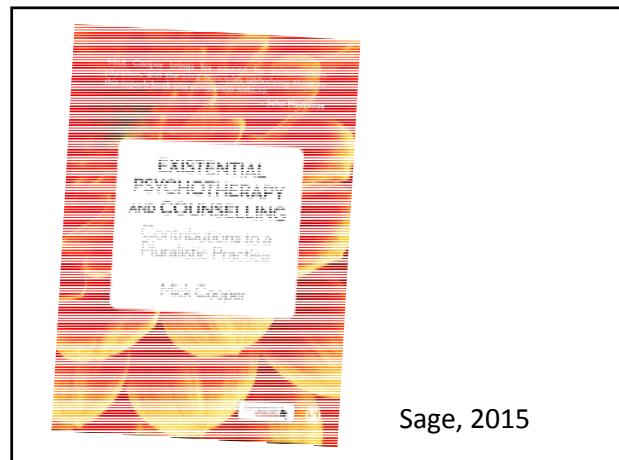


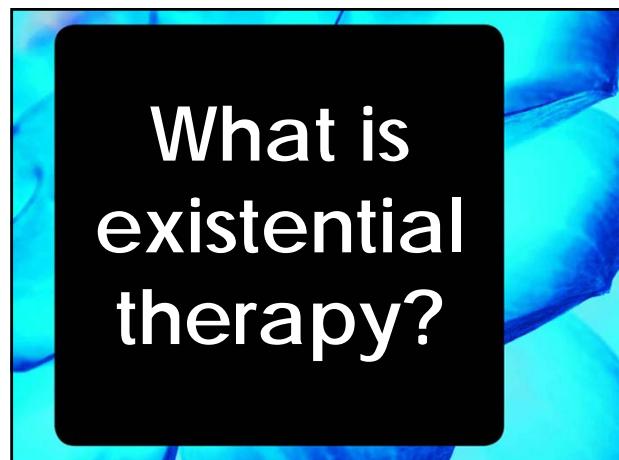
PCCS, 2012

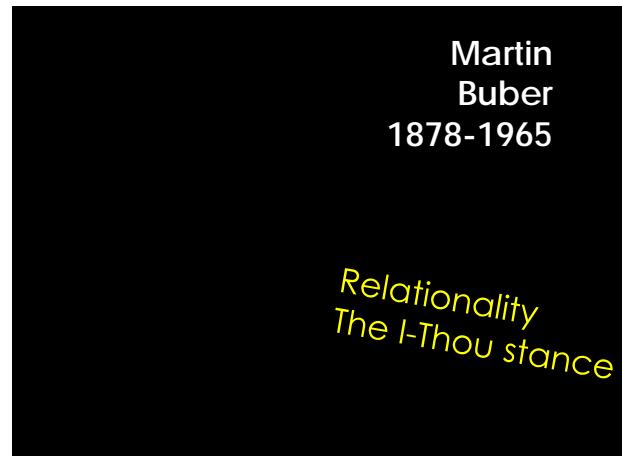
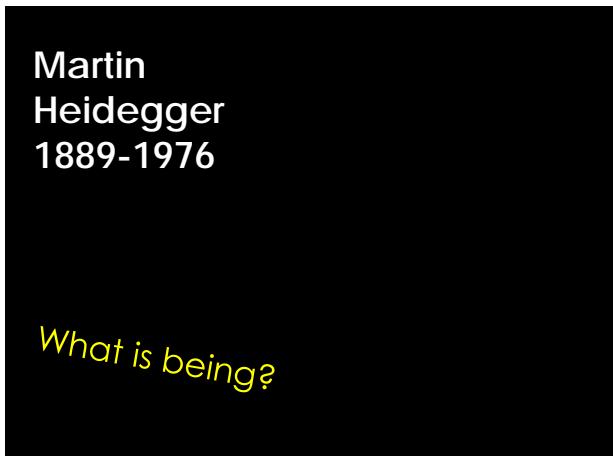


Sage, 2015



- There is no one 'best' therapy
- Different clients benefit from different therapeutic understandings and methods at different points in time
- If we want to know what is most helpful for clients, let's talk to them about it





Friedrich  
Nietzsche  
1844-1900

*Critique of 'herd mentality'*

### The essence of existential philosophy

- Critique of systems of thought that **de-humanise**: that reduce the richness of human lived-existences to impersonal laws, systems, numbers
- A return to the person 'of flesh and bone' (de Unamuno, 1954) – the concrete realities of existence

### What is our existence?

1. 'Here-and-now' being
2. Our lives 'as-a-whole'

### The essence of existential therapy

Helping clients acknowledge, live 'in tune with,' and make the most of the actuality of their existences

The schools of existential therapy  
Daseinsanalysis

Meaning-oriented therapies

The British school

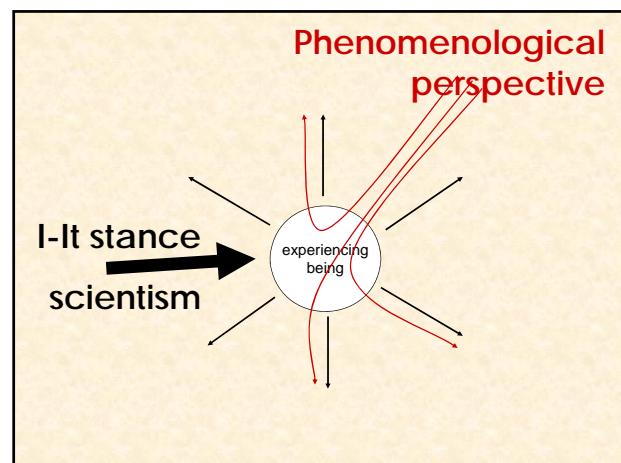
The existential-humanistic approach

### Relational and phenomenological foundations

Hesse

Buber

I-Thou	I-It
Standing alongside	Standing opposite
Other as subject	Other as object
Other as free	Other as determined
Listening holistically	Atomising
Open to otherness	Solipsism
Confirming	Disconfirming
Relating as wholeness	Relating in parts
Relating as wholeness	Relating in fragments
Dialogue/relational depth	Monologue



### Core principles of relational-phenomenological practice

- Active listening
- Empathising
- Bracketing
- Descriptive rather than interpretative
- Non-judgmental
- Asking open-ended questions
- Exploring the here-and-now encounter
- Using symbols and metaphors
- Engaging in dialogue
- Helping clients to **unpack** their experiencing

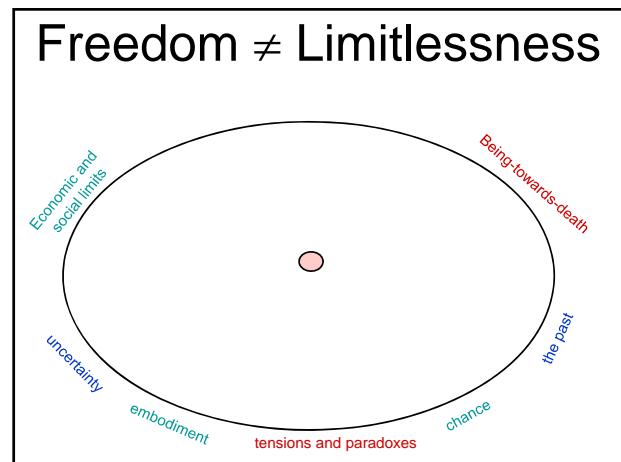


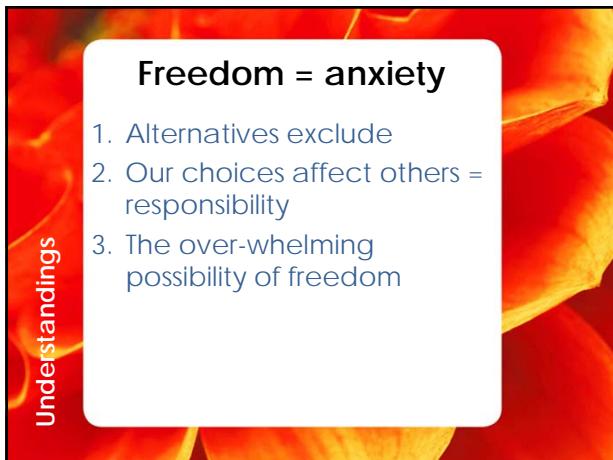
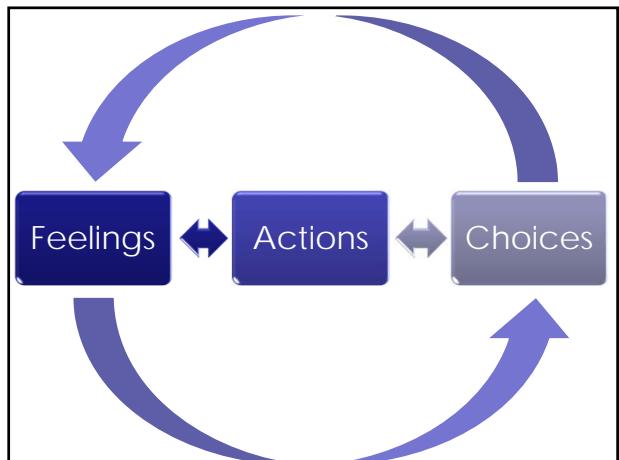
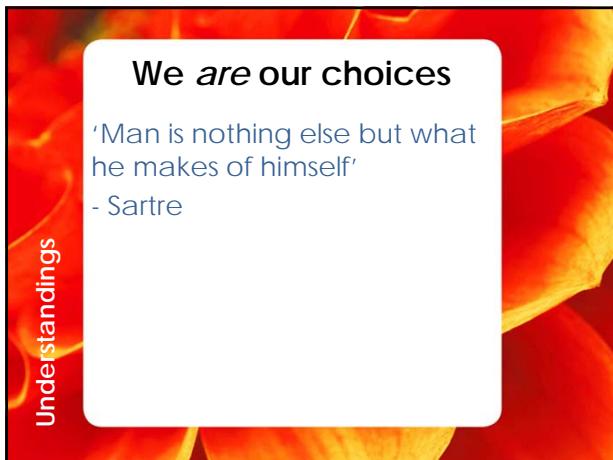
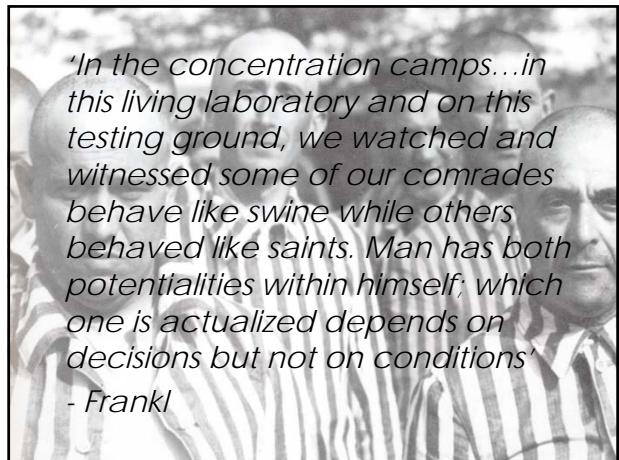
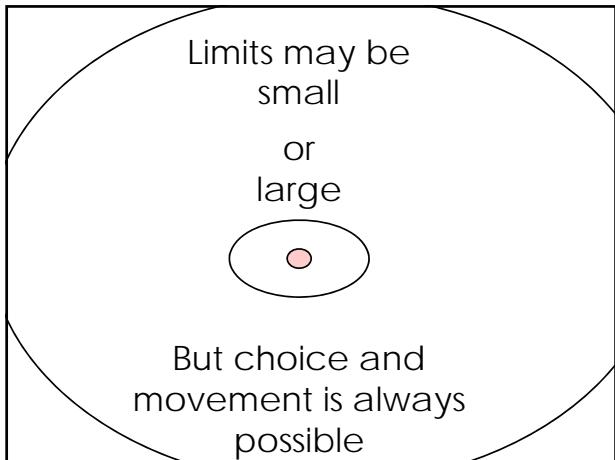
Understandings

**Being as free**

'Man does not exist *first* in order to be free *subsequently*; there is no difference between the being of a man and his *being-free*'

- Sartre





**Understandings**

### Losing our humanity

- Temporary relief but....

1. Reduces self-worth
2. Defences falter: Existential anxiety become neurotic
3. Not living the life that we want

**Methods**

### Empathising with the anxiety of choice

Dawn was a 21 year old client coming to the end of her college studies, and who spoke one day of her envy towards her friend Kate, who already knew what career path she wanted to follow. By contrast, said Dawn, she just 'didn't have a clue', and was overwhelmed by the variety of options available to her. Here, simply reflecting this back to Dawn and 'staying with' this anxiety seemed of some help--conveying to Dawn that she was not a 'weirdo' or 'spoilt brat' for feeling so envious and uncertain.

**Methods**

### Helping clients acknowledge freedom

- Can range from 'tougher', more direct challenging to gentler, more empathic exploration

### A direct challenge to take responsibility

*Thelma is concerned that her daughter is going out with a boy of 'ill repute'*  
*(Bugental, 1981)*

Bugental:	I can't do a thing, she's going to go, and that's it.
Thelma:	So you decided to let her go with John?
Bugental:	I haven't decided. She's the one who decided.
Thelma:	No, you've decided too. You've chosen to let her go with John.
Bugental:	I don't see how you can say that. She's insisting.
Thelma:	That's what she's doing; what you're doing is accepting her insistence.

### A direct challenge to take responsibility

Thelma:	Well then I won't let her go. But she'll be unhappy and make life hell for me for a while.
Bugental:	So you've decided to forbid her to go with John.
Thelma:	Well, isn't that what you wanted? What you said I should do?
Bugental:	I didn't say that you should do anything. You have a choice here, but you seem to be insisting that either your daughter is making a choice or that I am.
Thelma:	Well, I don't know what to do.
Bugental:	It's a hard choice.

### Gently unpacking choices

*Mary, a client in her mid-30s, is baffled by the anger she experiences towards her children*

Mary 1:	I get so frustrated that I'm really shouting at the kids. I don't know why I do it. One moment I'm feeling pretty calm and they're just playing around. And then the next moment I'm so angry. I really want to be more tolerant. Can you tell me about a time when you actually shouted at them?
Mick 1:	Take a few nights ago. They were up playing in their room, and I went up, and I saw what a mess they'd made, and-- to be honest, I could have swiped the little suds.
Mary 2:	What was going on for you when you saw the mess? Like, what was going through your mind when you saw the mess and also what were you feeling?
Mick 2:	I saw it and I thought, 'You don't just bloody listen to me do you, none of you, you're quite happy to treat me like your slave!' It was just the lack of respect that really got to me.
Mary 3:	

## Gently unpacking choices

Mick 3: So although you said earlier that you can't understand why you shout at them, when you talk about what actually happens, it sounds like it feels that there's a pretty good reason for it: that you want them to treat you with respect.

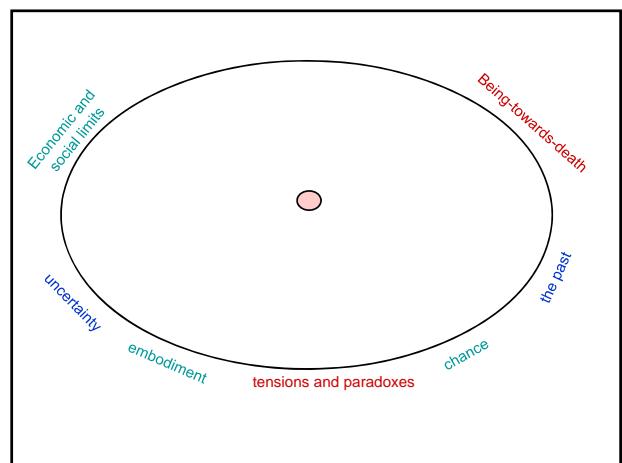
Mary 4: Yeah, I suppose so, but I feel so awful afterwards. It's just so not the kind of parent I want to be.

Mick 4: So it sounds like you're really wanting to get them to listen to you, and you're also not happy with the way that you're currently trying to do that. So I wonder, if-- like I wonder if there might be other ways that you could go about doing that. Let's imagine you walking into that room and seeing that mess: How else might you choose to behave?



Understandings

## Freedom is always engaged



## Mortality



# Tensions

- We are unavoidably pulled between competing desires – cannot overcome

Desire to achieve  
Desire for independence  
Desire to enjoy life  
Desire for closeness to others

TV      Getting out

**Understandings**

### Being is in-the-world

(You can't always get what you want to)

Paul wanted Nancy to be with him. He was a young man in a loveless marriage, and his affair with Nancy--an old school friend--was the one thing that he described as giving him a sense of excitement and passion in life. Paul desperately wanted to begin a new relationship with Nancy, but he knew that Nancy would never commit to him. She travelled widely, had several other romantic relationships, and had made it clear to Paul that, however fond she was of him, she would not want to settle down together. Paul tried hard to think his way around this given of the situation: maybe Nancy would come round, maybe his marriage was not so bad, maybe Nancy was not so great after all. But the existential reality was this: he wanted to be with her, she did not want to be with him, it really hurt.

**Understandings**

Uncertainty

**Understandings**

### Limits aren't nice

- Tendency to deny limits: e.g., 'I'm too special to die,' 'I can do it all'
- But denial means we don't make most of reality of our existences...
- and haunted by brute, impersonal, unforgiving facticity of world

**Methods**

### Empathising with anxiety of facing limits

Client: I keep on changing my mind about this guy I'm seeing. I'm driving myself crazy as well as everyone else.

Therapist: You hate being really torn about it, but I guess there's a reality that the two things you're feeling really strongly are both legitimate. You love him, and I can really see your passion; but you also don't want to mess up things with your kids. I have to say, if it was me there, I think I'd be struggling with that tension too, and I think you're doing brilliantly in the middle of it all.

**Methods**

### Helping clients to acknowledge limits

Petra had been encouraged to attend therapy by her father. Petra's father worried that she was doing nothing with her life, and Petra worried too: She had little sense of where she wanted to go in life, spent most of her time smoking marijuana and watching TV, and felt very envious of her friends who were all progressing in various directions. At the start of our work together, Petra indicated that her primary goal had been to live independently from her parents and, to be able to fund that, she had recently taken on an apprentice role at a local estate agent. However, a few weeks into our work she had quit the job, and subsequently moved back in with her parents. In our ninth session together, the dialogue proceeded along the following lines:

*Petra 1:* I just-- I know I should be looking for a job, looking on the internet, but I just-- once I start thinking about it and I sit down at the laptop and I-- there's so much other things to do, like I check my Facebook, and then I-- you know, stupid games and things. And then-- like it's eight o'clock and I just want to watch TV, go out for a smoke. Just goes so quickly.

*Mick 1:* So can you take me through that. Just say again. So there's you-- you're sitting at the laptop....

*Petra 2:* Yeah, I'm sitting there and I'm looking-- you know, job-- I might be like starting with Facebook, then Tumblr, then I go to some of the job sites and I'm looking-- searching... so boring, and, you know, that's even before I've started thinking about filling anything in. So, like, five minutes if I'm doing good, and then... I've probably got something else from Facebook by then-- on my mobile-- so it's maybe-- probably another hour or two before...

*Mick 2:* ...Before you go back to the jobs. And what's that like-- like I get a sense it's almost-- like it's painful for you to be staying on those job sites.

*Petra 3:* [Laughs]. Yeah-- yup-- It's so-- I just think, 'Jeez, I just can't be arsed.' You know, it's so-- it's such a mountain to climb and I... You know, one thing I was thinking about was how things used to be so easy when I was little. It was no effort, nothing was any effort. Like if I wanted to-- and I just think, these days, like if I want to do something, you know, I've probably got to put so much effort in-- and I do sometimes think, 'What the beep,' you know, like I just-- like I just can't be arsed. And that's probably why, you know, that's with the estate agent-- I couldn't-- like who wants to spend all day looking up pricing codes and that.

*Mick 3:* Yeah, so I can see you-- you really hate making that effort but it sounds like-- you seem to be saying that maybe if you want to get on with things and get somewhere in your life that's something you *do* need to do.

*Petra 4:* Yeah, it's like probably the reality is that if I am going to do something with my life I need to get off my arse and do something. Like I'm not going to get very far just sitting on my couch watching TV and getting ripped. Not unless I want to star on Jeremy Kyle [laughs].

*Petra 1:* ...and I look at it and I just think, you know, I just think-- Christ-- Jeez-- like, who's going to do that? What a crap job. I'd rather be getting stoned even if I don't have any money.

*Mick 1:* So it sounds like most of the jobs you look at-- all the jobs you look at, you look at them and they really don't-- just don't seem to be something you want to do.

*Petra 2:* Yeah, totally, well... you know, like a few of them are ok, but I never look at a job and think, 'That's *definitely* what I want to do.' You know, a few of them look ok but there's never definitely *the* job. You know, the one that I get really excited about and think, like, I *definitely* want to do that.

*Mick 2:* Ok, so what would that be?

*Petra 3:* [Pause] I dunno. [Pause] I dunno. Clown... furniture tester... [laughs] professional dope smoker [laughs]. *What?*

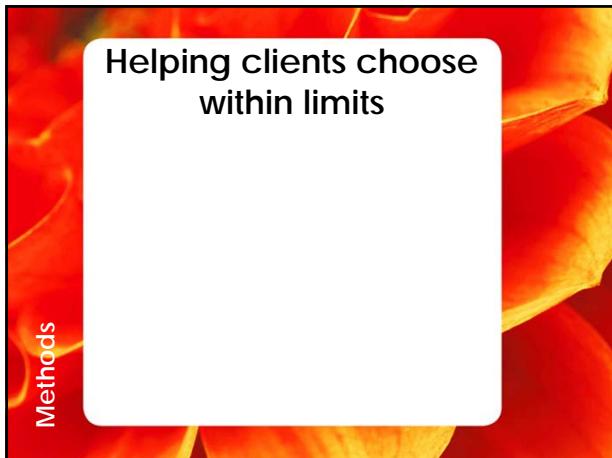
## Challenging clients to acknowledge limits

Methods

*Mick 3:* [Smiling] You know, I know you're joking here but-- I just think-- you know, I do get a sense that your line here is a bit 'I won't go for a job until the perfect one comes up,' and I just wonder if that's realistic. I guess there is a reality that you're 19, you're recently out of school, and it's going to take a while... before you get to do what you really want to do. And, I think-- you know, even if you've got a hundred PhDs there's maybe not likely to be ever the perfect job. You know, maybe it's one of the things about life that the chances of the perfect thing being out there... for any of us... is pretty slim. And if you're waiting for it to turn up you could-- you know, there's a risk-- you could be waiting for ever. [Pause] Mm...

*Petra 4:* [Long pause] I dunno, you know, like furniture tester sounded a lot better! [Laughs]. Yeah, yeah, I know what you mean. It's just... Yeah, I mean I've been kind of looking for ages and the reality is that nothing perfect has shown up at all, and given that-- I don't really know, what it is I can't really see-- you know, it's not that likely that I'll suddenly find the perfect job. But I do keep on waiting.

*Mick 4:* Yes, I know you do. And I can really understand that. But at the same time there's a reality, isn't there, that while you're waiting for the perfect job to come up you're also feeling really frustrated and unfulfilled and perhaps losing the time when you could be setting something up. And I guess, you know-- if I'm honest, I just worry-- and you also do too-- that, you know, you could end up waiting forever.



*Petra 3:* Ok, ten in the morning then [*laughs*]. No, seriously, I-- I reckon-- say, an hour? Like if I'm realistic, I could do an hour, maybe a bit more, then onto Facebook. Then maybe back again for another hour.

*Mick 4:* Ok, so-- and what-- like, supposing you're sitting there and five minutes later-- because, realistically, that's quite possible isn't it [*Petra: yeah*] that five minutes later you're going to be wanting to go onto Facebook. Ok, so you're sitting there and...

*Petra 4:* I guess it's about saying to myself some of the things that, you know, we discussed. Like around- like, you know, 'If I want to get a job and get away from my parents, I'm just going to have to do this.' I know- it's-- that it's not going to happen if I'm messaging and messing-- spending all day with friends.

*Mick 5:* And I guess there might also be something about-- about the thing that the perfect job may not be out there, and maybe-- you know, maybe you need to be a bit wider in what you are-- what you're looking for. [*Petra: mm*].

*Petra 5:* And I think, you know-- if I start saying to myself 'Let's have a quick look on Facebook,' I could-- I was thinking I could do something like count to 10: '1... 2... 3...' So I don't, you know-- so I give myself a bit more time.

*Mick 1:* So, ok, you're sitting there at the laptop. And you're thinking, 'Right, an hour on Facebook to start with.'

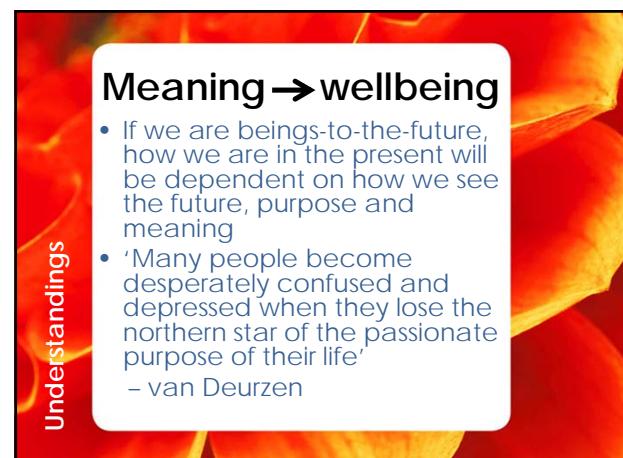
*Petra 1:* No [*laughs*]. No, I'm thinking, 'Right, I need to start looking for some jobs.' And then I maybe try a few sites... and then I think, 'Ok, just a bit of time on Facebook,' and then it ends up hours later.

*Mick 2:* Ok, so-- but what we're saying is-- what you're acknowledging is that, if you go down that route, you do then end up-- you do spend most of the rest of the day on Facebook or playing games. That does happen, doesn't it?

*Petra 2:* Yes, I guess mostly, but-- I guess I need to just keep myself focused on work and-- like, no Facebook until seven in the evening.

*Mick 3:* And, can I just ask, Is that-- Do you think that's realistic? Are you actually going to be able to do that?

## Purpose and meaning



**Understandings**

## The meaninglessness of existence

- 'There exists no "meaning," no grand design in the universe, no guidelines for living other than those the individual creates' - Yalom
- We are 'interpretation all the way down' - Dreyfus
- Need to come to terms with fundamental meaninglessness

**Methods**

## Being mindful of clients' future

*Lily: recently retired, depressed, husband unwell, deep sadness about 'loveless' relationship with daughter*

Lily: I wish Sophie would phone. She said to me she'd ring me last Wednesday and she didn't. She never comes to visit. She said that she's going to come down next weekend but I just don't know if she will or not. She didn't come down last time she said she would. And if she does come down this time, I'll be so angry with her about last time and how she ignores us that I'll probably have to be out of the room for most of the time she is here

Mick: So either way you won't get much out of it: if she doesn't come down you'll feel resentful, and if she does come down, you won't actually spend that much time with her

Lily: I just wish things were easier between me and her. When she was little, I so much wished that she'd be the person I could really talk to and share things with. I don't have a lot of friends- not close ones, anyway. I guess my expectations of her were too high. Now, I just don't know what's going to happen.

Mick: You know, as you're talking, what I'm thinking about is that the future for you is feeling pretty bleak; it doesn't feel like there's a lot for you to look forward to. It's like, you don't think things are going to end up particularly positively with you and Sophie, and then you talk about the way that Bob [her husband] is just getting worse and worse.

Lily: What have I got to look forward to? Sophie never calls, never bothers to turn up when she says she will. What am I supposed to do?

Mick: How would you like things to be? What kind of future do you want?

Lily: I want to feel close to Sophie. I want her to talk to me. I want Bob to stop criticising me and for him to find someone else to take him to the clinic sometimes. I want to go out with friends a bit more. I don't want to be coming to therapy for the rest of my life telling you how awful I feel.

**Methods**

## Helping clients find purpose and direction

- *Existential attribution:* Asking clients 'Why?' questions that help them track back to their most fundamental meanings and purposes. For instance, 'Why is it important for you to relate to people on an equal plane?'
- *Fast-forwarding:* Asking clients to depict likely future scenarios given a particular choice.
- *Magical thinking:* Asking clients questions that help them transcend their present and consider new possibilities. For instance, 'If you could do whatever you wanted right now, what would it be?'
- *Goals' form:* A simple, freely-available form that asks clients to write down their goals for therapy, or for life more generally

**Methods**

## Empathising with meaninglessness

'Challenging the meaning of life can...never be taken as a manifestation of morbidity or abnormality; it is rather the truest expression of the state of being human, the mark of the most human nature in man' - Frankl