

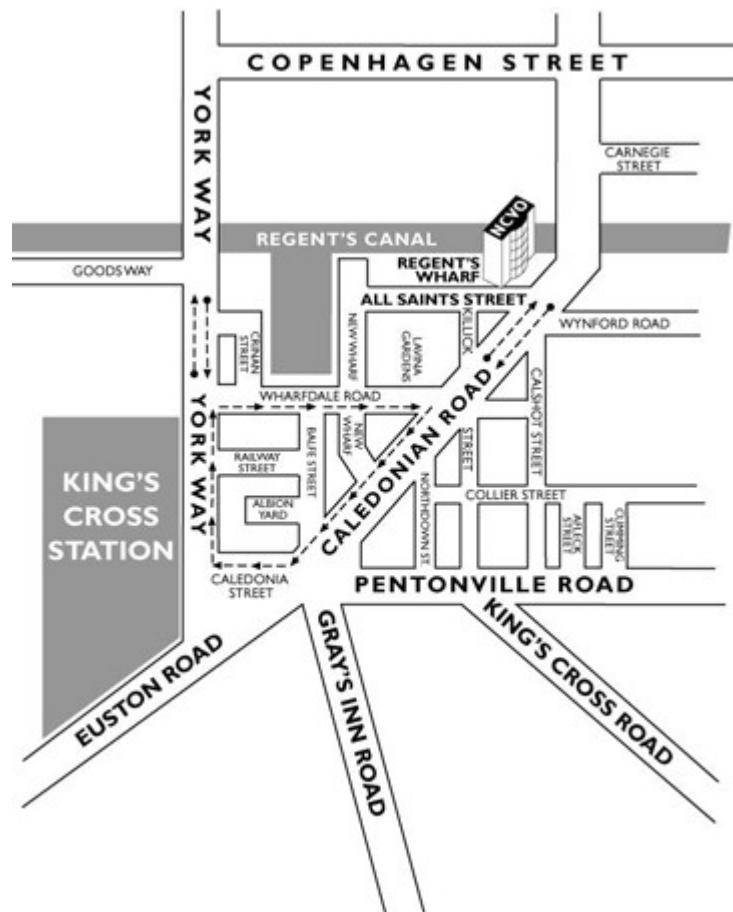
# SEA Conference 2009

## EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

**TICKETS ARE SOLD OUT!**

**Date:** 18 October 2009

**Venue:** NCVO, The National Council for Voluntary Organisations  
Regent's Wharf  
8 All Saints Street  
London  
N1 9RL



For further detailed directions go to <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/contact>.

## SCHEDULE

09:00-09:50	Registration
09:50-10:00	Welcome from the Chair
10:00-10:50	<b>BO JACOBSEN</b> – Chaired by <i>Paul McGinley</i>
11:00-11:30	Morning Tea Break
11:30-12:20	<b>JOHN HILLS</b> – Chaired by <i>Helen Brice</i> <b>MICHAEL GRUBER</b> – Chaired by <i>Ernesto Spinelli</i> <b>BÁRBARA GODOY</b> – Chaired by <i>Paul McGinley</i>
12:30-13:30	Lunch
13:30-14:20	<b>DR ERIK CRAIG</b> – Chaired by <i>Paul McGinley</i>
14:30-15:20	<b>HARAN RASALINGAM</b> – Chaired by <i>Damian Tamre</i> <b>DIANA MITCHELL</b> – Chaired by <i>Helen Brice</i> <b>GABRIELLA OTTY</b> – Chaired by <i>Paul McGinley</i>
15:30-16:00	Afternoon Tea Break
16:00-16:50	<b>RYAN KEMP</b> – Chaired by <i>Helen Brice</i> <b>MIKE HARDING</b> – Chaired by <i>Paul McGinley</i> <b>MARION STEEL</b> – Chaired by <i>Ernesto Spinelli</i>
17:00-17:30	Closing from the Chair

Lunch and refreshments provided during the breaks are all inclusive in your ticket price.

As previously advised, there will be up to three speakers presenting at any given time. You will need to choose on the day which talk you wish to attend. These cannot be reserved in advance. A full program will be provided on the day to assist you in making your decision which will include this Schedule, the abstracts of the speakers, and their bios. The speakers and their abstracts are included here should you wish to decide prior to this time.

### THE SPEAKERS & THEIR ABSTRACTS

(in alphabetical order)

**DR ERIK CRAIG:** *Ontological Reflections on Existential Crisis: Daseinsanalytic Perspectives for Theory and Practice*

With the multiplicity of ways the term “existential crisis” has been used over the last 60 years, today we confronted with the concealing power of what Edmund Husserl called “sedimentation,” namely the obscurity that comes with the habitual use, misuse, and even abuse of terms, in this case, the terms existential, crisis, and existential crisis. Drawing primarily on the works of Martin Heidegger and Medard Boss this presentation will unfold both philosophical and psychotherapeutic meanings of existential crisis with the hope of clarifying and opening up possibilities for psychotherapy and everyday life. Naturally, special attention will be given to that particular being Dasein. Dasein, the human being, is the very being for whom existential crisis is not only an issue but also a way of being. This paper ultimately aspires to address both ontic and ontological significances of existential crisis and to do so in vivid, frank, everyday language, drawing on everyday experience including psychotherapeutic experience. Traumatic and transformative possibilities of existential crises will be exposed.

**BÁRBARA GODOY:**

*Existential Crisis: A Psychological Quantum Leap that Attacks Existential Inertia*

Is existential crisis the golden opportunity in an analysis? Is the role of the existential therapist to facilitate the breaking of a world in favour of creativity? This paper views crisis as a moment of truth, acknowledging that this is a time of intense difficulty and asking, who is in trouble and what is in danger? The following concepts will be explored and illustrated with a case study: (a) Inertia: guardian of the status quo (b) Resistance: protector of what repeats itself indefinitely. (c) Quantum leap: a revolution that challenges science's Newtonian description of reality and shows the chaotic unity behind objects. What new energies attack psychological barriers? Nietzsche's Zarathustra danced at the funeral of a God fatally wounded by Giordano Bruno and Galileo. The objective witness from above dissolved in the beauty and the terrors of human experience. Now new ways of evaluating how we think are necessary.

**MICHAEL GRUBER:**

*Crisis? Between Reaction and Creation*

It's tempting to attribute our contemporary "existential crisis" to the uncertainty resulting from the collapse of financial systems. These systems have not only failed to protect the common good, they have been revealed to primarily defend and legitimize the globalization of capitalism. Additionally, these and other "security" systems are projected into our psycho-social lives to promote the belief that the meaning of existence depends upon economic cycles that shift erratically between scarcity and abundance. Assimilating this projection binds us to materialism and leaves us prey to ongoing "existential crises" suffused with guilt, fear, and an overall sense of disenchantment. I propose we abandon our belief in this ideology and choose to enhance our well-being by facilitating awareness of our soul-spiritual nature. Existential psychotherapy is called upon to restore peace and vitality to our self-other-world relations. To fulfill this healing task, we must illuminate that the cause of our "crisis" is separation from our Divine Source and cultivate a new "world-picture" whose deeds are permeated by forgiveness, kindness and ethical responsibility.

**MIKE HARDING:**

*Living with Anxiety: Are Attempts at Regulation Acts of Denial?*

This paper will examine the current usage of regulation: the State control of psychotherapy, burgeoning Codes of Ethics, CPD requirements, etc. and the implications of the Human Rights Act. It will address the Conference theme by suggesting that such strictures are primarily attempts to ameliorate the anxiety of the therapist, and are not for the protection of the public. As such they are not only classic examples of bad faith, but are likely to fail. The presentation will draw mainly on the work of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, with particular references to their critiques of the concept of truth and ethics, and the manner in which 'scientific' views increasingly predominate (viz: the importance of 'outcome studies', student 'learning outcomes', etc.) It will also explore what is omitted from such claims, and how the language of such legislation reveals the 'unspoken'. Examples from some 'wisdom traditions' will also be explored.

**JOHN HILLS:**

*“Heart of Darkness: Lightness of Being” towards an attempted resolution of the existential crisis of family life*

In this presentation John will briefly share some therapeutic implications of the Laing-Esterson social phenomenology and show how these can be used to enable a collaborative dialogue with a family suffering mental illness. The collaboration is both with family members and members of an adult mental health service who form part of a therapeutic team. There will be examples from current case material, the brief training programme used to help create the service and the general principles that inform the work. Families are places of 'darkness' and 'light' and it is the therapeutic understanding of the interplay between conflicting tendencies that may assist that most demanding human task-living in a familial community.

**BO JACOBSEN:**

*The Role of Existential Crisis for Human Development*

*Living through an existential crisis is a way of strengthening and unfolding your personality, a way of finding yourself.* It is common among therapists and psychologists to view crisis as something disagreeable and unfortunate that should be repaired or overcome. As existential psychologists and therapists we should advocate a radically different view of the phenomenon 'crisis'. Crisis is hard and painful, yes, but crisis is also an opportunity to open up towards your existential ground and define yourself on a firmer basis than ever before. The existential philosopher Otto Bollnow has developed a fruitful existential theory of crisis and its role for personal development that I will discuss. The optimal living through a crisis has three dimensions: dealing with loss, dealing with adversity and opening up your existence. I will detail these three dimensions and their therapeutic implications in my presentation.

**RYAN KEMP:**

*“Rock Bottom” and the Event of Truth*

The analysis of crisis in addiction is often articulated as “rock bottom”. This is seen as the turning point in the recovery process, a point where identity changes and spiritual recovery begins. I wish to link this change to the phenomenological notion of “truth” and argue that “rock bottom” is a moment of truth. I will make theoretical connections to Heidegger’s notion of truth and Sartre’s notion of Bad Faith and to the issue of truth telling and to its opposite – lying. It is well known that addiction draws its subjects into a web of lies and deceit. These themes will be brought together and explored. The presentation will be primarily clinically orientated but I will also briefly explore the wider implications of addiction, desire, greed, consumption, crisis and collapse for society.

**DIANA MITCHELL:**

*Existential Crisis or Crisis for Existential Therapy?*

I believe that both therapy and supervision are in various ways about learning. To truly learn something new is a personal discovery. A 'real' teacher is someone who can facilitate learning. I believe that the existential/phenomenological approach will always be marginal and unconventional. My fear now is that 'we' are in danger of becoming 'main-stream' and possibly betraying the very beliefs that attracted us to existential therapy in the first place. I will use four of my own experiences as a student from my school years in Holland, the Royal Ballet School, 'training' with an inspirational ballet teacher and my 'training' to become an existential/phenomenological therapist in order to show how learning and personal discovery are so closely linked. It is looking back at these experiences that helped me to define what I mean when I say that I am an existential therapist and supervisor.

**GABRIELLA OTTY:**

*Illness as a Path – A Journey to the Dark Places of Wisdom*

This paper is my personal attempt to explore and conceptualise the profound psychological and spiritual transformation I have witnessed in my father during the course of the illness that would eventually lead to his death. I will discuss how, in so far as it acts as an existential crisis – by confronting an individual with their own mortality and forcing them to re-evaluate the assumptions and beliefs on which they have based their life – illness can become a turning point, a life-opening experience; how those who choose to accept, rather than fight, their physical illness, embark upon a path to self-discovery, self-acceptance and spiritual healing. I will also consider the challenges posed to us by the work we do with clients affected by an illness or terminal disease and the way in which, as we sustain them throughout their journey, as fellow travellers and, ultimately, as human beings, we are enriched and transformed ourselves.

**HARAN RASALINGAM:**

*Existence facing existential crisis?*

In a society where science is king, where Dawkins makes more sense than Deity or Dasein, where reductionism, automation and metrics reign, those with power to make decisions affecting our lives on matters of health, education, economics and many other spheres, are becoming increasingly blind to the existential dimensions of life and thus fail to do justice to them. The reliance on reductive dogma squeezes out the ontological realm and the worst extension of this dogma is into the field of human well-being and psychological health. Turning the reductive tide is difficult without the language to do so. I will discuss how an alternative perspective might be successfully communicated, considering the concept of an "ontological deficit" along with holistic, systems thinking and phenomenology. By continuing to leave unchallenged the conceptual confusions evident in neuroscientific debates on consciousness and the government's "Dumbo Effect" scientism, an awareness of being will become extinct!

**MARION STEEL:**

*On the Boundary: Working with Existential Crisis in an Acute Hospital Setting*

Anyone who has worked with patients on acute hospital wards will tell you that you cannot resonate with every tremor of feeling, and that sometimes there are visions of horror and raw fear that can only be observed obliquely. Perfect constant empathy in such circumstances would be suicidal,' writes the neuropsychologist, Paul Broks, in his memoir, *Into the Silent Land*. Within the framework of the medical model, the focus is always primarily on the physical. The psychotherapist however, is, by definition, up close to the mind: its visions are the focus. So how does one offer existential psychotherapy in an acute hospital setting with patients who are up against their own mortality, and their imminent death, and without it having a suicidal or destructive impact on the therapist? I wish to explore this question with reference to my own experience working within palliative care and also with reference to the latter work of Heidegger.

**We look forward to seeing you there!**