

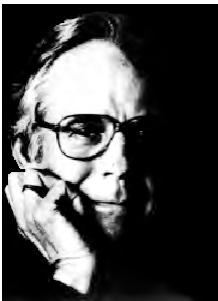
Existential Psychoanalysis

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Big Ideas	
Rollo May <u>The Existential Movement</u> •Kierkegaard •Heidegger •Nietzsche •Sartre <u>Western philosophy and science vs. Existentialism</u> <u>Powerlessness</u> <u>Anxiety</u> •The Age of Anxiety <u>Losing our Values...</u> <u>The Boundary Situation</u> <u>Self-Consciousness</u> <u>Rediscovering Feelings</u> <u>Four States of Consciousness</u> <u>Goals of Integration</u> <u>The Paradox</u> <u>The Daimonic</u> <u>Power</u> <u>Love and Sex</u>	<u>Intentionality</u> <u>Freedom and Destiny</u> <u>Courage and Creativity</u> <u>A Cry for Myth</u> <u>Existential Psychotherapy</u>

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Rollo May



- 1909-1994
- Born Ada, OH
- Raised in anti-intellectual Midwest
 - Too much education → psychotic behavior
- Undergrad at Oberlin College
- Began as seminary student before pursuing psychology
 - Explore the meaning of despair, suicide, anxiety
- Contracted TB in his 30s

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Existentialism Crash Course

The Existential Movement

- Movement in Philosophy
- Latin: *existere* (to stand out, to emerge)
- Famous Existentialists
 - Kierkegaard
 - Heidegger
 - Nietzsche
 - Sartre ("No Exit" & "Being and Nothingness")
- Origins in resistance movement in Europe during WW II

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Remember the Historical Backdrop



WWII

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Existentialism

- "When I consider the brief span of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and behind it, the small space that I fill, or even see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces which I know not, and which know not me, I am afraid, and wonder to see myself here rather than there; for there is no reason why I should be here rather than there, now, rather than then."
– Pascal

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Existentialism

- The most significant philosophical movement of the 20th Century counts Dostoyevsky as one of its founders.
- Existentialism is the opposite of "ESSENTIALISM," or the belief that reality, meaning, and significance precede individual actions and choices.
- Essentialism = To BE is to DO
- Existentialism = To DO is to BE

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Principles of Existentialism

"Human beings are condemned to be free,"
J. Paul Sartre

- Human beings are totally free—no predispositions constrain our actions
- We are entirely defined by the choices that we make
- Choices are only meaningful if they result in action
- Those who choose not to act, in effect, do not exist

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The Inevitability of Nihilism



Nietzsche

- Our values have let us down
 - Suspicion now that all interpretations of the world are false
 - Skepticism
- We must give them up before we can realize what they truly meant

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The Insufficiency of Reason



Dostoevsky

- Those that claim to be moral and rational end up being false
 - e.g., Evangelist scandals
- People even act against their best interest to support their incorrect philosophies
- We have a need for suffering

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The Crowd as the Lie



Kierkegaard

- "Truth exists only as the individual himself produces it in action."
- "Away from Speculation, away from the System, and back to reality."
- Be Yourself
 - Phenomenology

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So what?

Western philosophy and science

- Seeks to understand the *essence* of being
 - Fundamental laws and principles—mathematics
 - Psychology—forces, drives, conditioned behavior

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So what?

Existentialism

- Laws can be *true* but not *real*
 - “Existence precedes essence”
 - “Two unicorns plus two unicorns equals four unicorns”
 - Seeks to unite the abstractly true with the existentially real
 - Theories and abstractions are not substitutes for the real thing

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The Existential Movement

- Focus on understanding one’s striving to become human
 - Or to “know” our humanity
 - Being and becoming
 - Or to construct our humanity
- We are players in the game of life
 - Our *experience* as players differs from that of the spectator
 - We can’t be detached or uninvolved...
 - No one set of rules, or truths, for this game

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Lawfulness is Over-rated

- Not anti-scientific
- Rather, scientific understanding is limited in its ability to understand the human condition
- Reductionism is misleading
 - "Simpler can be explained only in terms of the more complex"
 - What makes a horse is not its evolutionary lineage, but its intrinsic "horseness"
 - Phenomenology/experience of depression
- "Knowing" arrives from doing and immersing one's self in the experience

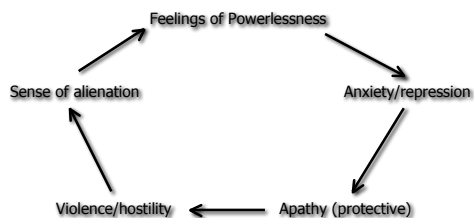
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Powerlessness

- Pervasive sense that one can do nothing in the face of society, the establishment, and the loss of traditional values
 - Vietnam, persistent middle east violence
 - Fear of nuclear war/world annihilation
- Feelings of emptiness (*ennui*)
 - Lack of purpose, lack of efficacy in the face of societal accomplishments → adrift
- Powerlessness manifested in anxiety, dread, apathy, violence, & hostility

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Cycle of Powerlessness



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May's definition of anxiety

"Anxiety is the apprehension cued off by a threat to some value that the individual holds essential to his existence as a personality."



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Anxiety

- Death is the fundamental anxiety
- The 'Age of Anxiety'
- Western civilization has become inattentive to our needs as humans in our striving for meaning and understanding
 - 40 hour work week, 2 weeks vacation
- The price we pay for "progress?"
- Stress = anxiety
 - BUT, stress happens "to" us, not our experience

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Some sources of anxiety

- Threat of death
- Threats to one's values
 - Questioning one's own values (personal growth)
 - Clinging to old values in face of changing circumstances

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Normal Anxiety

- Proportionate to the objective threat
- Doesn't involve repression or intrapsychic conflict
- Does not require defense mechanisms
- Can be dealt with constructively on a conscious level

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Neurotic Anxiety

- Disproportionate to the objective threat
- Involves repression or intrapsychic conflict
- Requires defense mechanisms
- Cannot be dealt with constructively on a conscious level

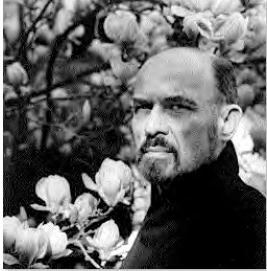
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Coping with Anxiety

- Efforts to dispel anxiety only serve to perpetuate it
 - We fill our emptiness with drugs, alcohol, or inappropriate authority
 - We have yet to cope with modernity
 - *Recognition* is the key
 - If we come to an understanding of our condition, embrace our condition, we can cope with it

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Irvin Yalom: Death Anxiety



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Defenses against Death Anxiety

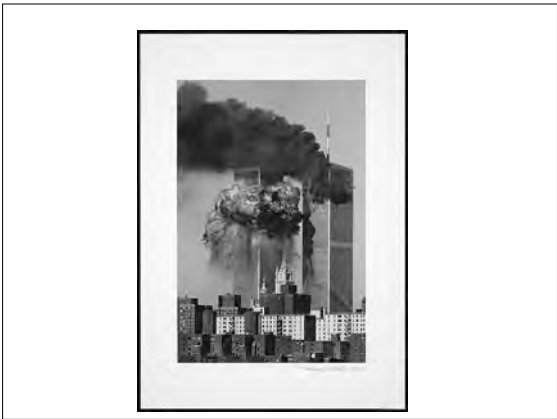
- Belief in Personal Specialness
- Overachievement
- Compulsive Heroism
- Compulsive Sexual Behavior
- Belief in an Ultimate Rescuer

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Terror Management: Another Defense?

- Not a defense listed by Yalom
- But, it is thought of as defense against death anxiety
 - Remind people of death with stories
 - Afterwards, people show:
 - More attachment to culture
 - More nationalism
 - More ethnic bias
 - More attachment to youth culture

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U.S.A. PATRIOT ACT

THESE COLORS

DON'T RUN!

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Losing our Values...

- Renaissance was a turning point (Western values)
 - Redefined ourselves by emphasizing work and financial accomplishments
- This competitiveness no longer effective in the modern day world
 - We have lost the ability to relate to other people and estranged from nature
 - IM, ICQ, e-Mail vs. Face-to-Face conversation
 - We have given up the distinctiveness of being humans to serve competitive goals

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..and Finding Them Again

- One answer to this dilemma is that we can return to our traditional, possibly "fundamentalist," values
- BUT, we have no essence, no "true" values to which we can return
 - Re-affirmation of traditional values is impossible
 - Since we are always being and becoming, we must therefore *choose* our values in the process of living
 - Withdraw into anxiety vs. Work to form a new society
 - Particularly in times of crisis → 9/11

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The Boundary Situation

- An urgent, crisis, situation that forces an individual to confront the existential situation
 - Often, learn the importance of the present, living in the present
 - Take stock, appreciate, the world as it is
- Massive “paradigmatic” shift
- Death is THE boundary situation
 - Personal growth in the terminally ill cancer patient
 - “What a tragedy I had to wait until now to learn what I’ve learned...”
- Death therapy → structured exercises confronting death and dying

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Self-Consciousness

- Often seen as a pejorative term
- What May thought set us apart from other animals
- What allows us to distinguish ourselves from the world, have empathy, learn from the past, look to the future, have empathy
 - The cost to us is anxiety and inner crisis
 - Why? We must develop an identity independent from those around us

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Rediscovering Feelings

- We have only a vague notion of what we are feeling at any given time
 - Experience separation of mind and body (denial)
- When we are unaware of our feelings, we are not in touch with our needs
 - We experience forbidden feelings/needs and, in the service of societal demands, deny them or only experience them in private
 - Fragmented, disorganized, self
- Becoming a person requires not just being in touch with one’s feelings but also fighting impediments to experiencing our feelings
 - Fight outside world → internalized values
 - We become our own jailors

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Four States of Consciousness

- Stage of Innocence characterizes infants and precedes consciousness of self
- Stage of rebellion characterizes toddlers and adolescents who seek inner strength through defiance and hostility
- Ordinary consciousness of self refers to learning from our mistakes and living responsibly
- Creative consciousness of self represents emergence of some perspective taking
 - Rarely achieved—similar to peak experiences

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Goals of Integration

- Humans are conscious of self, capable of intentionality, and needing to make choices
- Attempted to counter prevailing notion of Cartesian mind-body duality
 - Society teaches dualisms that distance ourselves from our needs and feelings
 - Integration involves finding balance

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The Paradox

- Abstract realizations fail to capture the human experience
- Instead, focus on paradox
- Defined as any two objects/concepts paired against each other, seeming to negate each other, but that can't exist alone
 - Good & evil, happy & sad, success & failure
 - The confrontation of one defines, brings life, into the other
 - The goal of integration, then, is to confronting the inherent paradoxes in life

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The Daimonic

- Any natural function that has the power to take over one's life or existence
 - Sex, anger, power
 - *Become* evil when they take over without regard for self-integration
 - Repression fails, it will control us
 - Become aware, integrate it into ourselves
 - Cherish our demons, enjoy the “spice”

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Power

- Powerlessness is the fundamental crisis facing humans
- The challenge we face is finding a balance between being “powerful” and enduring the discomfort of “powerlessness”
- Violence has its roots in “powerlessness”
 - Individuals engage in violent acts to enhance self-worth and self-esteem
- TV cultivates powerlessness by teaching the spectator role
- Use power appropriate to the situation
 - Assert ourselves, avoid aggression

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Love and Sex

- Love once viewed as the answer our problems
 - “All you need is love,” right?
- Society has led us to be unable to love
- We live in a world devoid of affect and fraught with apathy
 - An effort to protect ourselves from the overstimulation of the modern world
- Sexual revolution another form of Puritanism?
 - Sexuality without emotion, relation to others
 - Pornography, commercialization, as power
- We need to rediscover *care* to get back in balance

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Intentionality

- The structure that gives meaning to an experience
 - Imaginative activity that informs our actions
- A piece of paper
 - For a paper airplane, a love letter, to start a fire
- A piece of wood
 - To build a house, carve a statue, fashion a club
- Bridges the gap between subject and object
 - structures our perceptions and understandings of the world

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Freedom and Destiny

- Existentialism criticized for being “too free”
- Freedom means “openness, readiness to grow, flexibility, and changing in pursuit of human values”
 - To choose, to value, to guide our life course
- Destiny is the “vital design of the universe expressed within each one of us”
 - Sets limits on us
 - Equips us to perform certain tasks
 - Our present society reflects freedom without destiny

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Freedom and Destiny

- Determinism is one aspect of destiny
 - Mechanistic, scientific
 - Inanimate objects, unaware of our own responses
 - Shift to destiny occurs when one is self conscious of what is happening
- Responsibility is inseparable from freedom
 - Accepting personal responsibility pivotal to finding freedom
 - Pause is the ability to break up the rigid chain of cause and effect → freedom springs from pause

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Courage and Creativity

- Courage refers to the capacity to move ahead despite feeling despair
 - Facilitates the being and becoming
- Courage involves being fully committed even though we may be wrong
- Creative courage involves finding novel patterns, symbols, forms
 - Particularly, those symbols from which a new society can be constructed
 - Creative courage means confronting the established order such that a new world might be created

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A Cry for Myth

- May posited that problems facing society arose from lack of myths
- May defined *myths* as "narrative patterns that give significance to our existence"
- Western society cast aside myths in favor of left-brain thinking
- May's myths similar to Jung's archetypes
 - Be part of a human collective
 - The Birth Myth (stories taking on mythic meanings)

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Existential Psychotherapy

1. Patients learn how behavior is viewed by others (therapist, group therapy)
2. Patients learn how behavior makes others feel (experienced affect)
3. Patients learn how behavior creates the opinions others have of them
4. Patients learn how their behaviors influence their opinions of themselves

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