Rollo May – Existential Psychology

Essentially, May saw people living in the world of present experiences and ultimately being responsible for who they become. May believed that many people lack the courage to face their destiny and while in the process of fleeing from it, they give up much of their freedom. Having negated their freedom, they likewise run away from responsibility. Not being willing to make choices, they lose sight of who they are and develop a sense of insignificance and alienation.

In contrast, healthy people 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.
Biography

* Grew up in a family that did not value education
* Lonely childhood
* Wandered Europe
* Union Theological Seminary
* Influenced by many legendary philosophers
* Educated at Columbia University
* Contracted tuberculosis as an adult which stimulated his thinking about life and death
* Lectured around the world
* Died in 1975
May was influenced by many 19th and 20th Century philosophers

- **Existentialism**
- Existence over essence (being > substance)
- No split between subject and object
- People search for *meaning* in their lives
- We are ultimately *responsible* for who we are and who we become
- Existentialists are *anti-theoretical* (dehumanizing)
Basic Concepts

* Being-in-the-world
* No separation between object and subject
* Three modes of being-in-the-world
  * In the environment
  * In our relations with others
  * In our relation with ourselves
* Not being-in-the-world leads to nonbeing or the dread of nothingness
Anxiety
* When we become aware of our existence or some value identified with it might be destroyed
* **Normal anxiety** occurs when it is proportionate to the threat, doesn’t involve repression, or other forms of intrapsychic conflict
* **Neurotic anxiety** occurs when it is disproportionate to the threat, does involve repression, or does involve other forms of intrapsychic conflict

Guilt
* Arises when people deny their potential, fail to accurately perceive the needs of fellow human, or remain oblivious to their dependence on the natural world
People act with *intention*. Intention and action are woven together. Care, Love, & Will, too, are interrelated. Love requires knowing how to care for someone. Care however is the source of love. Will organizes one into action and toward a goal.
Forms of Love
Sex (physical)
Eros (psychological)
Philia (intimacy between two people)
Agape (concern for others, brotherly love)
• Assertion of one’s *freedom* requires confronting one’s *destiny*!