

VIKTOR FRANKL, ROLLO MAY, AND EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY*

Mark Kelland

This work is produced by OpenStax-CNX and licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0[†]

Abstract

This module covers the lives and theories of the existential psychologists Viktor Frankl and Rollo May. The references cited in this module can be found in the accompanying module entitled "References for Personality."

Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of Existentialism. . . For we mean that man first exists, that is, that man first of all is the being who hurls himself toward a future and who is conscious of imagining himself as being in the future. . . Thus, Existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him. (pg. 456; Jean-Paul Sartre, 1947/1996)

Existential psychology is the area within psychology most closely linked to the field of philosophy. Curiously, this provides one of the most common complaints against existential psychology. Many historians identify the establishment of Wilhelm Wundt's experimental laboratory in Germany in 1879 as the official date of the founding of psychology. Sigmund Freud, with his strong background in biomedical research, also sought to bring scientific methodology to the study of the mind and mental processes, including psychological disorders and psychotherapy. Shortly thereafter, Americans such as Edward Thorndike and John Watson were establishing behaviorism, and its rigorous methodology, as the most influential field in American psychology. So, as existential psychology arose in the 1940s and 1950s it was viewed as something of a throwback to an earlier time when psychology was not distinguished from philosophy (Lundin, 1979).

However, as with those who identify themselves as humanistic psychologists, existential psychologists are deeply concerned with individuals and the conditions of each unique human life. The detachment that seems so essential to experimental psychologists is unacceptable to existential psychologists. The difference can easily be seen in the titles of two influential books written by the leading existential psychologists: *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl (1946/1992) and *Man's Search for Himself* by Rollo May (1953). Existential psychology differs significantly from humanistic psychology, however, in focusing on present existence and the fear, anguish, and sorrow that are so often associated with the circumstances of our lives (Lundin, 1979).

1 Understanding the Philosophy of Existentialism

The roots of **existentialism** as a philosophy began with the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). Kierkegaard was intensely interested in man's relationship with God, and its ultimate impossibility. Man is finite and individual, whereas God is infinite and absolute, so the two can never truly meet. In

*Version 1.1: Nov 4, 2015 3:22 pm -0600

[†]<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

pursuing the relationship, however, man goes through three stages or modes of existence: the **aesthetic mode**, the **ethical mode**, and the **religious mode**. The aesthetic mode is concerned with the here and now, and focuses primarily on pleasure and pain. Young children live primarily in this mode. The ethical mode involves making choices and wrestling with the concept of responsibility. An individual in the ethical mode must choose whether or not to live by a code or according to the rules of society. This submission to rules and codes may prove useful in terms of making life simple, but it is a dead end. In order to break out of this dead end, one must live in the religious mode by making a firm commitment to do so. While this may lead to the recognition that each of us is a unique individual, it also brings with it the realization of our total inadequacy relative to God. As a result, we experience loneliness, anxiety, fear, and dread. All of this anguish, however, allows us to know what is really true, and for Kierkegaard truth was synonymous with faith (in God). However, as important as man's relationship to God was for Kierkegaard, he was adamantly opposed to organized religion. Kierkegaard rejected objective, so-called "**truth**" in the form of religious dogma in favor of the subjective "truth" that each person "knows" within themselves. While this subjective, personal truth brings with it the responsibility that leads to anxiety, it can also elevate a person to an authentic existence (Breisach, 1962; Frost, 1942).

Another philosopher considered essential to the foundation of existentialism was the enigmatic German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). A key element of Nietzsche's philosophy is the **will-to-power**. He believed this will-to-power is the fundamental force in the universe (Alfred Adler considered it fundamental to personality development). Ironically, according to Nietzsche, the universe has no regard for humanity. Natural forces (such as disaster and disease) destroy people, life is extremely difficult, and even those who struggle on attempting to realize their will eventually succumb to death. There is no hope to be found in an afterlife, since Nietzsche is famous for declaring that God is dead! Neither is there much hope within society for many people. Nietzsche believed that inequality was the natural state of humanity, so he considered slavery to be perfectly understandable and he felt that women (who are physically weaker than men) should never expect the same rights as men. Nonetheless, Nietzsche saw a great future for humanity, in the belief, indeed the faith, that we would create a **superman** (or superwoman, as the case may be). It is the creation of the superman that gives purpose to existence. Although the concept of the superman helped to fuel Nazi views on creating a German master race, it also made its way into American comic books as the great hero Superman (Fritzsche, 2007; Frost, 1942; Jaspers, 1965). In perhaps Nietzsche's most famous work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the would-be prophet Zarathustra encouraged people to seek a better future for humanity:

I will teach you about the superman. Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him? (pg. 81, Nietzsche, quoted in Fritzsche, 2007)

The German existentialists Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) focused on human existence itself and our role in the world. In a sense, Heidegger trivialized the nature of God, equating God with little more than the greatest being in the world, but a being nonetheless (just as humans are). Jaspers was not an atheist, but still his existential theory focused on the human journey toward a **freedom** that has meaning only when it reveals itself in union with God (Breisach, 1962; Lescoe, 1974). Heidegger considered individuals as beings who are all connected in **Being**, thus distinguishing between mere beings (including other animals) and the nature of truth or Being. Only humans are capable of understanding this connection between all beings, and Heidegger referred to this discovery as **Dasein** ("being here," or existence). On one level, Dasein is common to all creatures, but the possibility of being aware of one's connection to Being is uniquely human. For those who ask the big questions, Dasein can become authentic existence. This experience comes in the fullness of life, but only if one adopts the mode of existence known as **being-in-the-world**. Heidegger insisted that Dasein and being-in-the-world are equal. Being-in-the-world is an odd concept, however, since Heidegger believed that Being can only arise from nothingness, and so we ourselves arise as **being-thrown-into-this-world**. Having been thrown into this mysterious world we wish to make it our own, but our desire for connection with Being leads to anxiety. This anxiety cannot be overcome, because we are aware that we will die! Surprisingly, however, Heidegger considers death to be something positive. It is only because we are going to die that some of us strive to experience life fully. If we can accept that death will come, and nothing will follow, we can be true to ourselves and live an authentic life

(Breisach, 1962; Lundin, 1979).

Finally we come to the French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). Sartre was an extraordinary author and one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1964, but chose to reject it. More importantly for us, however, is the fact that he carried existential philosophy directly into psychology, with books such as *The Transcendence of the Ego* (Sartre, 1937/1957) and a section entitled “Existential Psychoanalysis” in his extraordinary work *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre, 1943). Whereas Kierkegaard believed that man could never truly be one with God, and Heidegger trivialized God, Sartre simply stated that God does not exist. But this is not inconsequential:

The Existentialist, on the contrary, thinks it very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him; there can no longer be an *a priori* Good, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. (pg. 459; Sartre, 1947/1996).

If one looks at the title of Sartre’s most famous philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre, 1943), you might get the impression that Sartre followed in the footsteps of Heidegger. However, Sartre did not agree with Heidegger (see Sartre, 1943). Sartre divided the world into **en-soi** (the in-itself) and **pour-soi** (the for-itself). Pour-soi can be defined as conscious beings, of which there is only one kind: human beings. Everything else is en-soi, things (including non-human animals) that are silent and dead, and from which come no meaning, they only are (Breisach, 1962). For Sartre, there is no mystery, no Being, tying all of creation together. Man’s consciousness is not a connection to God that can be realized, it is simply a unique characteristic of the human species. The nothingness to which Sartre refers is a shell around the pour-soi, the individual, which separates it from the en-soi. People who try to deny living authentically, those who try to deny the responsibility that comes with being conscious and settle into being nothing more than en-soi will have a shattering experience and be totally destroyed (since there is no Being, as described by Heidegger, beyond the shell surrounding the pour-soi; Breisach, 1962). This establishes critical ethical implications for the individual, since their life will be what they make of it, and nothing more.

Unfortunately, many people do reject their unique consciousness and desire to be en-soi, just letting life happen around them. As the en-soi closes in around them, they begin to experience nausea, forlornness, anxiety, and despair. Herein lays the need for **existential psychoanalysis**:

Existential psychoanalysis is going to reveal to man the real goal of his pursuit, which is being as a synthetic fusion of the in-itself with the for-itself; existential psychoanalysis is going to acquaint man with his passion...Many men, in fact, know that the goal of their pursuit is being; and ... they refrain from appropriating things for their own sake and try to realize the symbolic appropriations of their being-in-itself...existential psychoanalysis...must reveal to the moral agent that he is *the being by whom values exist*. It is then that his freedom will become conscious of itself... (pg. 797; Sartre, 1943)

Sartre proposed that individuals become conscious, and through that consciousness create the world itself, but also that we are “condemned to despair” and “doomed to failure” when we realize that all human activities are merely equivalent. This philosophical approach leads into Sartre’s criticism of the psychology of his time. Sartre believed that psychologists, and even most philosophers, stopped short of really understanding people:

For most philosophers the ego is an “inhabitant” of consciousness...Others - psychologists for the most part - claim to discover its material presence, as the center of desires and acts, in each moment of our psychic life. We should like to show here that the ego is neither formally nor materially *in* consciousness: it is outside, *in the world*. It is a being of the world, like the ego of another. (pg. 31; Sartre, 1937/1957)

So, Sartre believed that an existential psychoanalysis was needed to go beyond the limits of Freudian psychoanalysis. It is not enough, according to Sartre, to stop at describing mere patterns of desires and tendencies (Sartre, 1943). In critiquing the psychoanalytic biography of a famous author named Flaubert, Sartre asked very meaningful questions about this individual’s life: why did Flaubert become a writer instead of a painter, why did he come to feel exalted and self-important instead of gloomy, why did his writing emphasize violence, or amorous adventures, etc.? Sartre’s point is a common criticism of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. If most any result can come from an individual’s experiences, then what does psychoanalysis really tell us about anyone? Sartre proposed a deeper form of psychoanalysis:

This comparison allows us to understand better what an existential psychoanalysis must be if it is entitled to exist. It is a method destined to bring to light, in a strictly objective form, the subjective choice by which

each living person makes himself a person; that is, makes known to himself what he is. Since what the method seeks is a *choice of being* at the same time as a *being*, it must reduce particular behavior patterns to fundamental relations - not of sexuality or of the will-to-power, but of *being* - which are expressed in this behavior. It is then guided from the start toward a comprehension of being and must not assign itself any other goal than to discover being and the mode of being of the being confronting this being. It is forbidden to stop before attaining this goal. . . This psychoanalysis has not yet found its Freud. (pp. 733-734; Sartre; 1943)

Placing Existential Psychology in Context: Height Psychology Goes Deeper Than Depth Psychology

The two theorists highlighted in this chapter were truly extraordinary individuals. Both Viktor Frankl (who coined the term “height psychology”) and Rollo May were well immersed in existential thought and its application to psychology when they faced seemingly certain death. For Frankl, who was imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camps, death was expected. For May, who was confined to a sanitarium with tuberculosis, death was a very real possibility (and indeed many died there). But Frankl and May were intelligent, observant, and thoughtful men. They watched as many died, while some lived, and they sought answers that might explain who was destined for each group. Both men observed that for those who resigned themselves to death, death came soon. But for those who chose to live, they had a real chance to survive despite the terrible conditions in which they existed.

Frankl and May also shared their training in traditional psychoanalysis, and both had studied with Alfred Adler, at least somewhat. However, they found the so-called depth psychology as lacking, since it did not address the true potential for humans to rise above their conditions. In this regard, existential psychologists have typically been viewed as belonging within the humanistic psychology camp. However, both Frankl and May considered humanistic psychology to also be lacking, in that it neglected the true potential for humans to make bad choices, and to harm both themselves and others. So for existential psychologists, the center of their focus is on the immediate existence of the individual, in the context of their relationship to others. It is this seeming paradox, and the drive to resolve it, that provides the motivation and energy for life.

There is also a natural connection between existentialism and Eastern schools of thought, including yoga, Buddhism, and Taoism. Some of the comparisons are so striking that, shortly after discussing Taoism, May wrote “one gets the same shock of similarity in Zen Buddhism” (May, 1983). And so, this chapter should provide an interesting transition to the final section of this text, in which we will examine both Eastern and Western spiritual approaches to making positive choices in one’s life.

2 Viktor Frankl and Logotherapy

Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) was truly an extraordinary man. His first paper was submitted for publication by Sigmund Freud; his second paper was published at the urging of Alfred Adler. Gordon Allport was instrumental in getting Frankl’s book *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 1946/1992) published in English, a book that went on to be recognized by the Library of Congress as one of the ten most influential books in America. He lectured around the world, and received some thirty honorary doctoral degrees in addition to the medical degree and the Ph.D. he had earned as a student. He was invited to a private audience with Pope Paul VI, even though Frankl was Jewish. All of this was accomplished in spite of, and partly because of, the fact that he spent several years in Nazi concentration camps during World War II, camps where his parents, brother, wife, and millions of other Jews died.

A Brief Biography of Viktor Frankl

Viktor Frankl was born in Vienna, Austria on March 26, 1905. Although his father had been forced to drop out of medical school for financial reasons, Gabriel Frankl held a series of positions with the Austrian government, working primarily with the department of child protection and youth welfare. He instilled in his son the importance of being intensely rational and having a firm sense of social justice, and Frankl became something of a perfectionist. Frankl described his mother Elsa as a kindhearted and deeply pious woman, but during his childhood she often described him as a pest, and she even changed the words of Frankl’s favorite childhood lullaby to include calling him a pest. This may have been due to the fact that Frankl was

often asking questions, so much so that a family friend nicknamed him “The Thinker” (Frankl, 1995/2000). From his mother, Frankl inherited a deep emotionality. One aspect of this emotionality involved a deep attachment to his childhood home, and he often felt homesick as his responsibilities kept him away. And those responsibilities began at an early age (Frankl, 1995/2000; Pattakos, 2004).

Even in high school Frankl was developing a keen interest in existential philosophy and psychology. At the age of 16 he delivered a public lecture “On the Meaning of Life” and at 18 he wrote his graduation essay “On the Psychology of Philosophical Thought.” Throughout his high school years he maintained a correspondence with Sigmund Freud (letters that were later destroyed by the Gestapo when Frankl was deported to his first concentration camp). When Frankl was just 19, Freud submitted one of Frankl’s papers for publication in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, afterward hoping that Frankl would agree and give his belated consent. Despite having impressed Freud, Frankl himself was already impressed by Alfred Adler. Frankl became active in Adler’s individual psychology group, and as he began medical school he was urged by Adler to publish a paper in the *International Journal of Individual Psychology*. It is hard to imagine that many people could have come into the favor of both Freud and Adler by such a young age, even before having begun medical school or a career in psychiatry. Despite Frankl’s young age and somewhat limited experience, the paper published by Adler was dealing with difficult material, specifically the “border area that lies between psychotherapy and philosophy, with special attention to the problems of meanings and values in psychology” (Frankl, 1995/2000). Eventually, however, Frankl fell out of favor with Adler. Frankl had been impressed with two men, Allers and Schwarz, whose views were at odds with Adler. On the evening when Allers and Schwarz announced to the society that they could not agree with Adler, Adler challenged Frankl and a friend to speak up. Frankl chose to do so, and he defended Allers and Schwarz, believing that a middle ground could be found. Adler never spoke to Frankl again, even when Frankl said hello in the local coffee shop. For a few months Adler had other people suggest to Frankl that he should quit the society. When Frankl did not, he was expelled by Adler (Frankl, 1995/2000; Pattakos, 2004).

Frankl proceeded to develop his own practice and his own school of psychotherapy, known as **logotherapy** (the therapy of meaning, as in finding meaning in one’s life). As early as 1929, Frankl had begun to recognize three possible ways to find meaning in life: a deed we do or a work we create; a meaningful human encounter, particularly one involving **love**; and choosing one’s attitude in the face of unavoidable suffering. Logotherapy eventually became known as the third school of Viennese psychotherapy, after Freud’s psychoanalysis and Adler’s individual psychology. During the 1930s Frankl did much of his work with suicidal patients and teenagers. He had extensive talks with Wilhelm Reich in Berlin, who was also involved in youth counseling by that time. As the 1930s came to an end, and Austria had been taken over by the Nazis, Frankl sought a visa to emigrate to the United States, which was eventually granted. However, Frankl’s parents could not get a visa, so he chose to remain in Austria with them. He also began work on his first book, eventually published in English under the title *The Doctor and the Soul* (Frankl, 1946/1986), which provided the foundation for logotherapy. He fell in love with Tilly Grosser, and they were married in 1941, the last legal Jewish marriage in Vienna under the Nazis.

Shortly thereafter, the realities of Nazi Germany overcame what little privilege Frankl had enjoyed as a doctor at a major hospital. Since it was illegal for Jews to have children, Tilly Frankl was forced to abort their first child. Frankl later dedicated *The Unheard Cry for Meaning* “To Harry or Marion an unborn child” (Frankl, 1978). Then the entire Frankl family, except for his sister who had gone to Australia, was deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp (the same camp from which Anna Freud cared for orphans after the war). As they marched into the camp with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of other prisoners, his father tried to calm those who panicked by saying again and again: “Be of good cheer, for God is near.” Frankl’s parents, his only brother, and his wife Tilly died in the concentration camps. Most tragically, Frankl believed that his wife died after the war, but before the liberating Allied forces could care for all of the many, many suffering people (Frankl, 1995/2000).

When Frankl was deported, he tried to hide and save his only copy of *The Doctor and the Soul* by sewing it into the lining of his coat. However, he was forced to trade his good coat for an old one, and the manuscript was lost. While imprisoned, he managed to obtain a few scraps of paper on which to make notes. Those notes later helped him to recreate his book, and that goal gave such meaning to his life that he considered

it an important factor in his will to survive the horrors of the concentration camps. It would be difficult to adequately describe the conditions of the concentration camps, or how they affected the minds of those imprisoned, especially since the effects were quite varied. Frankl describes those conditions in *Man's Search for Meaning*. The book is rather short, but its contents are deep beyond comprehension. Frankl himself, however, might take exception to referring to his book as "deep." Depth psychology was a term used for psychodynamically-oriented psychology. In 1938 Frankl coined the term "**height psychology**" in order to supplement, but not replace, depth psychology (Frankl, 1978).

After the war, Frankl's life was nothing less than amazing. He returned to his home city of Vienna, married Eleonore Katharina, née Schwindt, and raised a daughter named Gabriele, whose husband and the Frankl's grandchildren all lived in Vienna. He lectured around the world, received many honors, wrote numerous books, all while continuing to practice psychiatry and teach at the University of Vienna, Harvard, and elsewhere. He had a great interest in humor and in cartooning. Throughout his life, Frankl steadfastly refused to acknowledge the validity of collective guilt toward the German people. When asked repeatedly how he could return to Vienna, after all that happened to him and his family, Frankl replied:

...I answered with a counter-question: "Who did what to me?" There had been a Catholic baroness who risked her life by hiding my cousin for years in her apartment. There had been a Socialist attorney (Bruno Pitterman, later vice chancellor of Austria), who knew me only casually and for whom I had never done anything; and it was he who smuggled some food to me whenever he could. For what reason, then, should I turn my back on Vienna? (pp. 101-102; Frankl, 1995/2000)

Viktor Frankl died peacefully on September 2, 1997. He was 92 years old. During his life, his work influenced many people, from the ordinary to the famous and influential. "Viktor Frankl, to be sure, leaves a profound legacy" (pg. 24; Pattakos, 2004).

The Theoretical Basis for Logotherapy

While Frankl was in medical school, he considered specializing in dermatology or obstetrics. A fellow student who was aware of Frankl's wide-ranging interests, however, introduced Frankl to the works of Kierkegaard. This friend had been reminded of Kierkegaard's emphasis on living an authentic life, and he urged Frankl to pursue his interest in psychiatry. While still in medical school Frankl delivered a lecture to the Academic Society for Medical Psychology, of which Frankl was the founding vice-president, and used the term logotherapy for the first time (a few years later he first used the alternative term existential analysis; Frankl, 1995/2000). The word logos is Greek for "meaning," and this third Viennese school of psychotherapy focuses on the meaning of human existence and man's search for such a meaning. Logotherapy, therefore, focuses on man's **will-to-meaning**, in contrast to Freud's **will-to-pleasure** (the drive to satisfy the desires of the id, the pleasure principle) or Adler's **will-to-power** (the drive to overcome inferiority and attain superiority; adopted from Nietzsche) (Frankl, 1946/1986, 1946/1992).

The will-to-meaning is, according to Frankl, the primary source of one's motivation in life. It is not a secondary rationalization of the instinctual drives, and meaning and values are not simply defense mechanisms. As Frankl eloquently points out:

...as for myself, I would not be willing to live merely for the sake of my "defense mechanisms," nor would I be ready to die merely for the sake of my "reaction formations." Man, however, is able to live and even to die for the sake of his ideals and values! (pg. 105; Frankl, 1946/1992)

Unfortunately, one's search for meaning can be frustrated. This **existential frustration** can lead to what Frankl identified as a **noogenic neurosis** (a neurosis of the mind or, in other words, the specifically human dimension). Frankl suggested that when neuroses arise from an individual's inability to find meaning in their life, what they need is logotherapy, not psychotherapy. More specifically, they need help to find some meaning in their life, some reason to be. When reading Frankl's examples of how he helps such people, and Frankl offers many of these examples in his writings, it seems so simple. But it must be remembered that it takes a great deal of experience, knowledge, and maturity, as well as an ability to put oneself in another's shoes, in order to creatively think of how another person can find meaning in their life. It would be safe to say that many of us find it difficult to find meaning in our own lives, and research has indeed shown that the will-to-meaning is a significant concern throughout the world (Frankl, 1946/1992). In order to make sense of this problem, Frankl has suggested that we should not ask what we expect from life, but rather, we should

understand that life expects something from us:

A colleague, an aged general practitioner, turned to me because he could not come to terms with the loss of his wife, who had died two years before. His marriage had been very happy, and he was now extremely depressed. I asked him quite simply: "Tell me what would have happened if you had died first and your wife had survived you?" "That would have been terrible," he said. "How my wife would have suffered?" "Well, you see," I answered, "your wife has been spared that, and it was you who spared her, though of course you must now pay by surviving and mourning her." In that very moment his mourning had been given a meaning - the meaning of a sacrifice. (pg. xx; Frankl, 1946/1986)

The latter point brings us back to Frankl's discussion of how one can find meaning in life: through creating a work or doing a deed; by experiencing something or encountering someone, particularly when love is involved; or by choosing one's attitude toward unavoidable suffering. Those of us who have lost someone dear know how easily it leads to deep suffering. Frankl had already written the first version of *The Doctor and the Soul* when he entered the Theresienstadt concentration camp, so his views on how one should choose their attitude toward unavoidable suffering were put to a test that no research protocol could ever hope to achieve! His observations form the basis for much of *Man's Search for Meaning*. Both his observations of others and his own reactions in this unimaginably horrible and tragic situation are quite fascinating:

...as we stumbled on for miles, slipping on icy spots, supporting each other time and again, dragging one another up and onward, nothing was said, but we both knew: each of us was thinking his wife...my mind clung to my wife's image...Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun...A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth - that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: *The salvation of man is through love and in love.* (pp. 48-49; Frankl, 1946/1992)

...One evening, when we were already resting on the floor of our hut, dead tired, soup bowls in hand, a fellow prisoner rushed in and asked us to run out to the assembly grounds and see the wonderful sunset. Standing outside we saw sinister clouds glowing in the west and the whole sky alive with clouds of ever-changing shapes and colors, from steel blue to blood red...Then, after minutes of moving silence, one prisoner said to another, "How beautiful the world *could* be!" (pg. 51; Frankl, 1946/1992)

...The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress.

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way. (pp. 74-75; Frankl, 1946/1992)

Discussion Question: Frankl considered the most important aspect of survival to be the ability to find meaning in one's life. Have you found meaning in your life? Are there goals you have that you believe might add meaning to your life? Do you know anyone personally whose life seems to be filled with meaning, and if so, how does it appear to affect them?

Logotherapy as a Technique

Unfortunately, as noted by Frankl, not everyone can successfully accomplish the will-to-meaning. Those who rapidly declined toward death itself had lost the ability to have faith in the future; they could not identify any goal that provided meaning for their future. Such individuals exist in what Frankl called an existential vacuum. We have no instincts that tell us what we have to do, fewer and fewer traditions that tell us what we should do, and we often don't even know what we want to do. Therein lies the need for logotherapy. As a technique, logotherapy relies primarily on **paradoxical intention** and **dereflection** (Frankl, 1946/1986, 1946/1992). Paradoxical intention is based on a simple trap in which neurotic individuals often find themselves. When a person thinks about or approaches a situation that provokes a neurotic symptom, such as fear, the person experiences **anticipatory anxiety**. This anticipatory anxiety takes the form of the symptom, which reinforces their anxiety. And so on... In order to help people break out of this

negative cycle, Frankl recommends having them focus intently on the very thing that evokes their symptoms, even trying to exhibit their symptoms more severely than ever before! As a result, the patient is able to separate themselves from their own neurosis, and eventually the neurosis loses its potency.

Similar to anticipatory anxiety, people often experience a compulsive inclination to observe themselves, resulting in hyper-reflection. For example, people who suffer from insomnia focus on their efforts to sleep, or people who cannot enjoy a sexual relationship often focus on their physical, sexual responses. Because of this intense focus on sleep, or having an orgasm, these very things are unattainable. In dereflection, patients are taught not to pay attention to what they desire. A person who cannot sleep might read in bed, they will eventually fall asleep. A person who cannot enjoy intimate sexuality could focus on their partner, and as a result they should experience satisfaction that they did not expect. In essence, whereas paradoxical intention teaches the patient to ridicule their symptoms, dereflection teaches the patient to ignore his or her symptoms (Frankl, 1946/1986).

Discussion Question: Logotherapy relies on paradoxical intention and dereflection to break the anticipatory anxiety that often leads to failure (and then, more anxiety). Are there situations where you find yourself getting anxious or nervous even before the situation begins? What steps, if any, have you taken to break out of that pattern?

The Search for Ultimate Meaning

Kierkegaard believed that man could never truly be in contact with the infinite and absolute God. Similarly, Frankl talked about a **super-meaning** to life, something that goes far deeper than logic. When Frankl told his daughter that the *good* Lord had cured her measles, his daughter reminded him that the *good* Lord had given her the measles in the first place. Since children may not benefit from the challenges of suffering as adults might, and even adults find it difficult to find meaning in truly horrible situations like the concentration camps of Nazi Germany or the gulags of the former Soviet Union, the meaning of life in the greater context of human societies is often not readily apparent. But as Frankl says:

This ultimate meaning necessarily exceeds and surpasses the finite intellectual capacities of man; in logotherapy, we speak in this context of a super-meaning. What is demanded of man is not, as some existential philosophers teach, to endure the meaninglessness of life, but rather to bear his incapacity to grasp its unconditional meaningfulness in rational terms. *Logos* is deeper than logic. (pg. 122; Frankl, 1946/1992)

In discussing the value of logotherapy, Frankl offered critiques of other popular fields in psychology and psychiatry. His most serious critique was of the deterministic nature of psychoanalysis. Frankl fervently believed in an individual's freedom to transcend their self and choose to make the best of any situation. And he had plenty of experience to back up his opinion: "...I am a survivor of four camps - concentration camps, that is - and as such I also bear witness to the unexpected extent to which man is capable of defying and braving even the worst conditions conceivable" (pg. 47; Frankl, 1978). He did not, however, reject determinism entirely. Instead, he attributed determinism to the psychological dimension, whereas freedom exists within the noölogical dimension. He acknowledged Freud and Adler for teaching us to "unmask the neurotic." As for behaviorism, Frankl acknowledged that it helped to "demythologize" neurosis, by pointing out that not every psychological problem is due to unconscious forces from early childhood, and he included Pavlov, Watson, and Skinner as great pioneers. Still, both psychoanalysis and behaviorism ignore the essential humanness of the individual.

Despite his emphasis on the individual human, Frankl did not consider logotherapy as belonging within humanistic psychology (or at least not within what he called pseudo-humanism; Frankl, 1978). He believed that humanistic psychology focused so much on the humanity of individuals, that they did not quite appreciate the uniqueness of each person. It is not enough to merely encounter another person. In order to be moved on the personal level there must be an element of love (love for another person, if not a more intimate and personal love as for a spouse or a child). As we will see below, Rollo May also considered love to be of great importance to our lives. The emphasis that Frankl placed on love may have something to do with his deep spirituality. Frankl believed in a spiritual unconscious, separate from the instinctual unconscious described by Freud (Frankl, 1948/2000). In order for an individual to experience an authentic existence, they must determine whether a given phenomenon (thoughts, feelings, impulses, etc.) is instinctual or spiritual,

and then freely choose how to behave or respond. Frankl returned to Heidegger's concept of Dasein, living according to the understanding that one is connected to Being. Although this concept may seem reminiscent of Jung's collective unconscious, nothing could be further from the truth:

...It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that not only is the unconscious neither divine nor omniscient, but above all man's unconscious relation to God is profoundly personal. The "unconscious God" must not be mistaken as an impersonal force operant in man. This understanding was the great mistake to which C. G. Jung fell prey. Jung must be credited with having discovered distinctly religious elements within the unconscious. Yet he misplaced this unconscious religiousness of man, failing to locate the unconscious God in the personal and existential region. Instead, he allotted it to the region of drives and instincts, where unconscious religiousness no longer remained a matter of choice and decision. According to Jung, something within me is religious, but it is not I who then is religious; something within me drives me to God, but it is not I who makes the choice and takes the responsibility. (pg. 70; Frankl, 1948/2000)

According to Frankl, the most human of all human phenomena is the will-to-meaning. Religion, or spirituality, seeks a **will-to-ultimate-meaning**. Once again, Frankl believed that Freudian psychoanalysis and Adlerian individual psychology had failed to sufficiently credit the self-transcendent quality of individuals who live authentic lives. It is in the study of authentic lives that "height psychology," as Frankl called it, can address the higher aspirations of the human psyche. In other words, beyond seeking pleasure and/or power, there is man's search for meaning (Frankl, 1948/2000).

Discussion Question: Frankl was a very spiritual man. He talked about super-meaning and a will-to-ultimate-meaning. Are you a spiritual and/or religious person? If yes, does your faith help to give meaning to your life?

3 Rollo May and Existential Psychology

Rollo May (1909-1994) introduced existentialism to American psychologists, and has remained the best known proponent of this approach in America. Trained in a fairly traditional format as a psychoanalyst, May considered the detachment with which psychoanalysts approached their patients as a violation of social ethics. For example, if a psychoanalyst helps a patient to be the best they can be, and the person happens to earn their living in an unseemly or criminal way, it hardly seems proper (Stagner, 1988). On the other hand, who is to decide which values should be preferred in a particular society? In the pursuit of freedom, May suggested that sometimes individuals might reasonably oppose the standards or morality of their society. Politics, a wonderful topic for lively debates, is dependent on opposing viewpoints. Only when an individual lives an authentic life, however, should their opinion be considered valid, and existential psychology seeks to help individuals live authentic lives.

A Brief Biography of Rollo May

Rollo Reese May was born on April 21, 1909, in Ohio, and grew up in Marine City, Michigan. He attended Oberlin College in Ohio, graduating in 1930. Having always been interested in art and artistic creativity, he joined with a small group of artists and traveled to Europe, where they studied the local art of Poland. In order to remain in Europe, May took a teaching position with the American College at Salonika in Greece. When not teaching, he traveled widely throughout Greece, Poland, Romania, and Turkey. He attended the summer school taught by Alfred Adler. Deeply impressed by Adler (as Frankl had been), he nonetheless considered Adler's theories overly simplistic and too general. This may well have been due to his awakening awareness of the tragic side of human life, keeping in mind that much of Europe suffered greatly during the depression between World War I and World War II (Reeves, 1977).

Upon returning to the United States, May worked as a student advisor and the editor of a student magazine at Michigan State University. In 1936, he enrolled at Union Theological Seminary in New York, with the intention of asking, and most likely hoping to find answers to, the ultimate questions about human life. Despite having no particular desire to become a minister, he did serve in a parish in Montclair, New Jersey for a while. While at the seminary, he became a lifelong friend of Paul Tillich, a well-known existential theologian. Tillich, whose classes May regularly attended, introduced May to the works of Kierkegaard and Heidegger. May also met Kurt Goldstein during this time, and became acquainted with Goldstein's theories

of self-actualization and anxiety as a reaction by organisms to catastrophic events. Regarding his time as a minister, May reflected that the only events which seemed to include an element of reality were the funerals (Reeves, 1977).

Shortly after graduating from the seminary, May began writing books on counseling and creative living. He worked as a counselor at the College of the City of New York, and trained as a psychoanalyst at the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and Psychology in New York. His time at the training institute overlapped with Harry Stack Sullivan being the president of the William Alanson White Foundation, and Erich Fromm as a fellow associate. In 1946, May began a private practice in psychoanalysis, in 1948 he became a faculty member at the institute, and in 1949 he received the first Ph.D. in clinical psychology at Columbia University. His doctoral dissertation was published as *The Meaning of Anxiety* (May, 1950), a book that heavily cites the work of Freud and Kierkegaard on anxiety, as well as Fromm, Horney, and Tillich (May, 1950; Reeves, 1977).

Similar to Viktor Frankl, May's life had taken a dramatic turn during this time, an uncontrollable event that threatened his life: May contracted tuberculosis. At the time, there were no effective treatments for this contagious disease, many people died from it, and like many others May had to spend several years at a sanitarium (Saranac Sanitarium in upstate New York). It was during his time in the sanitarium that May theorized about anxiety and came to one of the most important conclusions in his career. He determined that although Freud had done a masterful job of characterizing the effects of anxiety on the individual, it was Kierkegaard who had truly identified what anxiety is: the threat of becoming nothing. From this point on May could clearly be identified as an existential psychologist. He collaborated with Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Gordon Allport to present a symposium on existential psychology, in conjunction with the 1959 annual convention of American Psychological Association, which led to the publication of a book on the subject (Reeves, 1977).

As May's career continued, he became a supervisory and training analyst at the William Alanson White Institute, and an adjunct professor of psychology in the graduate school at New York University. He gave a series of radio talks on existential psychology on a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation show, he served as a visiting professor at Harvard and Princeton, and he continued writing. His later books include works on dreams, symbolism, religion, and love. He eventually settled in California, where he died in 1994.

Anxiety

May considered **anxiety** to be the underlying cause of nearly every crisis, whether domestic, professional, economic, or political. He described the world we live in as an age of anxiety. Even though May published *The Meaning of Anxiety* in 1950, it is safe to say that his concerns are even more relevant today, particularly with the advent of the depersonalization of our world due to the computer age (Reeves, 1977). May considered a wide range of theories on anxiety, including philosophers, neurologists (Kurt Goldstein), and the major psychodynamic theorists (including Freud, Adler, Jung, Horney, Sullivan, and Fromm). He came to the conclusion that Freud had done the best job of explaining anxiety, but it was Kierkegaard who best understood anxiety. May was particularly impressed by Kierkegaard's idea that anxiety must be understood in the context of an orientation toward freedom. Freedom is the goal of personality development, and although this freedom brings with it anxiety, it is through facing this anxiety that the possibility of freedom arises (May, 1950). In praise of Kierkegaard, May wrote:

...Kierkegaard is proclaiming that "self-strength" develops out of the individual's successful confronting of anxiety-creating experiences; this is the way one becomes educated to maturity as a self. What is amazing in Kierkegaard is that despite his lack of the tools for interpreting unconscious material - which tools have been available in their most complete form only since Freud - he so keenly and profoundly anticipated modern psychoanalytic insight into anxiety; and that at the same time he placed these insights in the broad context of a poetic and philosophical understanding of human experience. (pg. 45; May, 1950)

In defining anxiety, May distinguished between anxiety and fear, and between **normal anxiety** and **neurotic anxiety**. According to May, "anxiety is the apprehension cued off by a threat to some value which the individual holds essential to his existence as a personality" (pg. 191; May, 1950). The threat may be either physical or psychological, such as facing death from tuberculosis or being imprisoned in a concentration camp (which, of course, brought the threat of death in addition to the loss of freedom), or the threat may

challenge some other value that the individual identifies with their existence or personal identity (such as the loss of a career, a divorce, a challenge to patriotism in time of war, etc.). What differentiates anxiety from fear, is that fear is a reaction to a specific event, whereas anxiety is vague and diffuse. For example, during a robbery you may fear a man with a gun, but in America today many people are anxious about terrorism. No one can tell when or where terrorists may strike, or even whether they will be foreign terrorists (such as in the World Trade Center attacks) or American terrorists (such as the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City or the D.C. sniper killings). May carefully pointed out that using the terms “vague” and “diffuse” to describe anxiety should in no way diminish our understanding of the intensity and painfulness that anxiety can bring. Therein lies the difference between normal vs. neurotic anxiety (May, 1950).

Everyone faces challenges in life, but not everyone sees the same challenges as actual threats. Losing one’s job can be an opportunity to begin a new career, perhaps to go back to school to pursue that new career. However, the transition is often difficult, especially when one is used to being the primary wage earner in the family, and also if the family has to cut back on items they can no longer afford. So anxiety would be a reasonable reaction. That anxiety is considered normal if it is 1) not disproportionate to the objective threat, 2) does not involve mechanisms of intrapsychic conflict, and 3) does not require defense mechanisms for its management (May, 1950). Normal anxiety is often overlooked in adults since it is not particularly intense, especially compared to neurotic anxiety, and it can be managed constructively. It does not show itself in panic or other dramatic symptoms. Neurotic anxiety is, simply, the opposite of normal anxiety. It is disproportionate to the objective threat, it does require intrapsychic defense mechanisms, and it results in neurotic symptoms in spite of those defense mechanisms. It is important to keep in mind that we should not consider individuals who suffer from neurotic anxiety as suffering from objective weaknesses, but rather they suffer from inner psychological patterns and conflicts that prevent them from using their powers to cope.

True to his training in psychodynamic theory, May believed that the psychological patterns resulting in the inability to cope have their origin in childhood, particularly due to poor early relations between the infant and its parents, since an infant’s essential values arise from the security patterns established between the infant and its caregivers (as in Erikson’s first psychosocial crisis: trust vs. mistrust, see Chapter 7). One of the most important factors seems to be the infant’s subjective interpretation of rejection by its primary caregiver, and that subjectivity is influenced by expectations that form later in life (e.g., middle- and upper-class children, who expect more support from their parents, are especially prone to react to rejection with neurotic anxiety; May, 1950).

Discussion Question: May felt that we must understand anxiety in relation to freedom, or rather, as the fear that we will lose our freedom. He said that some of this anxiety is normal, and only in extreme cases does it become neurotic anxiety. What are some of the situations in your life that make you anxious, and how might they be a threat to your personal freedom? Do you think the level of these anxieties is normal, or is it severe enough to perhaps be considered neurotic?

Culture, Anxiety, and Hostility

May also addressed the effects of culture on anxiety, and the close interrelationship between anxiety and **hostility**. Culture affects both the kinds and the quantities of anxiety experienced by individuals. Beyond the essential relationship between infant and caregiver, the determinants of personality that each of us consider essential to our existence as a personality are largely cultural. Indeed, even the nature of the infant/caregiver relationship is subject to cultural influence. The amount of anxiety most people are likely to experience is determined, in part, by the stability of the culture. For example, if a culture is relatively stable and unified, there will be less anxiety throughout that culture (May, 1950). Today, however, many societies are in dramatic flux, due in large part to the powerful trend toward globalization.

As psychologists have begun to examine anxiety in different groups around the world, a variety of interesting, and sometimes disturbing, results have been found. Keep in mind, however, that these are generalities, and do not necessarily apply to each individual within any group. Generally, Asians are more anxious than Europeans and White Americans, who are more anxious than Black Americans and Africans, and there may be a neurological basis for these relative anxiety levels (Rushton, 1999). However, when looking at the specific form of anxiety related to taking academic tests, Black Americans and Chilean students demon-

strate higher levels of test anxiety than White Americans (Clawson, Firment, & Trower, 1981; Guida & Ludlow, 1989). One suggestion for the higher levels of anxiety among Blacks in America is that our society is much less sociocentric than most African cultures. Thus, Blacks in America, even if they have lived here for generations, still experience the effects of their displacement from Africa when the culture they carried with them is at odds with Western cultural expectations (Okeke et al., 1999), and even more so when an individual seems to be at odds with most members of their own cultural group (Copeland, 2006). Indeed, the greater the discrepancy between one's individual cultural expectations and the cultural expectations of the majority of society, the greater the anxiety an individual experiences. This is particularly true during attempts at intercultural communication (Matsumoto & Juang, 2004). Any subsequent breakdown of intercultural communication, which is more likely during periods of high anxiety, can either lead to or enhance pre-existing hostility, prejudice, discrimination, and scapegoating (Whitley & Kite, 2006). One important challenge to intercultural communication in psychology is the need for clinical psychologists to recognize the growing number of anxiety disorders unique to non-Western cultures, such as: **hwa-bung** (Korea), **koro** (Malaysia and Southern China), **nervios** (Latin America), **dhat syndrome** (India), **susto** (Latin America), and **taijin kyofusho** (Japan) (Castillo, 1997).

Culture can influence individuals in a wide variety of ways. May (1950) used the example of competitive individual success in the Western world as his main example, which he considered to be *the* dominant goal in America. There are many negative effects of this competition, including the high incidences of gastric ulcers and heart disease in our society. Less than a decade later, Freidman and Rosenman (1959) published their classic study on the relationship between Type A behavior (studied in highly competitive businessmen) and cardiovascular disease. Subsequent studies have shown that the key component of Type A behavior predictive of heart disease is hostility, which we will discuss in more detail below (Dembrowski et al., 1985; Lachar, 1993; MacDougal et al., 1985). There has also been a great deal of discussion in our society about media influences on body image, the relationship between unreasonable expectations for women to be thin and the incidence of eating disorders in girls and women, and the repression of female sexuality in many cultures. Goldenberg (2005) recently presented an existential perspective on the body itself as a threat. Cultural beliefs often help to overcome fears of mortality by convincing individuals that they are of greater value than other, lower animals. However, despite the beliefs of many that only humans have a soul, our body is still a mortal animal. As a reaction to the anxiety presented by the reality of our mortal body, many people act in a hostile fashion toward their own bodies, ranging from denying themselves healthy physical relationships with others (e.g., sexual repression) to outright self-destructive behavior (e.g., anorexia nervosa). The problem reaches its extreme, however, when one powerful group directs its hostility in an organized fashion toward another group.

The relationship between anxiety and hostility, according to May, involves a vicious circle. Anxiety gives rise to hostility, and hostility gives rise to increased anxiety. But which comes first? May believed that it was anxiety that underlies hostility, and the evidence can be found in clinical cases involving repressed hostility:

Granted the interrelation between hostility and anxiety, which affect is generally basic? There is ground for believing that, even though hostility may be the specific affect present in many situations, anxiety is often present below the hostility...For one example, in some of the psychosomatic studies of patients with hypertension...it has been found that the reason the patients repressed their hostility was that they were anxious and dependent...The hostility would not have to be repressed in the first place except that the individual is anxious and fears counter-hostility or alienation... (pg. 223; May, 1950)

In Reeves' analysis of May's theory (1977), Reeves discusses one of the most important social issues to have faced the United States: the civil rights movement of the 1960s. When an individual's sense of selfhood is challenged by dramatic changes in society, it can be a very painful experience. And one is likely to resent those responsible for those changes. While it is true that many White people in America supported the civil rights movement, White people in the Deep South (and elsewhere, of course) turned their anxiety, and its associated hostility, toward Blacks. It should not be necessary here to describe the many terrible acts of violence that followed. Suffice it to say that the federal government had to use military troops to intervene in some of the worst cases. Today, we face a similar problem in the war on terrorism. Given the often unequal and unfair manner in which globalization brings vastly different cultures into conflict, and the ease

with which so many people can travel the globe, perhaps we should not be surprised at the dramatic level of terrorism in the world today.

Connections Across Cultures: Terrorists and Terrorism

Since September 11, 2001, when agents of the terrorist organization Al Qaeda destroyed the World Trade Center in New York City and killed some 3,000 people, the United States has been involved in what has been called an international war on terrorism. As the war on terrorism developed, it had two main goals: to capture Osama bin Laden, leader of Al Qaeda and mastermind of the World Trade Center bombings, and to overthrow Saddam Hussein, the dictator of Iraq (for his alleged role in supporting international terrorism). To date, this war has lasted *much* longer than World War II, we have spent hundreds of billions of dollars, and thousands more young American men and women have died fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many Iraqi and Afghan civilians, as well as additional coalition military personnel, have also died. Saddam Hussein was removed from power in Iraq; he was also tried, convicted, and executed. It took nearly 10 years, but Osama bin Laden was finally tracked down and killed in a raid in Pakistan by U.S. Navy Seals. However, Al Qaeda is still committing acts of terrorism, Iraq is descending once again into bitter sectarian violence (rising to the level of civil war), and Americans continue to die fighting in Afghanistan as our intended date for withdrawal slowly draws near (after 13 years!). One thing that will not be addressed in this section, because it does not exist, is an easy answer to these problems.

Please allow me to share a little personal history here. When the Iranian revolution under Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah of Iran, and the revolutionaries captured the American embassy in Tehran and took sixty-six people hostage (fifty-two of those hostages were held for well over a year before being released), I was in the United States Marine Corps Reserve. I received a phone call at 2:00 a.m. on a Friday morning at my apartment in Cambridge, MA. By midnight, that same day, my reserve unit was in Camp Lejeune, NC, with full combat gear, ready to go to war in Iran. We spent the weekend preparing, though President Carter ultimately chose not to send us overseas. Approximately 10 years later, when the first Gulf War erupted after Iraq invaded Kuwait, my sister took part in Operation Desert Storm. As an Air Force nurse, she was sent to England to help prepare a hospital for wounded military personnel being evacuated from the Middle East (fortunately casualties were minimal). I considered re-enlisting in the Marine Corps at that time, since I certainly wasn't going to sit at home while my own sister "fought" for our country and our allies. Thankfully, that first Gulf War was brief and, seemingly, simple. So I have followed events in the Middle East carefully ever since, and when Al Qaeda attacked us in New York, I saw it as the latest in a continuation of events in my own life since 1979. For people in the Middle East, however, it was a continuation of events that have lasted for thousands of years.

What I believe matters most for Americans today is to begin to make an honest effort to understand terrorism, its causes, its goals, and how best to deal with it around the world. First, we must dispense with misconceptions. Terrorism and Islam are **not** one and the same. In an insightful and easily readable book entitled *Islam versus Terrorism*, Firooz Zadeh (2002) discusses how Islam opposes violence and murder, especially of innocent women and children. He also attempts to identify what is and is not terrorism, and in that effort he identifies eight types of terrorism: state terrorism, religious terrorism, criminal terrorism, terrorism by those who are mentally sick, political terrorism, oppositional terrorism, copy cat terrorism, and victim terrorism. According to Zadeh, the highest cost to society results from state terrorism. When the United States supports corrupt, terrorist governments in other parts of the world, our credibility as a nation fighting terrorism is suspect at best. Has this been the case? Yes, and in the worst possible way: we switch sides as it serves our political and economic interests. The United States helped to train Osama bin Laden and the Taliban fighters in Afghanistan when we wanted them to fight the Russians. Now we call them enemies. We provided weapons and training to Saddam Hussein's army when they were fighting the Iranians, because of the hostages taken in Tehran. Now we have deposed Hussein. We also sold weapons to Iran, and used the money to help support the Contras (freedom fighters or terrorists, depending on your point of view) trying to overthrow the leftist Sandinista government of Nicaragua. Zadeh proposes that people in the Middle East cannot trust the United States, except in one area: our support of Israel. And since other Middle Eastern countries see Israel as the one obstacle to a Palestinian homeland, they disapprove of that support. It does not matter whether the actions of the United States were right or wrong, whether they

really were in our best interests or not. What matters is how the rest of the world sees us now, and whether our top government officials are willing to consider how we are viewed globally and to act responsibly in terms of foreign policy in order to ensure what is best for all people around the world. In addressing the Middle East in particular, Fathali Moghaddam wrote:

Islamic communities in many parts of the world are experiencing a profound and historic identity crisis, one tragic manifestation of which is terrorism. In order to understand and avert this destructive trend, we must come to grips with the monumental crisis of identity that is paralyzing moderate movements but energizing fanatic forces in Islamic communities.

...Why do we need to understand how the terrorists see the world? Because this is the best way for us to find an effective means to end terrorism. . . . Seeing the world from the terrorists' point of view does not mean condoning terrorism; rather, it means better understanding terrorism so as to end it. (pg. ix; Moghaddam, 2006)

As mentioned above, there are many different forms of terrorism, so it is difficult to define exactly what it is. Nevertheless, in an effort to do so, Moghaddam (2005) defines terrorism as “politically motivated violence, perpetrated by individuals, groups, or state-sponsored agents, intended to instill feelings of terror and helplessness in a population in order to influence decision making and to change behavior.” Moghaddam suggests that psychologists need to play an important role in understanding terrorism for two main reasons: the basis for terrorist actions is typically subjectively interpreted values and beliefs, and the actions of terrorists are designed to cause specific psychological experiences, i.e., terror and helplessness. Moghaddam (2005, 2006) proposes a metaphor for how one becomes a terrorist, based on climbing a staircase, in which options are perceived to become more and more limited as one climbs the stairs. The most significant factor is the condition in which many people live on the ground floor, before they even consider climbing that staircase. Many people in this world live in abject poverty, under repressive governments that are unjust. When individuals see no hope within the system, and they lack any political means to effect change, then a path toward terrorism becomes perhaps the only reasonable possibility. Still, very few people are likely to become suicide bombers.

Individuals living in desperate conditions may move to the first floor on the staircase toward terrorism, where they evaluate their perceived options to fight unfair treatment. If there appear to be no options for justice within one's society, no opportunity to be heard, and no opportunity for personal mobility, the individual may then move to the second floor. Here the individual begins to displace their aggression. This often involves education/propaganda that identifies a clear target, for example the United States, also known as the “Great Satan.” This is the important beginning of an us-versus-them mentality. On the third floor, individuals become morally engaged with the terrorist organization. While we may see terrorists as immoral, they are beginning to believe that they are fighting for a just cause, against the immoral repression of their chosen target. As they move to the fourth floor, they solidify their categorical thinking (the us-versus-them mentality) and begin to see the terrorist organization, and terrorist acts, as legitimate. At this point there is little chance that they can leave the terrorist organization alive. For specific individuals, the training necessary to carry out a terrorist act takes place, often very quickly. Not only does a terrorist need to learn about weapons and tactics, they must also be trained to sidestep the natural, biological inhibition against killing other human beings. Two factors in helping to prepare people to kill are the intense indoctrination in the belief that their actions are for a greater good and secrecy. If an attack is done suddenly and without warning, victims have no opportunity to submit or to beg for mercy. The act occurs before the terrorist might become compassionate as he or she faces their intended victims (Moghaddam, 2005, 2006). Based on this model, Moghaddam proposes four steps that are necessary to stop terrorism by interrupting the formation of new terrorists. First, there must be prevention. Unfortunately, our government has a long history of choosing short-term fixes, rather than long-term preventative measures. Case in point: America's failure in the war on drugs. Aggressive responses aimed at individuals only provide an opening for someone new to step in and continuing using and/or selling drugs, and the same is true of terrorists. We need to work toward eliminating the pathway to terrorism, so we will not need to use the military and/or FBI to track down individuals (except, of course, in extreme cases such as terrorism that results from psychological disorder - e.g., consider the case of Theodore Kaczynski, the Unabomber). In addition, Moghaddam suggests

supporting contextualized democracy, educating against categorical thinking, and promoting interobjectivity and justice. In order for there to be a long-term solution, there must be international dialogue and improved intercultural understanding (Moghaddam, 2005).

Returning to the misconception in the minds of many Americans that terrorism is synonymous with Islam, let's examine where known terrorist organizations are located around the world. Fairly notorious organizations have come from Northern Ireland (e.g., the Irish Republican Army and the Ulster Defense Association), throughout mainland Europe (e.g., the Red Army Faction in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy, and Action Directe in France), throughout the Middle East (e.g., Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Palestinian group Hamas, the Stern Gang that fought for the establishment of Israel, and Al Qaeda), Africa, Asia, Latin America, Canada, and the United States (e.g., the Animal Liberation Front, Aryan Nations, the Black Panthers, and the Ku Klux Klan). As of 1999, at least twenty-eight well-organized terrorist groups existed, and when one takes into account factions within those groups and smaller, yet still identifiable, groups, as many as eighty-three terrorist groups have been identified around the world (Henderson, 2001). Some are primarily political, and some are primarily religious. Some are global, and some are more local. They include people and cultures of great diversity: Black, White, Asian, Latin, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Hindu, etc. Although terrorism appears to arise out of poverty and desperation, terrorists themselves, or at least the leaders, tend to be better educated than most and they are well versed in propaganda and well trained in weapons and tactics (Moghaddam, 2005; Zadeh, 2002). The only characteristic that all terrorists seem to share is an extreme commitment to violence, which arises out of desperation and perceived injustice, and is viewed as the only means to be heard and to effect change.

So can terrorism effect change, is terrorism effective? One can easily find authors who argue that it does indeed work (Dershowitz, 2002) or that it always fails (Carr, 2002). Alan Dershowitz (2002) argues that the very reason terrorism works is everything we have looked at so far: an effort to understand the root causes of terrorism and the terrorists themselves. Accordingly, he says:

We must take precisely the opposite approach to terrorism. We must commit ourselves *never to try to understand or eliminate its alleged root causes*, but rather to place it beyond the pale of dialogue and negotiation. Our message must be this: even if you have legitimate grievances, if you resort to terrorism as a means toward eliminating them we will simply not listen to you, we will not try to understand you, and we will certainly never change any of our policies toward you. Instead, we will hunt you down and destroy your capacity to engage in terror. (pp. 24-25; Dershowitz, 2002)

As a case in point, Dershowitz cites the awarding of observer status at the United Nations to the Palestinian Liberation Organization only after Palestinian terrorists began hijacking commercial airliners. Prior to the hijackings, 20 years of pleading their case to the United Nations had little effect. Dershowitz then offers a timeline that appears to clearly establish an effective relationship in which terrorism became more and more effective over time (from 1968-1999) in eliciting international recognition and support for the Palestinian cause. In contrast, Caleb Carr (2002) views terrorism entirely within the discipline of military history. He considers today's terrorism to be nothing more than a modern permutation of warfare against civilians in order to break their support for either leaders or policies that the terrorists oppose, the origins of which are as old as human conflict itself. Viewing terrorism as warfare has certain interesting implications. Throughout history, those who wage war against civilians ultimately defeated themselves by turning sentiment against them. On 9/11, Al Qaeda attacked civilians to a degree that has not been seen in ages:

...In so doing, the organizers, sponsors, and foot soldiers of every terrorist group involved in the September 11 attacks have unwittingly ensured that their extremist cause will be discredited among many of their sympathizers, disowned by most of their former sponsors, and finally defeated by their enemies: two thousand years of the lessons of terror dictate that this is the ultimate fate that awaits the attackers, no matter how many noncombatants they manage to kill along the way. (pp. 223-224; Carr, 2002).

Carr also addresses the other most important implication of treating terrorism as warfare: it must be met with warfare, but that warfare must not be excessive, such that it might also be viewed as terrorism. If our response to terrorism is excessive military might, then the tide of public opinion can swing back in favor of Al Qaeda, especially in Muslim countries where the United States is not trusted.

Echoing Carr's concerns about the extent and nature of our military actions in the war on terror, one

way in which terrorism might work against us, without seeming to have gained what was intended (if we can even know what was intended), is if our fundamental democratic principles change. In *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror*, Michael Ignatieff (2004) argues that terrorism must be met with force, and that such force is a lesser evil than the terrorism that necessitated the response. The danger lies in succumbing to the greater evil of seeking revenge. Dershowitz (2002) provides a compelling case for how an amoral society could control and possibly eliminate all terrorism, but America is not an amoral society. Our responses are constrained by the constitution and by the political debate that forms the very basis of our democracy. When we respond to terrorist acts, we must consider what we want that response to accomplish:

Terrorism requires us to think carefully about who we are as free peoples and what we need to do in order to remain so. When we are confronted with terrorist violence, we cannot allow the claims of national security to trump the claims of liberty, since what we are trying to defend is our continued existence as a free people. Freedom must set a limit to the measures we employ to maintain it. (pg. 145; Ignatieff, 2004)

Finally, can the ultimate answer to terrorism be found in promoting democratic governments in every nation? The war on terror has led us to depose both Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and to replace them with democratically elected governments. Only time will tell whether those governments will survive, but there is reason for caution. Religious turmoil continues in the Middle East. In America, our constitution provides for separation of church and state, and that separation has become an important tradition. But for Muslims, the idea of a secular democracy, one that is not guided by Allah, is simply inconceivable. They are not opposed to democracy per se, indeed it has been argued that Islam is likely to eventually lead to pluralist democracies (Aslan, 2005). But to pressure Islamic countries into accepting the secular democracy that we hold so dear is, according to Robert Shedinger (2004), equivalent to declaring war on Islam. So what appears to be essential to promoting stability in the Middle East, and elsewhere, is an effort to support contextual democracy, that is, forms of democracy that fit with the culture of the people who will create and participate in that democracy (Aslan, 2005; Moghaddam, 2005, 2006; Shedinger, 2004; Zadeh, 2002).

Integration and the Human Dilemma

In the preface to *Man's Search for Himself* (May, 1953), May presents the existential philosophy that there is meaning to be found in challenges and suffering, and that psychologists in particular may find a special opportunity in such circumstances:

When our society, in its time of upheaval in standards and values, can give us no clear picture of “what we are and what we ought to be,”...we are thrown back on the search for ourselves. The painful insecurity on all sides gives us new incentive to ask, Is there perhaps some important source of guidance and strength we have overlooked?...How can anyone undertake the long development toward self-realization in a time when practically nothing is certain, either in the present or the future?...The psychotherapist has no magic answers...But there is something in addition to his technical training and his own self-understanding...This something is the wisdom the psychotherapist gains in working with people who are striving to overcome their problems. He has the extraordinary, if often taxing, privilege of accompanying persons through their intimate and profound struggles to gain new integration. (pg. 7; May, 1953)

Integration, according to May, is similar to Heidegger's concept of Dasein (being-in-the-world). As conscious, free, and responsible beings our goal should be to separate ourselves from the conformist, automaton masses (the en-soi, according to Sartre) and progressively integrate with others in freely chosen love and creative work (May, 1953), or as Clement Reeves puts it: “To understand and elucidate the specific, distinguishing characteristics of the human being, and to grasp what it is to achieve courageous, decisive, integrated response to the challenge inherent in existence...” (Reeves, 1977). The process of integration is lifelong, and should be appropriate for whatever age each one of us happens to be right now. May suggests that a healthy child of eight, who is fulfilling his capacity of self-conscious choice for a child of eight years old, is more of a person than a neurotic adult who is 30 years old. Likewise, a person who can face death courageously at the age of thirty is more mature than someone 80 years old who “cringes and begs still to be shielded from reality” (May, 1953). Thus, it is important to live each moment with freedom, honesty, and responsibility. If each of us lives within the present moment, working to fulfill our potential, being true to whom we are and the situations within which we live, May proposes that we will experience joy and

gratification:

...*Does not the uncertainty of our time teach us the most important lesson of all - that the ultimate criteria are the honesty, integrity, courage and love of a given moment of relatedness?* If we do not have that, we are not building for the future anyway; if we do have it, we can trust the future to itself. (pg. 276; May, 1953)

One of the challenges to living an integrated life is seen in what May described as the **human dilemma** (May, 1967). Are we the subject of our lives, or are we an object in our world? When we become absorbed in the details of our responsibilities and actions, when we allow ourselves to be controlled and directed in order to accomplish our assigned tasks, when we become slaves to the clock, doing this and that, going here and there, as others expect us to, we are viewing ourselves as objects. This is reminiscent of what Karen Horney called the tyranny of the should. On the other hand, when we consider our feelings, wishes, and desires, when we are true to ourselves, or living authentically, then we are viewing ourselves as subjects, as active participants in our own lives. According to May (1967), the human dilemma arises out of our capacity to experience ourselves as *both* subject and object at the same time. But how can opposite poles of the human experience both be true? It is in the process between the two poles that development of human consciousness develops, both deepening and widening that consciousness. This is essentially the same idea, though in different form, used by Heidegger and Sartre in describing the unique nature of human beings. For Heidegger this nothingness was the undefined distinction between Being and beings, for Sartre it was the shell that surrounded the *pour-soi*.

May believed that existential psychology occupied a space somewhere between the two extremes that existed, and continue to exist, in psychology: behaviorism vs. humanism. May rejected Skinner's arguments that all human behavior can be understood in terms of stimuli and responses, declaring that there is ample evidence in both clinical practice and everyday life of people being active participants in their view of, actions in, and reactions to their world. He was equally critical of Carl Rogers, believing that humanistic psychologists no longer recognized very real irrational behavior, as well as aggression and hostility (May, 1967). He believed that psychology had become trapped in a misguided desire to define everything scientifically, and according to rules that then determined each psychologist's view of the world and their patients. As a caution to those psychologists who cannot see beyond their theories, May wrote:

Now I am certainly aware, if I may say so without sounding patronizing, that the compelling need for honesty is one of the motives which leads psychologists to seek quantitative measures...I am also aware that research in our day has to be carefully set up so that the results are teachable and can be built upon by others. The compelling drive to get at the truth is what improves us all as psychologists, and is part and parcel of intellectual integrity. But I do urge that we not let the drive for honesty put blinders on us and cut off our range of vision so that we miss the very thing we set out to understand - namely, the living human being. (pg. 14; May, 1967)

Discussion Question: May suggested that we need to separate ourselves from the conformist masses, and then integrate ourselves with others in free and responsible ways. Are you a follower, or a leader? Either way, do you consciously choose the role you play, thereby living an authentic life?

Love and Intentionality

Love was a very important topic for May. Simply put, "To be capable of giving and receiving mature love is as sound a criterion as we have for the fulfilled personality" (May, 1953). He was certainly not alone. Harry Harlow, best known for his studies on **contact comfort**, described love as "a wondrous state, deep, tender, and rewarding," and Abraham Maslow said "We *must* understand love; we must be able to teach it, to create it, to predict it, or else the world is lost to hostility and to suspicion" (Harlow, 1975; Maslow, 1975). However, there are "a million and one" types of relationships that people call love, so it remains a perplexing issue (May, 1953).

May talked about four types of love in Western tradition: **sex**, **eros**, **philia**, and **agape** (May, 1969). Sex and eros are closely related, but they are different. Sex is what we also call lust or libido, whereas eros is the drive of love to procreate or create. As changes in society allowed the more open study of sex, prompted by the work of people like Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich, May noted three particular paradoxes. First, our so-called enlightenment has not removed the sexual problems in our culture. In the past, an individual could

refrain from sexual activity using the moral guidelines of society as an explanation. As casual sex became common, even expected, individuals had to face expressing their own morality as just that: their own! This also created a new source of anxiety for some, namely the possibility that their personal relationships might carry an expectation of sexual activity, and that if they did not comply they might not be able to continue dating someone they liked. The second paradox is that “*the new emphasis on technique in sex and love-making backfires*” (May, 1969). Emphasizing technique (or prowess) can result in a mechanistic attitude toward making love, possibly leading to alienation, feelings of loneliness, and depersonalization. This can lead to the anticipatory anxiety described by Frankl. Finally, May believed that our sexual freedom was actually a new form of Puritanism. There is a state of alienation from the body, a separation of emotion from reason, and the use of the body as a machine. Whereas in the Victorian era people tried to be in love without falling into sex, today many people try to have sex without falling in love.

Philia and agape are also related to one another, as with sex and love. Philia refers to feelings of friendship or brotherly love, whereas agape is the love devoted to caring for others. Friendship during childhood is very important, and May believed it was essential for meaningful and loving relationships as adults, including those involving eros. Indeed, the tension created by eros in terms of continuous attraction and continuous passion would be unbearable if philia did not enter into the equation and allow one to relax in the pleasant and friendly company of the object of one’s desires. Harry Harlow, once again, showed that the opportunity to make friends was as essential in the development of young monkeys as it appears to be in humans (cited in May, 1969). In the West, however, given our highly individualistic and competitive society, deep, meaningful friendships seem to be something of the past, especially among men. May cautions, however, that since the evidence shows the importance of friendship during development perhaps we should remember the value of having good friends.

Finally we have agape, a selfless love beyond any hope of gain for oneself. May compared this love to the biological aspect of nature in which a parent will fight to the death in defense of their offspring. With agape, we run the risk of being like God, in the sense that we know others never act without some degree of their own interests in mind. Similarly, we don’t want to be loved in an ethereal sense, or on the other hand only for our body. We want to be loved completely. So, all true love involves some element of the other types of love, no matter how little or how obscured it may be (May, 1969).



Figure 1

Agape is exemplified in the bond between a parent and their child.

In the foreword to *Love and Will* (May, 1969) May acknowledged that some of his readers might find it odd that he combined the two topics in one book, but he felt strongly that the topics belong together. He considered both love and will to be interdependent, they are processes in which people reach out to influence others, to help to mold and create the consciousness of others. Love without will is sentimental and experimental, whereas will without love is manipulative. Only by remaining open to the influence of others can we likewise influence them, so love must have an honest purpose, and purpose must be taken with care.

Will, or **will power** as it is more commonly known, was one of the earliest subjects in American psychology, having been examined in detail by William James as early as 1890 (see James, 1892/1992) and again in 1897 in *The Will to Believe* (James, 1897/1992). May considered Sigmund Freud's greatest discovery to be the uncovering of unconscious desires and motives. Although many people may believe themselves to be acting out of higher ideals, most of us are, in reality, acting according to psychologically determined factors of which we are unaware. Nonetheless, May considered this to be one of the most unfortunate results of Freud's work. By accepting determinism, we undermine the influence of will and making decisions. As May put it, Freud's theory suggests that we are "not *driving* any more, but *driven*" (May, 1969).

The suggestion that we are no longer in charge of our own lives, that we are driven by psychological determinism, seems strange to those who believe that never before have people had such power, both in terms of individual freedom and in the collective conquest of nature. But May referred to a **contradiction**

in will, the contrast between our feelings of powerlessness and self-doubt and the societal assurances that we can do anything we set our minds to. May believed that we exist in a “curious predicament,” in that the technical wonders that make us feel so powerful are the very same processes that overwhelm us (May, 1969):

Thus, the crisis in will does not arise from either the presence or absence of power in the individual’s world. It comes from the contradiction between the two - the result of which is a paralysis of will. (pg. 189; May, 1969)

Will alone is not the driving force that leads us to responsible and authentic lives. Underlying will is something May called **intentionality**. Intentionality is the structure that gives meaning to experience, it is both how we perceive the world and how the world can be perceived by us. In other words, through our perceptual processes we influence the world around us; we affect the very things that we perceive. Intentionality is a bridge between subject and object (May, 1969). Compare this once again to the nothingness between beings and Being (à la Heidegger), or between the en-soi and the pour-soi (à la Sartre). Still, our ability to reach and form the very objects that we perceive, in other words, to participate actively in our lives, can be dramatically curtailed by the problem addressed by May early in his career, anxiety:

Overwhelming anxiety destroys the capacity to perceive and conceive one’s world, to reach out toward it to form and re-form it. In this sense, it destroys intentionality. We cannot hope, plan, promise, or create in severe anxiety; we shrink back into a stockade of limited consciousness hoping only to preserve ourselves until the danger is past. (pp. 244; May, 1969)

Discussion Question: Consider the different loves in your life. How do they differ? How have they brought meaning to your life? Has your view of what love is changed during your life, in either good or bad ways?

The Daimonic: Source of Violence and Creativity

The **daimonic**, according to May, is “any natural function which has the power to take over the whole person” (May, 1969). It can be either destructive or creative, and is often both. In this way it is similar to Jung’s concept of the shadow, and May himself made that comparison (May, 1991; see also Diamond, 1996, Reeves, 1977). In fact, it is the mixture of good and evil in the daimonic that protects us from the dangers of excess, whether excess good or the passivity of feeling powerless. When May did not know whether he would live or die from tuberculosis, he realized that his feelings of helplessness were turning into passivity, and that this was sure to lead to his death (as he had seen with others). He described this experience as the product of his innocence, and that because he was innocent he allowed the bacteria infecting his body to do violence to him. However, when he chose to fight the disease, when he asserted his will to live, he began to make steady progress and, indeed, he recovered. In this sense, May had chosen to allow the daimonic to take over his self in the interest of self preservation. In each instance, how one allows the daimonic to take over is influenced by personal responsibility (Reeves, 1977).

When the daimonic takes over without one having made a responsible choice, however, it can lead to violence toward others. Our lives often involve conflict between those who have power and those who do not. When a person feels powerless, helpless, insignificant, they can lash out under the control of the daimonic. According to May, violence is bred in impotence and apathy (May, 1972). This can be particularly important for those who have little or no advantage in our society. In *Power and Innocence* (May, 1972), May described a patient who was a young, Black woman. Being both Black and female, born before the civil rights movement, she was about as powerless as one could be in America. Her stepfather had forced her to serve as a prostitute for years. Although quite intelligent, and successful in school and college, she felt so helpless that May described her as having “no active belief that she deserved to be helped.” An important aspect of therapy for this patient was to get in touch with her anger, to get in touch with the violence that had been done to her and that she wished to do to others.

In considering the case of this young woman, May concluded that we must not simply condemn all violence and try to eliminate even the possibility of it. To do so would be to take away a part of full humanity. In this context, May criticizes humanistic psychology and its emphasis on fulfilling self-actualization, an emphasis that May felt moved toward greater moral perfection. However, the recognition that we are not perfect, that each of us has good and evil within, prohibits us from moral arrogance. Recognizing this leads to the restraint necessary for making forgiveness possible.

Our ability to achieve good is dependent on who we are, and who we are is based partly on our own **creativity**. Since humans are not simply driven by instinct and fixed action patterns, in contrast to every other creature on earth we must create ourselves. This creation must take place within the world that exists around us, and must take into account all of the emotions and predispositions that we do carry with us as biological organisms.

Art - and creative activities of all kinds - can provide comparatively healthy outlets for the constructive expression of anger and rage. Creativity cannot, however, always substitute for psychotherapy. Nevertheless, creativity is at the very core of the psychotherapeutic project: The patient is encouraged to become more creative in psychologically restructuring his or her *inner* world, and then to continue this creative process in the *outer* world, not only by accepting and adjusting to reality, but, whenever possible, by reshaping it. . .

“Creativity” can be broadly defined as *the constructive utilization of the daimonic*. Creativity is called forth from each one of us by the inevitable conflicts and chaos inherent in human existence. . . (pp. 255-256; Diamond, 1996)

Pursuing this creativity is not easy, however. We live in a world that is rapidly changing. Since May’s death in 1994 change in the world has probably even accelerated. May asked whether we would withdraw in anxiety and panic as our foundations were shaken, or would we actively choose to participate in forming the future (May, 1975). Choosing to live in the future requires leaping into the unknown, going where others have not been, and therefore cannot guide us. It involves what existentialists call the anxiety of nothingness (May, 1975). Making this bold choice requires **courage**. One of the reasons we need to be courageous is that we must fully commit ourselves to pursuing a responsible creation of the future, but at the same time we must recognize that sometimes we will be wrong. Those who claim they are absolutely right can be dangerous, since such an attitude can lead to dogmatism, or worse, fanaticism (May, 1975).

Finally, not only must we accept that we might make bad choices, we must also recognize that our creativity is limited. In *The Courage to Create* (May, 1975), May described having attended a conference where the introductory speaker declared that there is no limit to the possibilities of the human being. Following this statement, the discussion at the conference was a flop. May realized that if there is no limit to what we can accomplish, then there really aren’t any problems any more, we only need to wait until our potentiality catches up with our situation and the problem solves itself. May offered a rather amusing example to clarify this point:

...it is like putting someone into a canoe and pushing him out into the Atlantic toward England with the cheery comment, “The sky’s the limit.” The canoer is only too aware of the fact that an inescapably real limit is also the bottom of the ocean. (pg. 113, May, 1975)

Another inescapable limit is our death. There is no creative act that can change the fact that we will die someday, and that we cannot know when or how it will happen. May believed, however, that these limits are valuable, that creativity itself needs limits. He proposed that consciousness arises from our awareness of these limits, and from the struggle against these limits. May compared this concept to Adler’s theory that much of what we as individuals, and also society as a whole, are arises from our efforts to compensate for inferiority. Thus, our limits lead to what May called a **passion for form**. In its passion for form, the mind is actively forming and re-forming the world in which we live (May, 1975).

Discussion Question: May believed that creatively taking charge of your life required courage. Have you ever had to make a really difficult decision? Did you take the easy way out, or the safe path, or did you make a bold decision that offered great opportunity?

The Cry for Myth

As a practicing psychoanalyst I find that contemporary therapy is almost entirely concerned, when all is surveyed, with the problems of the individual’s search for myths. The fact that Western society has all but lost its myths was the main reason for the birth and development of psychoanalysis in the first place. (pg. 9; May, 1991)

The preceding quote is how May began *The Cry for Myth*, the last book of his career (May, 1991). According to May, the definition of a **myth** is quite simple: it “is a way of making sense in a senseless world.” In addition, myths give substance to our existence. In a healthy society the myths provide relief from neurotic guilt and excessive anxiety, and so a compassionate therapist will not discourage them. In the

twentieth century, especially in Western culture, we have lost our myths, and with them we have lost our sense of existence and our direction or purpose in life. The danger in this is that people are then susceptible to cults, drugs, superstition, etc., in a vain effort to replace that purpose (May, 1991).

As we pass through the experiences of our lives, our memory is dependent mainly upon myth. It is well accepted today that human memory is constructive, and influenced by our expectations of memory. As May describes it, the formation of a memory, regardless of whether it is real or fantasy, is molded like clay. We then retain it as a myth, and rely on that myth for future guidance in similar situations. For example, an infant is fed three times a day and put to bed 365 days a year, and yet they remember only one or two of these events from their years of early childhood. For whatever reason, good or bad, these specific events take on mythic proportions and greatly influence the course of our lives. May acknowledges the contribution of Alfred Adler in recognizing the value of these early memories, describing Adler as “a perceptive and humble man, he was gifted with unusual sensitivity for children” (May, 1991). As we have seen, Adler considered the basis for neurosis to be a lack of social interest. In therapy, Adler focused on the “guiding fiction” of a child’s life, something May considered to be synonymous with a “myth.” Since “memory is the mother of creativity,” and memory depends upon myth, May believed that the myths that form the identity of our culture are essential for the formation of our self.

May ends his final book with a chapter entitled *The Great Circle of Love*. Having covered a variety of famous myths in the book, including Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Marlow’s *Faust*, Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*, and Poe’s *The Raven*, May concludes:

In each of these dramas the liberation of both woman and man is possible only when each achieves a new myth of the other sex, leading to a new significant psychological relationship. They are both then liberated from their previous empty and lonely existence. The woman and the man find their true selves only when they are fully present to each other. They find they both need each other, not only physically but psychologically and spiritually as well. (pg. 288; May, 1991)

4 Existential Psychotherapy

Existential psychotherapy is not so much a technique as it is an overall approach to understanding the nature of the human being. By asking deep questions about the nature of anxiety, loneliness, isolation, despair, etc., as well as about creativity and love, existential psychotherapists seek to avoid the “common error of distorting human beings in the very effort of trying to help them” (May & Yalom, 1995). May believed that American psychology has had both an affinity for and an aversion to existential psychotherapy. The affinity arises from an historical place in American psychology that was very similar to existentialism: William James’ emphasis on the immediacy of experience, the importance of will, and the unity of thought and action. The aversion arises from the Western tendency to dehumanize people through strict adherence to scientific principles of research, i.e., to reform humans in the image of machines (May, 1983).

An essential aspect of existential psychotherapy is to help individuals realize their own being, their own role in choosing the form that their life will take. This is known as the “**I-Am**” experience. It is all too common for us to associate ourselves with external factors: I am a professor, I am a student, I work at a store, I run a business, etc. We repress our own sense of being. To use an example similar to a case described by May: I am a professor, but that is not really who I am. I am a father and a husband, but that isn’t all that I am. I have a family and a career, but that isn’t quite it either. What is left, or what is common in each of these statements? I am! And as May put it, if I am, I have a right to be (example cited in May & Yalom, 1995). This realization is not the solution to my problems, but it is a necessary precondition to finding the courage to pursue the rest of my life.

Once an individual finds the courage to recreate their life, the existential therapist will address a variety of issues. As discussed above, May placed a great deal of emphasis on anxiety. Guilt is also an important issue to be addressed, since we may feel guilty about poor ethical choices or instances when we failed to be responsible with our actions. As with anxiety, guilt can be normal (after actually doing something bad) or neurotic (when we fantasize some transgression). Both anxiety and guilt affect how we experience Kierkegaard’s concept of being-in-the-world. Our world can be viewed in several different ways, however.

There is the **Umwelt** (the world around), the **Mitwelt** (the with-world), and the **Eigenwelt** (the own-world). The Umwelt is the world around us, the natural environment. It encompasses our biological needs, and the unavoidable reality that we will die one day. The Eigenwelt refers to our self-awareness and our ability to relate to our selves, and it is uniquely human (May & Yalom, 1995).

The Mitwelt bears a special relationship to another important concept in existential psychotherapy: **time**. Because we tend to think about ourselves spatially, as objects within our life, we tend to focus on the past. In other words, we focus on what we have become, as opposed to what we might be. Moments when we truly encounter ourselves are rare, but it is only when we grasp the moment that we truly experience life. Those moments can be positive, such as the experience of love, or negative, such as the experience of depression, but they are real nonetheless. The Mitwelt contains the inner meaning of the events that occur in our lives. Individuals who suffer from brain damage often cannot think in terms of abstract possibilities, they become trapped in concrete time. In order to be fully healthy, and something essential to the growth of humans, is our ability to transcend time:

If we are to understand a given person as existing, dynamic, at every moment becoming, we cannot avoid the dimension of transcendence. Existing involves a continual emerging, in the sense of emergent evolution, a transcending of one's past and present in order to reach the future. (pg. 267; May & Yalom, 1995)

Although the content described above might seem very different from the type of psychoanalysis described by Freud, the general process of existential psychotherapy is similar to psychoanalysis. It is accepted that the client experiences anxiety, that some of this anxiety is unconscious, and that the client is relying on defense mechanisms in order to cope with the anxiety. A fundamental difference, however, is the focus of the therapy. Rather than digging into the deep, dark past, the existential psychotherapist strives to understand the meaning of the client's current experiences, the depth of experience in the given moment. For this reason, the therapist-client relationship remains important, but the emphasis is not on transference. Rather, the emphasis is on the relationship itself as fundamentally important (May & Yalom, 1995).

Discussion Question: Have you ever had an "I-Am" experience?

5 Buddhism and Existentialism: The Completion of a Circle?

Buddhism is by far the oldest theory of psychology that we will cover in this book. Applied existentialism, particularly the work of Rollo May, is one of the more recent developments in psychology. And yet, these two approaches share a great deal in common, a fact readily acknowledged by May:

...The likenesses between these Eastern philosophies and existentialism go much deeper than the chance similarity of words. Both are concerned with ontology, the study of being. Both seek a relation to reality which cuts below the cleavage between subject and object. Both would insist that the Western absorption in conquering and gaining power over nature has resulted not only in the estrangement of man from nature but also indirectly in the estrangement of man from himself. The basic reason for these similarities is that Eastern thought never suffered the radical split between subject and object that has characterized Western thought, and this dichotomy is exactly what existentialism seeks to overcome. (pp. 58-59; May, 1983)

In Japan there is a form of psychotherapy, known as **Morita**, which emphasizes the treatment of anxiety. The treatment consists of acceptance, reattribution, dereflection, and active engagement. The dereflection mentioned is the same technique developed by Viktor Frankl. The active engagement continues this effort at distracting the client from their anxiety, hopefully breaking them out of the circle of anticipatory anxiety and subsequent failure described by Frankl. This procedure has proven both successful and, consequently, influential amongst Japanese psychotherapists. A second Japanese technique, **Naikan**, combines a more traditional Buddhist approach with elements of existential psychology. The client is directed to reflect intensely on their past relationships, and then to consider what they have done for others, what others have done for them, and the difficulties they have caused for others. The goal is to help the client recognize the interdependence of humans, and to appreciate whether or not they, as well as others, have acted responsibly within the relationships. By confronting feelings of guilt and unworthiness, it is hoped that the client will realize that they have been loved and appreciated nonetheless (Walsh, 1995).

Belinda Siew Luan Khong (2003) has examined the role of responsibility in a particular form of existential

psychotherapy known as **daseinsanalysis** (developed by the Swiss psychiatrist Medard Boss and grounded in the philosophy of Heidegger) and compared it to Buddhist practice in the Theravadan tradition. She found that daseinsanalysis and Buddhist practices share much in common, and that both have something to offer to each other:

...An integration of these two disciplines will make their ideas and practices more accessible to communities outside their traditional domains. The daseinsanalytic and Buddhist perspectives relating to personal and social responsibility provide us with valuable philosophical and psychological insights into this very important human phenomenon and show us practically how individuals can be assisted in taking responsibility for every moment of their existence, and to develop a sense of responsibility to different situations. (pg. 158; Khong, 2003)

Stephen Batchelor, a former Buddhist monk turned author and teacher, has presented existentialism as an interesting approach to the primary problem facing Buddhism in America today (Batchelor, 1983). According to Batchelor, Buddhism in the west is split between those who wish to follow a traditional path (emphasizing meditation and practice) and those who insist upon an academic approach to the analysis and understanding of Buddhism. Between the two approaches lies a great chasm. As we have seen, existentialism draws its deepest and most meaningful philosophy from nothingness, be it the distinction between Being and beings (Dasein, according to Heidegger) or the shell separating the pour-soi from the en-soi (as proposed by Sartre). Drawing primarily from his Buddhist training and the philosophy of Heidegger and Tillich (see below), Batchelor contrasts **being-alone** and **being-with**. We are essentially alone at birth and at death, in that we cannot share the experience with others, and this leads to unavoidable anxiety throughout our lives (though not necessarily overwhelming anxiety for most people). As we will see in the next chapter, the first noble truth of Buddhism is that human life is suffering. But just as much as we are alone, we are unavoidably linked to others as well. What matters then, is that we experience authentic **being-with-others**, and the root of authentic being-with is concern for others (as opposed to the inauthentic distortion of self-concern; Batchelor, 1983).

The genuine welfare of man, of both oneself and others, is found in the optimum actualization of the potentialities of his being. To exist in the fullest possible way in our aloneness as well as in our relations with others is the fulfillment of the inner aim of human life... (pg. 88; Batchelor, 1983)

6 Some Final Thoughts on Existentialism and Existential Psychology

Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) is considered the defining text of modern existentialism. Sartre was an atheist, so the brief introduction to existentialism in this chapter went in the direction of atheism. However, Frankl and May were not atheists, and one of May's most influential mentors, as well as a close personal friend, was Paul Tillich. Tillich remains a well-known and respected existential philosopher in the spiritual tradition. May went so far as to say that Tillich' book *The Courage to Be* might be the best and most understandable presentation of existentialism as an approach to life that has been written in English (May, 1983).

It is also interesting to note that both Frankl and May were significantly influenced by Alfred Adler. Frankl worked closely with Adler for a time, and May took a summer course with Adler. Both cite Adler regularly in their writings. Adler's focus on the childhood struggle against one's own inferiority, his emphasis on social interest as a responsible means to superiority, and his recognition of the dangers inherent in seeking superiority at the expense of others, all fit well with the existential perspective on making responsible choices in living one's life. This point emphasizes, once again, the profound influence that Adler has had on psychology, and that he is in all probability the most under-recognized figure in the history of psychology.

In 1897, William James published an essay entitled *Is Life Worth Living?* (James, 1897/1992). James begins by describing how some people see the value in life, indeed they fully enjoy life, no matter what happens to them or around them. However, for most people this is not the case, and there is no magic way to give everyone such an optimistic point of view. So, James presents a series of arguments that one might use with suicidal people (that is the term he uses) in order to convince them that life is worth living. He relies heavily on religious faith, though not on any particular religion, but also leads into a discussion

of existential thought. Approximately a decade before Frankl and May were even born, James wrote the following words:

...Suppose, however thickly evils crowd upon you, that your unconquerable subjectivity proves to be their match, and that you find a more wonderful joy than any passive pleasure can bring in trusting ever in the larger whole. Have you not now made life worth living on these terms?...This life is worth living, we can say, *since it is what we make it, from the moral point of view*, and we are determined to make it from that point of view, so far as we have anything to do with it, a success...These, then, are my last words to you: Be not afraid of life. Believe that life is worth living, and your belief will help create the fact. (pp. 501-503; James, 1897/1992)

The challenges that we all face in trying to live authentic lives, the challenges of making responsible and ethical choices that are true to who we ourselves are, can be difficult. In a fascinating book entitled *Not a Genuine Black Man*, Brian Copeland (2006) talks about his family's racial struggles during the civil rights movement and the difficulties he faces today as a Black man who has adopted many so-called "White" cultural values. Copeland insists, however, that we cannot so easily claim that any given value or personal interest belongs only to one group of people:

...When all is said and done, I AM indeed a Genuine Black Man - because I am resilient. That's what being black in America is truly about: resilience...I stayed on my feet through taunts and harassment, through police intimidation and bigoted nuns, through schoolyard bullies and Sylvester, through my mother's death and bouts of sometimes crippling depression. I am still standing.

I am black because, as my friend Mr. Wilkins once told me, people should be called what they *want* to be called. I have the right and the ability to determine my identity regardless of what other blacks or whites say. I am not an "oreo," nor am I "still a nigger." I am a man. I am a black man.

No one person or group of individuals holds the monopoly on what in this society is the "true" black experience. My world is as "black" as that of Malcolm X, Colin Powell, Snoop Dogg, Jesse Jackson, Usher, Bill Cosby, or Diddy. As their experiences in America are unique, mine is unique - yet it is the same. It is as valid as that of the poor African American living in "the 'hood," the rich black rapper balancing a lifestyle of fame and violence, and the black scholar working to better this world through academic dissertation. It is as authentic as the experiences of those who marched with Dr. King for civil rights and those who defy the black community by arguing the conservative point of view.

It is the "true" black experience because it is *my* experience... (pp. 243-244; Copeland, 2006)

Discussion Question: Brian Copeland talked about how difficult it can be to live an authentic life when you don't meet the expectations of others. Have you ever gone against the advice of family or friends? Did it prove to be the right decision, or did it at least help you to feel better about your own confidence in yourself?

Personality Theory in Real Life: The Application of Frankl's Theories to the Workplace and Everyday Life

In 1989, Stephen Covey published *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey's book became very popular, selling millions of copies on the way to becoming a #1 New York Times bestseller. If you were to read the first chapter of that book now, it would seem very familiar. Covey presents a very existential approach to understanding our lives, particularly with regard to the problems we experience every day. Perhaps it should not be surprising, then, that in the chapters describing the first two of these seven habits he cites and quotes Viktor Frankl numerous times. Indeed, Covey cites Frankl's first two books as being profoundly influential in his own life, and how impressed Covey was having met Frankl shortly before Frankl's death (see Covey's foreword in Pattakos, 2004).

The first two habits, according to Covey, are: 1) be proactive, and 2) begin with the end in mind. He briefly describes Frankl's experiences in the concentration camps, and refers to Frankl's most widely quoted saying, that Frankl himself could decide how his experiences would affect him, and that no one could take that freedom away from Frankl! People who choose to develop this level of personal freedom are certainly being proactive, as opposed to responding passively to events that occur around them and to them. It is not necessary, of course, to suffer such tragic circumstances in order to become proactive in one's own life:

...It is in the ordinary events of every day that we develop the proactive capacity to handle the extraor-

dinary pressures of life. It's how we make and keep commitments, how we handle a traffic jam, how we respond to an irate customer or a disobedient child. It's how we view our problems and where we focus our energies. It's the language we use. (pg. 92; Covey, 1989)

Covey compares his habit of beginning with the end in mind to logotherapy, helping people to recognize the meaning that their life holds. Covey works primarily in business leadership training, so the value of working toward a greater goal than simply keeping a company in business from day to day is clear, especially for those who care about employee morale and quality control (see also *Principle-Centered Leadership*; Covey, 1990). When employees share a sense of purpose in their work, they are likely to have higher intrinsic motivation. Think about it for a moment. Have you ever had a job you didn't really understand, and didn't care about? Have you ever been given that sort of homework in school or college? So, how much effort did you really put into that job or assignment?

Covey's remaining habits are: 3) put first things first, 4) think win/win, 5) seek first to understand, then to be understood, 6) synergize, and 7) sharpen the saw. At first glance these principles seem reasonably straight forward, emphasizing practical and responsible actions. However, what does "sharpen the saw" mean? Sharpening the saw refers to keeping our tools in good working order, and we are our most important tool. Covey considers it essential to regularly and consistently, in wise and balanced ways, to exercise the four dimensions of our nature: physical, mental, social/emotional, and spiritual. By investing in ourselves, we are taking care to live an authentic life.

More recently, Covey has examined his principles beyond the business world. In 1997 he published *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*, a book in which he applies the same 7 habits to family life. Covey certainly has solid credentials as a family man, as father of 9 and grandfather of 43 children, and he won the 2003 Fatherhood Award from the National Fatherhood Initiative. Drawing in large part on his own extensive, personal experience, Covey uses many stories, anecdotes, and examples of real-life situations to help provide context to the challenges of raising a family and how we might best work with them. But first, he introduces a simple process: have a clear vision of what you want to accomplish, have a plan of how you might accomplish it, and use a compass (your own unique gifts that enable you to be an agent of change in your family). In essence, Covey is recommending that you prepare yourself to develop the seven habits. We all know how difficult it is to establish a new habit or break a bad habit; how is your New Year's resolution going?

Just as families change, so does the world we live in. Recently, Covey addressed this change by proposing an eighth habit (Covey, 2004). He says that this was not simply an important habit he had overlooked before, but one that has risen to new significance as we have fully entered the age of information and technology in the twenty-first century. As communication has become much easier (e.g., email), it has also become less personal and meaningful. Thus the need for the eighth habit: find your voice and inspire others to find theirs. According to Covey, "voice is unique personal significance." Essentially, it is the same as finding meaning in one's life, and then helping others to find meaning in their own lives. It is through finding a mission or a purpose in life that we can move "from effectiveness to greatness" (Covey, 2004).

Whereas Covey presented an approach to personal and professional effectiveness (and later to greatness as well) that parallels the principles set forth by Viktor Frankl, Alex Pattakos very directly applies Frankl's theories to both the workplace and one's everyday life in *Prisoners of Our Thoughts: Viktor Frankl's Principles at Work* (with a foreword by Stephen Covey; Pattakos, 2004). Frankl himself urged Pattakos to publish his book during a meeting in 1996. Pattakos, like Covey, has been profoundly influenced by Frankl's writings throughout Pattakos' career. According to Pattakos, we are creatures of habit, and we prefer a life that is both predictable and within our comfort zone. As the world is changing in the twenty-first century, so the conditions under which we work are changing. Pattakos believes there is a need for humanizing work. More than just balancing one's personal life and career, humanizing work is an attempt to honor our own individuality and to fully engage our human spirit at work. Simply put, it is an effort to apply Frankl's will-to-meaning in our workplace (Pattakos, 2004).

Like Covey, Pattakos presents seven core principles. They are similar to Covey's seven habits, but in keeping with Pattakos' intentions they are aligned more directly with the principles of logotherapy and existential psychology described by Frankl. The seven core principles are: 1) exercise the freedom to choose

your attitude, 2) realize your will-to-meaning, 3) detect the meaning of life's moments, 4) don't work against yourself, 5) look at yourself from a distance, 6) shift your focus of attention, and 7) extend beyond yourself. These principles include not only the ideas of personal freedom and will-to-meaning, but also dereflection (principles 4 and 6) and the will-to-ultimate-meaning (principle 7). Clearly Pattakos has accomplished his goal of applying logotherapy to the workplace, but how well does this application work in real life?

Pattakos describes the case of a probation officer with the state department of corrections. Rick, as Pattakos identifies him, was raised in foster care and orphanages. However, rather than developing a sense of caring and concern for others who have difficulties in their lives, Rick refers to his clients as "maggots." Rick has become insensitive and unforgiving, he has also become deeply depressed and anxious. Overall, he feels lost, unhappy, and unfulfilled, and he doesn't know what to do about it. According to Pattakos, he has become a prisoner of his own thoughts, and only he has the key to his own freedom. Very simply put, he needs to find a new job or find meaning in the one he has now. One possibility is for Rick to consider his own life circumstances in relationship to his clients:

...Whenever we stop long enough to connect to ourselves, to our environment, to those with whom we work, to the task before us, to the extraordinary interdependence that is always part of our lives, we experience meaning. Meaning is who we are in this world. And it is the world that graces us with meaning. (pg. 157; Pattakos, 2004)

By making a responsible choice to seek meaning in our lives, to not work against ourselves, we can put ourselves on a path we had not seen before:

When we live and work with meaning, we can choose to make meaning, to see meaning, and to share meaning. We can choose our attitudes to life and work; we can choose how to respond to others, how to respond to our jobs, and how to make the very best of difficult circumstances. We can transcend ourselves and be transformed by meaning. We can find connection to meaning at work, in the most unusual places and with the most unexpected people. Meaning is full of surprises. (pg. 159; Pattakos, 2004)

And finally, it does not matter what sort of job we have. It is our choice, our freedom:

No matter what our specific job might be, it is the *work* we do that represents who we are. When we meet our work with enthusiasm, appreciation, generosity, and integrity, we meet it with meaning. And no matter how mundane a job might seem at the time, we can transform it with meaning. Meaning is life's legacy, and it is as available to us at work as it is available to us in our deepest spiritual quests. We breathe, therefore we are - spiritual. Life is; therefore it is - meaningful. We do, therefore we work.

Viktor Frankl's legacy was one of hope and possibility. He saw the human condition at its worst, and human beings behaving in ways intolerable to the imagination. He also saw human beings rising to heights of compassion and caring in ways that can only be described as miraculous acts of unselfishness and transcendence. There is something in us that can rise above and beyond everything we think possible... (pg. 162; Pattakos, 2004)

Discussion Question: Stephen Covey and Alex Pattakos have applied Frankl's theories to both the workplace and our everyday lives. How well do you think the principles of existential psychology can address the problems that you face at work, home, school, etc.? Is it ever really as simple as applying one's will and choosing to act responsibly? Do you live an authentic life?

7 Review of Key Points

- Existentialism focuses on an individual's subjective "truth." The freedom and responsibility that come with personal truth lead to anxiety, but they can also elevate the individual to lead an authentic life.
- Heidegger believed that all creatures are connected, but that only humans can become aware of this connection. Dasein, the realization of this connection, allows us to connect with Being. Awareness of our impending death, however, leads to anxiety, but if we accept that truth we can live an authentic life.
- Sartre believed that humans were unique, something he called en-soi. Awareness of the nothingness that separates the en-soi from the pour-soi is what drives some individuals to make something significant of their lives. For those who cannot, Sartre expressed a need for existential psychoanalysis.

- Viktor Frankl developed his ideas for logotherapy (an existential psychoanalysis) during his impressive early career. He had an extraordinary opportunity to put his ideas to the test while imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camps.
- Recognized as the third Viennese school of psychotherapy, logotherapy focuses on one's will-to-meaning, the desire to find meaning and purpose in one's life.
- People who cannot find meaning experience existential frustration, which can lead to a noogenic neurosis.
- Logotherapy itself relies primarily on the techniques of paradoxical intention and dereflection. These techniques are designed to break the cycle of anticipatory anxiety and failure that plague individuals who suffer from existential crises.
- Going beyond ordinary, everyday life, Frankl proposed a super-meaning to life, and he suggested that there is also a will-to-ultimate-meaning that can be pursued through religion or spirituality. In this light, Frankl referred to logotherapy as "height psychology" (in contrast to depth psychology, another term for psychoanalysis).
- Rollo May believed that anxiety underlies nearly every crisis. He proposed that anxiety must be understood in terms of freedom, and he distinguished between normal anxiety and neurotic anxiety.
- Culture has significant effects on the nature and amount of anxiety that people are likely to experience in their lives. Since anxiety can lead to hostility, these cultural factors are, and have been throughout history, very important issues (e.g., opposition to the civil rights movement in the United States, and the recent dramatic rise in international terrorism).
- A critical factor in life, according to May, is our ability to integrate into our world. One of the challenges to integration is the human dilemma: whether we are the subject or the object in our lives. As self-aware beings we can know that we are both subject and object, and so, in psychological terms, we exist in a world between either behaviorism or humanistic psychology.
- There are different types of love, all of which are very important to our lives. Love can give meaning to our lives, but it must be honest and responsible love.
- Through will and intentionality we can give structure to our lives and meaning to our actions. However, overwhelming anxiety can destroy our ability to participate actively in our own lives.
- The daimonic is any function that can take over the whole person. It can be a source of violence, but also a source of creativity. We can choose how the daimonic takes over, and whether that choice is responsible or not determines whether our actions are violent or creative.
- Being creative requires that we live in the future and actively participate in shaping our lives. Such bold choices require courage, especially in light of the inescapable reality that we will die.
- May felt that myth provides an important cultural framework within which we can form our lives. Unfortunately, the Western world has lost many of its myths, making people susceptible to cults, drugs, superstition, etc.
- According to May, the primary goal of existential psychotherapy is to help the client realize their own being, to have an "I-Am" experience. Time is an important aspect of this procedure. The client must be helped to shift their focus from the past to the future, and even more so, to transcend time altogether.
- Although existential psychology is younger than most other schools of psychology, it has much in common with ancient Eastern philosophies, such as Yoga, Buddhism, and Taoism.
- Terrorism is not the result of Islam. Terrorists are found all over the world, from many different races, religions, and nationalities. Islam opposes violence and murder.
- Terrorism is based on psychological factors (a perception that there are no alternatives, and that terrorism is legitimate), and seeks to cause psychological effects (feelings of terror and helplessness). Thus, psychologists have an important role to play in understanding and eliminating terrorism.
- One can easily find those who believe that terrorism either never works or always works. Some believe that we must respond with understanding to eliminate the root causes of terrorism, whereas others believe we must use force (but not too much force, lest we become terrorists as well). Clearly there are no easy answers for dealing with terrorists themselves or terrorism in general.