over the mechanisms of life that have been fathomed seems to be expressed more intensively. Those inconceivable, inapprehensible influences that are presumed as factors present and cannot be controlled are projected to the boundless territory of transcendence.

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<sup>16</sup> A further and everyday aspect of devisualization today is to have professional care taker companies bury our deceased ones, by 'taking care of all our burdens'.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Ziegler's term (Csejtei 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Susan Sontag (1990) in her works *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors* sets forth in detail that military metaphors have flooded health care. The phenomenon can be observed in the mode the spreading of pathogens in the human body are referred to, as well as in the qualification of illnesses. One of the typical examples by Sontag is related to carcinomatous diseases that are not proliferating, but attacking the organism. The same can be observed in relation to medicaments, since adjectives like 'aggressive', 'broad spectrum', 'hit' are considered the greatest praise when describing a product (Sontag 1990; Csejtei 2004).

<sup>19</sup> A long ago when death has set in, the medical doctor verified the event. Nowadays, the circumstances and the time of death are set by medical doctors.

<sup>20</sup> Genetic research could be reckoned here as certain cases of cloning, or genetic engineering controlling gender, physical-psychological-spiritual qualities; a considerable amount of plastic surgery and cosmetic interventions. We should also include here some paradigms related to birth, since by these days 'undisturbed birth' has become a curiosity, considered as 'alternative'; giving birth, and birth itself as a natural physiological process is controlled at most of its stages, and is burdened with questionable interventions. We face a similar situation regarding anaesthesia, which is expected to be immediate and total.

## Finding awareness and maturation of/in existence and the self – psychological crisis as reflective process

‘Difficulty only arises where man refuses his duty’ – indicates Béla Hamvas in his philosophical work entitled *World Crisis* (1983) dealing with modern apocalypse, crisis-catharsis, compiling his views about the world crisis in a single volume. However with variable intensity, permanent reflective and self-reflective processes can be observed in the personality, as man constantly maintains his relationship with himself and the world, by inquiring and formulating answers. He looks for questions and answers, since his development not only depends on answers discovered, but on questions concerning deeper and deeper layers of reality. Keyserling thinks the question is not the way one is conceiving the world, but how deeply he conceives it, when approaching the issue in his volume entitled *Creative Understanding*, published in 1922 (Hamvas quoting Keyserling 1983: 22).

Arising at once with meaninglessness as its counter side, crisis usually appears as the way or possible mode of finding realisation, maturation and the state of being understood by others. The personality’s openness to experiences and the ability to receive them appear to be the conditions of development. The essence of it seems to be preserved in our language: when an experience *touches* us it simultaneously conveys the meanings that an event becomes the part of our personal reality, one ‘gains awareness’<sup>21</sup> of it; at the same time reaching a new stage of personal development as well. Thus, *the crisis situation may become an ‘impending’ or liminal situation towards transcendence*. Questions include problems<sup>22</sup> and vice versa, since problems are the questions to be solved. The crucial cognitive and emotional contents, entities existing in the deeper structures of the personality become available for awareness spontaneously or as the outcome of universal processes of development. Thereby, man becomes the subject of an existential sort of introspection. From a scientific point of view it is a most fascinating and at the same time, the most difficult problem of investigation: whether what factors assist the intensification of the mentioned reflective processes in man and what context is created by the crisis situation. The author of the study – sharing Caplan’s view (Kézdi 1995; Caplan 1964) – infers *the psychic contents appearing and revealing in crisis situations are actually such structures of the*

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<sup>21</sup> The Jesuit monk’s, Anthony de Mello’s term (de Mello 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Wikipedia defines problem as: ‘...an obstacle, impediment, difficulty or challenge, or any situation that invites resolution; the resolution of which is recognized as a solution or contribution toward a known purpose or goal. A problem implies a desired outcome coupled with an apparent deficiency, doubt or inconsistency that prevents the outcome from taking place.’ (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem> – assessed: 11 June 2013)

*personality that could not be available without the event or processes triggering the crisis. Therefore, crisis – as liminal situation – forms a bridge between unintegrated contents and the personality assisting man to the state of 'Being uncovered'.*

In catharsis, during the integration of the personality at higher stages, two forces are differentiated by Hamvas (1983): one subsisting upon nihilism and the other subsisting on progression. The first is ignorant, acrid, without any desire or interest, so much crusted that it is without respect to anything and has lost everything. The latter – we could call the power or powers of promotion – is the 'world of new radiance and flavour' in which confidence, humour, facing challenges, openness, and joy are characteristic. Vital forces flare up in vigour, and it seems as if 'the world has just begun to open up for us in its originality and grandeur' (Hamvas 1983: 52). The essential prerequisite of catharsis is 'fearlessness',<sup>23</sup> at once covering surrendering, resistance and discontentment. 'Catharsis is the intensification of all past and future dramatic situations: it is the potentiality of all life situations, moral requirements, compromise, desire for combat and total apathy, joy of life and escapism becoming demanding' (Hamvas 1983: 54). The above description seizes the essence of ambivalence with its contrary aspirations and psychological content most typical of psychological crisis (Csürke 2011). Hamvas even catches the moment of decision: man deconstructs his world, and is 'facing nothing' (Csürke 2011: 54). The state of nothing, -that is the 'concealment of Being'<sup>24</sup> according to Heidegger – is revealed, and new truths, new components of reality become available for awareness. Hamvas raises the possibility that nothing is 'only' an abyss, beyond which something else starts, however the one going through the crisis cannot respond to this issue, since nobody has ever taught him about the very 'jump' and it has not ever been mentioned. In catharsis such tension of 'intensities and retentive decisions' (Csürke 2011: 55) appear that man cannot bear for a longer period of time. As a consequence the dynamics of the crisis generate a *psychological existential vacuum* –<sup>25</sup> referring to V. Frankl's term (2005). Vacuum is the essence of crisis centralizing psychic powers, cognitive and emotional energies and arranges emerging contents around a problem focus.<sup>26</sup> *A novel and*

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<sup>23</sup> Terminology by Hamvas (1983: 53).

<sup>24</sup> Being, that is partially revealing and covering through nothing.

<sup>25</sup> V. Frankl explicates the generation of noogene (existential, spiritual) neurosis by the principle.

<sup>26</sup> Maybe that is the reason why so often the hurricane is the visual analogy for crisis, the meteoric event capable of immense destruction with its vast energies taking everything that is in its way into its funnel. The whirlpool is a characteristic visual metaphor as well with its similar formation in water, a natural phenomenon in streams. Moreover, the unpredictable character of these natural phenomena even makes the comparison with psychological crisis particularly remarkable, since it is almost impossible to have any forecasts, and in most cases only certain thematic occurrences make the event probable.

*deeper perspective of truth*<sup>27</sup> – reality perceived and experienced by the person – may arise and become the subject of cognition, operations, self-actualization, individuation and identification.

The most significant correlation is marked by Heidegger supporting the above mentioned statements. He claims in ontological issues being and truth has always been brought together if not identified, thus the inevitable correlation of being and apprehension comes to surface, though its primordial foundation still remaining concealed.

The interpretation of the above conception in the crisis paradigm – where the issues of existence and non-existence emerge consequently – substantiates the conclusion, *the commitment to the apprehension of truth, reality and the self in psychological crisis means: choosing life.*

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<sup>27</sup> The concept of *truth* used here firmly refers to and reflects the Heideggerian concept of truth, which at him means ‘un-concealedness’ Being that ceases covering and concealedness (Störig 1997).

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## A LÉLEKTANI KRÍZIS AZ EGZISZTENCIALISTA FILOZÓFIA ÉS PSZICHOTERÁPIA NÉZŐPONTJÁBÓL

A homo patiens, Viktor E. Frankl (2010) szenvedő ember figurája szenvedés-képessége révén képes létében értelmet felfedezni: a beteljesülés és kétségbeesés dimenziójában a végzetes sikertelenségben is képes önmagát kiteljesíteni. A krízisben szenvedő ember lehetőséget fedezhet fel egy magasabb minőség – egy mélyebb értelem megtalálására. A szenvedés ezáltal válik értelemlehetőséggé. A lélektani krízis jelensége megközelítésünkben így a lét és létezésünk alapkérdéseivel való kapcsolatunkat definiálhatja. A krízisben felmerülő megoldási kísérletek elgondolása során mélységeiben tekinthetünk önmagunkra. A jelen tanulmányban vizsgált egzisztencialista megközelítések metszetében új nézőpontokra lelhetünk: elsőként a krízis mint transzcendens művelet, az egzisztenciális alapkonfliktusok által létrehozott határhelyzetekben (Jaspers 2000) kerül elemzésre. Kísérletet teszünk a krízis olyan új értelmezési keretben történő vizsgálatára, mely a heideggeri létfejtés és felfedő lét létmódjai (1989) közötti transzcendális megértéséhez visznek közelebb. Majd a szorongás, valamint a reménytelenség – mint a szuicidalitás egyik legerősebb prediktorának – krízis-szituációkban betöltött lehetséges funkcióit elemezzük egzisztencialista perspektívából. Az életünkben felbukkanó rossznak, Hamvas kifejezésével élve (1983) drámának minősített és száműzni kívánt folyamatok elemzésén keresztül a krízist mint a lét- és önmegértés felé vezető reflektív folyamatot vizsgáljuk meg.

*Kulcsszavak:* krízis, egzisztenciális pszichoterápia, egzisztenciálfilozófia, értelemlehetőség, reflektív folyamat, önmeghaladás