

## Rollo May on Existence Enriches Mental Health

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### Abstract

To identify philosophical inquiry into human existence that enrich mental health, many existential therapists avoid pain and choice in the world rather than face them. In order to enrich mental health, this avoidance suggests methodological questions about how existential therapy should proceed. Existential therapist Rollo May addressed such questions by arguing his concept of existence that we must come face to face with anxiety and loneliness by own choice, and responsibility. The methods of investigation used include documented researches from sources of the psychology of religion. The research methodology used involves the collection of data concerning texts about the life and work of Rollo May.

In “Rollo May on existence enriches mental health”, the researcher assesses and partially endorses May’s own terms and then through a critical analysis of true religion. This analysis begins with the essence of humans is their existence for understanding the “whole” person. After defining May’s existence theory, the researcher focuses the purpose of his true religion is to enhance ultimate meaning of individual purpose as a whole to enrich mental health, and conclude his new dimension by discussing how religion offered in this dissertation is essential for healthy personality.

**Keyword:** Existence is Being

### Introduction

American existentialist psychologist, Rollo Reece May introduced the concept of “human existence” as developed in existential psychology to the United States. May defines the self as the “I” as experienced by the individual. He conceives of the self as a dynamic entity, fully alive with potentialities. He tries to understand the individual as he really is and as he is related to life. He understands human beings as “becoming.” As such, May represents a holistic approach in psychology to understand human beings below the surface for knowing who he is. The human being is a complex organism of the universe, and can reflect, set goals, make free decisions and learn to act as a free person.

May is a theistic existentialist who has freely chosen to believe in God, to have faith that God exists and believe that God is good. According to May’s view of existential psychology, all religions affirm that the ultimate meaning of individual purpose as a whole is essential for the development of mental health. This is a new dimension of psychology in which the mental health of the individual becomes of central concern in a new context. These concepts led to the conclusion that religion is essential to the development of a healthy personality. As May wrote

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in *The Art of Counseling*, “True religion understood as the finding and affirming of ultimate meaning and individual purpose in the life process as a whole is essential to a healthy personality.” (May, 1967: 215)

I believe that May has sought meaning in human experience by combining the concept of existence with an understanding of religion that a new dimension is added to psychology involving the mental health. In any event, the existential roots of May’s concept of existence are found in his study of human nature and God, *The Spring of Creative Living* (1940). May defines healthy religion in the following terms:

“Call it confidence with the universe, trust in God, belief in one’s fellow man, or what not; the essence of religion is the belief that something matters—the presupposition that life has meaning.” (May, 1940: 13)

In above ideas, he shows that God is essential for life. May presents a personality theory based on the individual’s discovery and appropriation of meaning. “The healthy religious person has found meaning in life.” (May, 1940: 13) In this passage, he connects the need for religion to the meaning of life and religion relates to mental health.

In the Longman dictionary of contemporary English, existence is defined as the state of existing. Existence refers to a human being who is existentially a living person. Existential psychology focuses on the belief that the essence of humans is their existence and aims at understanding the “whole” person.

Theoretically, existential psychology represents a synthesis of philosophy and psychology. Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger provided the groundwork for existential psychology. A popular summary of existentialism in *Being and Nothingness* is taken from the formulation of Jean-Paul Sartre as “existence precedes essence.” (Sartre, 1957: 566) This ideas support the need for being of my dissertation which is an attempt to explain why this is the case.

Paul Tillich, an existentialist theologian who influenced May’s existential thinking, holds that belief in God is a personal experience. Existential therapy is a treatment method that discovers how well-being begins, and how it ends. Well-being is a positive condition of mental health that should give us warm and sunny feelings. In existential therapy, there is the same positive emphasis in religious belief for spiritual health.

One’s relationship with God is essential to mental health. So, May’s concept of “existence” is close to one’s religious experience in both satisfying and evolving God. It appears that mental health relates constructively with other people and with God. Therefore, May applied his concept of “existence” to his work on the human struggle to live in the modern world.

In order to be successful in dealing with life, we must come face to face with anxiety. Other existential therapists—avoid pain in the world. Facing life’s challenges with purpose and meaning, which May called, having “true religion,” is a path of healing to enrich mental health. If we avoid pain in life, we become alienated from the world.

### **Significance of Research Problem**

The significance of this research investigation is indicated by the integration of psychological and religious ideas, with both contributing in positive ways to the understanding of mental health that May shows.

“Mental health is a positive phenomenon interrelated with the process of existence. Individuals reflect on their experiences in order to further wellbeing (May, 1940: 14).

I believe that his individuality is sustainable for being. May defines his existentialism in his “Origins and Significance of the Existential Movement in Psychology” that

“Existentialism...is the endeavor to understand man by cutting below the cleavage between subjects and objects which bedeviled Western thought and science since after the Renaissance” (May, 1958: 11).

This passages support a central aim of dissertation by understanding human as he is. While in the view of May, a true and effective religion helps satisfy human needs. Achieving this aim also requires a detailed investigation of the properties of existence which is one of Rollo May's true religion.

Unlike Freud who believed that religion expresses psychological neuroses and distress. He suggested that religions try to control the world. As an atheist, he believed that religion tries to overcome all. In the Introduction to *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), he states that “religion is an attempt to get control over the sensory world, in which we are placed, by means of the wish we have developed inside us as a result of biological and psychological necessities.”

Also religion, in Freud's view, was a poor attempt to resolve the neuroses. Freud argues in his *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) that religion should be discarded. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), he argues that religious doctrines are shaped by the childhood, and set that child free by religiously deceived. Unlike May who could overcome tuberculosis by belief in God, Freud could not overcome oral cancer, perhaps because he was irreligious without higher power. May further relates his concept of “existence” by claiming that our rejection of myth has left us vulnerable to mental illness. Thus, May connects his “existence” as being to help mental health with myth. May points out that myth have had a significant principle to help people. When we lose the capacity to experience myths, so we lose life.

### **Statement of Problem**

My argument is that Rollo May's concept of existence as a new dimension of psychology plays a role similar to the role of religion in the sense that both ground emotional stability and conscientiousness with the conclusion that life becomes enjoyable when imbued with purpose and meaning. My explanation will involve examining how religion promotes well being based on May's concept of existence. His belief that true religion is helpful in that religious awareness can become an essential component of human mental health.

## **Objectives and Scope of Works**

### **Objectives**

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

1. My objective is to study May's life and works together with his concept of existence as a new dimension in psychology leading to an understanding of mental health;
2. To discuss and apply his concept of existence to mental health

### **Scope of Works**

This research investigation is confined to understanding mental health within the framework of psychology of religion. Existential ways of living have developed their own approaches to attaining well being. To alleviate suffering is to reduce desires in the sphere of religion. I hold that well being in life can be validated. I acknowledge the existence notion of Rollo May's as a new dimension of psychology to enrich the mental health of humans.

## Literature Review

Existential theory based in philosophy, grounded in the reality of human existence. Basic concept, The “I-Am” experience, or the experience of being, is known in existential therapy as an ontological experience to lived perception of one’s existence as real. Existential therapists find where the actual was, so are seeing patients as they really are, and the way to understand human beings, which was more reliable than the psychotherapies.

## Research Methodology

The purpose of this research is to integrate the notions “existence” as a new dimension of psychology that combines with religion to enrich well-being. The method of investigation used is documentary research in sources in the psychology of religion. The research methodology used involves collecting data concerning the life and work of Rollo May from texts. Both primary and secondary sources are used during this stage of inquiry.

## Findings

### Rollo May’s Life and Work

In *The Origins and Significance of the Existential Movement in Psychology* (1958) May’s discussion of psychotherapy incorporate to his concept of existence as a new dimension of psychology. In 1983, May published a work that explains how existential thought was connected with his psychology. *The Discovery of Being: Writings in Existential Psychology* is a collection of the views of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Freud. May illustrates that psychology and existentialism were concerned with the same issues and could contribute towards an understanding of the human condition.

### Rollo May’s Existence

In his *Existential Psychology* (1960), May represents a synthesis of philosophy and psychology as May’s “Being-in-the-world. Both phenomenological positions are subjectively defined as:

Human’s “being-in-the-world” takes on three modes. First, Umwelt refers to man’s relationship with his biological environment, the physical earth. This includes also the drives and instincts, which are inherent from birth. Secondly, Mitwelt deals with the relationship of man with his fellow beings. Great love or great evil can shape these relationships. Lastly, Eigenwelt is the relationship of man with himself and is the primary interest of psychotherapy” (May, 1983: 110).

It appears this concept emphasizes the unity of person and environment. May also saw man live in the world of present experiences, being responsible for who they become. I believed that May showed enormous insight into most of the deepest philosophical issues surrounding religion and psychology. Not only May does recognize what existence gives, he also gives us to believe in the power of God to support this existence effectively.

Like May, I believe that people with neurotic tendencies do not have the courage to face their destiny. They give up their freedom by running away from responsibility. Man was not willing to make choices. He loses sight of which he is and develops a sense of insignificance and alienation for social problem.

In contrast, facing life challenges as anxiety will become healthy people who can challenge their destiny, cherish their freedom, and live authentically with other people and themselves. They recognize the inevitability of death and have the courage to live life in the present.

May's existential attitude and existentialism emphasizes existence rather than essence or being over substance. Not being-in-the-world leads to nothingness. Essence is an unchanging law that governs existence. "Being-in-the-world" is the basic concepts of his existential psychology by no split between subject and object, in the environment in our relations with others and in our relation with self.

"People search for meaning in their lives. No truth or reality except as we participate in it. Knowledge is an act of doing. We are ultimately responsible for who we are and who we become." (May, 1961: 98)

I think that such meaning is inevitable and will help us determine who we are. I also agree with that anxiety and serve as the basis for a new ideals how to be individuality when May shows that anxiety is important in existentialism and psychotherapy. Therapists often use existential philosophy to explain the patient's anxiety.

May uses anxiety as a door for meaning of life. His anxiety means that it occurs when we become aware of our existence or some value might be destroyed. Normal anxiety occurs when it is proportionate to the threat. I focus that this is the key for solving our problem by individuality of self-freedom to courage and create meaning with our responsibility.

Neurotic anxiety occurs when it is disproportionate to the threat, and involves conflict. From his existential psychology of his first book, the *Meaning of Anxiety*, was based on his doctoral dissertation. This is in turn was based on his reading of the Kierkegaard and his definition of anxiety which is "the apprehension cued off by a threat to some value which the individual holds essential to his existence as a self" (May, 1967: 72).

I agree the above mention that self is quite solving problem directly. May considered Otto Rank to be the most important precursor of existential therapy. Of course, May's background in theology, particularly the influence of the existential theologian Paul Tillich, would have a profound effect on May's thinking to study of psychology informed by existentialist philosophy. Paul wrote "The Courage to be" which examines anxiety from an existential view.

May was also influenced by American humanism and is often associated with humanistic psychology, although he shows his own human existence. His book on existential psychology, "Existence" published in 1958, which highly influenced the American humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow.

### **Rollo May's on the Concept of Existence as New Dimension of Psychology to Enrich Mental Health**

Rollo May survived tuberculosis by struggling against the disease with fear and anxiety that had been the key for him to remaining alive. It kept him from becoming resigned to death. My argument is that May's concept of existence as a new dimension of psychology plays a role similar to the role of religion in the sense that both ground emotional stability and conscientiousness. Life becomes enjoyable with purpose and meaning. Religion promotes well being through the belief in the healing power of myth.

### Healing Power of Myth

I agree that myth makes me faithful to religion. As from Rollo May in his *The Cry for Myth*:

"A myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world. Myths are narrative patterns that give significance to our existence. Whether the meaning of existence is only what we put into life by our own individual fortitude, as Sartre would hold, or whether there is a meaning we need to discover, as Kierkegaard would state, the result is the same: myths are our way of finding this meaning and significance." (May, 1991: 15)

I think that myth helps May to consider highest meaning of God for powering self in problem solving as new dimension of psychology according to May's perspective offered by the existence. A succession of myth, is appearing to humanity in different religions, and identified them as representing a link to Higher nature of God, affirmed in mental health and intended to guide human conduct in human hearts.

May uses true religion to create new meaning of life together with own self, other and God. As such, May on the concept of existence, as the true religion, essentially defines optimal mental health of the individual in terms of relationship to God and myth. Individual understanding can preserve special care by positive choice to meaning of life.

### Application

Applications of Rollo May's existence for solving all addiction, social problems and mental disorder from dictatorial patient who lost courage to be, when human lose values, must discover new values to search for identity which is relating to others in authentic health. The patients tend to produce emotional problem and conflict that has taken on illness and neurosis from his inadequacy psychological phenomena. I believe that there is a great deal to be said for believes in God who is always significant over the neurotic tendency who will always express himself to be better than all in the world. Rather work within the framework of May' existential psychology, I will prove his existential facing life challenges by developing being pure, thorough six-senses slightly together with more precisely of proficiency testing. Pure being will help neurotic tendency who can make some upset for society. I also believe that there is means of life May identified, such as the anxiety which I mentioned that is similar to dysfunction of sensory organ caused by mental error control. I believe that May's value of anxiety will create courage and freedom\_for releasing ignorance from illness effects and relaxation of physical body to promote mental health.

Application of new dimension existential psychotherapy is based on existential principles. The practice of this psychotherapy is combining with religion to give the patient a spiritual question, followed Rollo May and distributed by Irvin Yalom. It is a positive and flexible approach. At its best, his existential psychotherapy confronts the ultimate meaning and existential facts of life as evil to cover anxiety and guilt, as well as promoting the meaningful, love, caring, courage, creativity, power, will, individuation, self-actualization and authenticity. As consumers are increasingly confronted with the very real limitations of managed mental health care.

### Recommendations

Many of the ideas driving this dissertation arose from May on the concept of existence. Therefore, May applied his concept of "existence" to his work on the human struggle to live in

the modern world in the way of existentialism that encourages ourselves to determine our life individually without any outside influentially.

Many of his ideas driving the processes of life challenge and life suffering by facing anxiety directly our self including with dignity. However, we have courage to responsible our life freely without the problem solving by other. In order to be successful in dealing with life, we must come face to face with anxiety.

Other existential therapists—avoid pain in the world. Facing life's challenges with purpose and meaning, which May called, having "true religion," is a path of healing to enrich mental health. If we avoid pain in life, we become alienated from the world

Mental health can be understood as a positive condition. His individuality is evolving toward expression of God to beneath our wings. Many times I have been assisted by his suggestion of facing life challenging with courage that is made me so rich responsibility because of the wonderful God's powered me as I am a firm believer.

May emphasized the enduring presence of evil and suffering in the world. The process of spiritual development of existence in psychology will be a relatively further research.

Last, from my experiencings, I have not been able to find many contemporary adherents who have defended this theory with as much passion and intellectual integrity as May, to understand humans as not simply doing, but also freely being, positive purpose, courage and responsibility with meaning of life by ourselves. God enriches mental power without any psychotherapists have done. Like May, who can survive from tuberculosis until 85 as well as we could proceed our life individually without medical doctor and not be hurt by anyone or waiting for more social helping.

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