



Philosophical Background to the Psychotherapies

This course - led by Heward Wilkinson – explores key moments involving key figures in post-Renaissance Western philosophy, in relation to core psychotherapy theories.

The assumption behind this is that psychotherapy is a theoretical field based on multiple modalities or approaches. These draw upon *some differentiated potential or mode of human emotion (primarily), as a form of intervention, to articulate the specific causal processes of such modalities*. It will not attempt a fully comprehensive account of philosophy but will seek to be rigorous for the parts of the philosophers from whom it draws.

I shall make it as accessible as I can and seek to give clear responses to challenges and questions. But philosophy is a genuinely puzzling and challenging subject, and is likely to feel daunting at times, and not to be lightly undertaken. It will not require specialist knowledge, as we reflect on matters of which we all have experience, but it will require creative thinking ‘out of the box’.

Apart from the introductory survey of the course, each two session phase of the course would consist of:

Discussion of a key passage or passages of a pivotal philosopher from the 17th or 18th Centuries, correlated with related figures from the 20th Century.

These would be, in turn, deeply connected, in the manner indicated, with major meta-modalities of the field of psychotherapy, upon a ‘best fit’ (not necessarily perfect fit) basis, - a relationship of congruence.

We shall assume psychotherapy’s aims to be both: remedy of human suffering, and enabling of human well being. Psychotherapy as a field is defined by the spectrum of the differences of the modalities.

One of the recognitions we will explore is that the differences and major clusterings are not sharp or definitive or fully consensual.

So we shall also seek within the course for the cumulative generic conceptual core, constituting the spectrum of the field as a whole.

Naturally, also, there is more overlap and continuity of definition between approaches than can be indicated in a rough sketch, such as now follows.

The course will be delivered in *11 monthly sessions of four and a half hours*, with a half hour break in the middle, consisting of presentation of theory in the first two

hour part and open-ended experiential discussion and exploration in the second part. It will be online.

Members would need to be committed to the whole sequence, on a closed group basis. The cost would be £60.00 per member for each monthly evening session or £600.00 if paid in advance for the whole sequence. Outline material and recommended reading would be provided for each session in advance.

Subject to the impact of our explorations, the sessions will run roughly as follows:

Session One

Survey of the whole field as below

Session Two and Three

Humanistic Psychotherapy and Phenomenology

Rene Descartes (*Meditations on First Philosophy*): as the inaugurator of modern philosophy - and implicit pioneer of what became Phenomenology.

Modern Philosophy: Correlated with the Intentionality based Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and the Dialogical Philosophy of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas.

Phenomenology provides the fullest knowledge base of *Humanistic Psychotherapy*, including the *Person-Centred* tradition, and *Integrative-Humanistic Psychotherapy (IH-P)*.

Session Four and Five

Empiricism and Data Based Philosophy of Psychotherapy

David Hume: as the supreme British Empiricist Philosopher and pioneer of empiricist Anthropological (secular human centred) Philosophy.

Modern Philosophy: Correlated with the Logical Empiricism of Bertrand Russell, the Vienna Circle, and the earlier work of Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

Empiricism and Logical Empiricism are the best fit modern background to modern scientific forms of personal psychotherapeutic change grounded in *data- and goal-focussed self-enquiry, self-injunction, and self-motivation*, such as Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy, Rational-Emotive Therapy, Personal Construct Psychology, Ericksonian Hypno-psychotherapy, NLP, and in part Transactional Analysis.

Session Six and Seven

Psychodynamic Phase 1

Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, J Wakefield Freud and *Philosophy of Mind*.

These connect with the earlier Freud and Psychoanalysis, the Jung of *Symbols of Transformation*, and Para-Analytic Approaches such as Gestalt, Psychosynthesis, and Psychodrama, which overlap into Phase 2.

Session Eight and Nine

Psychodynamic Phase 2

Hegel, Derrida: Systems Based and Post-Modernist Contextualism -

These connect with the later Freud and Object Relations, and Jung Archetypal/Alchemical period, Matte Blanco *The Unconscious as Infinite Sets*, Norman J Ackerman *A Theory of Family Systems*,
Psychodynamic variants of Integrative Psychotherapy

I discuss these two phases as one complex movement. There is great overlap between the two psychodynamic phases, which nevertheless differ deeply in emphasis.

The first phase is broadly volitional, *a function of will and drive*, mediated by consciousness as dualistic, but grounded in wider unconscious systems and implicitities.

The second phase is *broadly internalised relational-structural modes*, but still grounded in variant forms of unconscious dynamics and process

Session Ten and Eleven

Existential, Commonsense, and Fideistic Philosophies - Commonsense, Fideistic, Existential, and Generic Psychotherapeutics approaches

Pascal, Reid, Austin, Moore, Strawson, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre – Commonsense, Linguistic Analysis, and Fideism in Newman, Austin, and the later Wittgenstein, and Christian theology (Barth, Tillich, Pannenberg) – Transpersonal, Existential Commonsense, Body, Integrative Understanding as Generic, Attachment based work

Synopsis of the Psychotherapy Field as Generic Meta-Theory underpinning the Modality Spectrum

<https://hewardwilkinson.co.uk/docs/Towards-Theory-of-Metamodality-of-Psychotherapy-2025.pdf>

My philosophical background.

My academic degree background is in English, Theology, Religious Studies, and Psychotherapy. At Cambridge University I attended FR Leavis's literary critical seminars, which had a powerful philosophical critique implicit in them. And I became increasingly absorbed in the Philosophy of Religion and those philosophers most relevant to it, such as Hume, Kant, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Derrida. At Cambridge I was also in scholarly dialogue with Professor John Wisdom, author of *Other Minds*, and Professor Donald McKinnon, deliverer of the Gifford Lectures 1965-6, which became *The Problem of Metaphysics*, and my tutor was Professor John Hick, author of *Faith and Knowledge* and *Evil and the God of Love*, whose doctoral supervisor was the philosopher Professor HH Price, who had written a powerful commentary on *Hume's Theory of the External World*. My tutor in the MA in Religious Studies at Lancaster University was Professor Ninian Smart, another Gifford Lecturer, whose doctoral supervisor, for the book published as *Reasons and Faiths*, was Professor J.L. Austin. I wrote my MA Dissertation at Lancaster on *Kant's Doctrine of Time*, in which I set out to reconcile Strawson's and Heidegger's analyses of Kant's *Transcendental Deduction of the Categories*, in relation to possible thinking about the relation of time and eternity. I recognised the Kantian quasi-philosophical dimensions of both Freud and Jung quite early and this, pursued more widely, now motivates my intentionality to map the field of the psychotherapies as a whole philosophically.

Draft and Provisional Dates and Times for 11 Philosophy Sessions

I am looking for an October start to give time for a bit more recruitment. I am hoping Monday will be the least worst option for the day chosen. Time of commencement I suggest is 1600 to 2030, but this could be renegotiated once we are set going.

2025

October 20th

November 17th

December 15th

2026

January 12th

February 9th

March 9th

April 13th [Allows for Easter]

May 11th [Allows for Bank Holiday]

June 8th

July 6th

August 3rd

Heward Wilkinson