

EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY: CONTRIBUTION OF ROLLO MAY

(Lecture Series-2), B.A. IInd (Honors)

(Paper-IVth Systems in Psychology)

By

Dr. Masaud Ansari

Department of Psychology,

A.P.S.M. College, Barauni

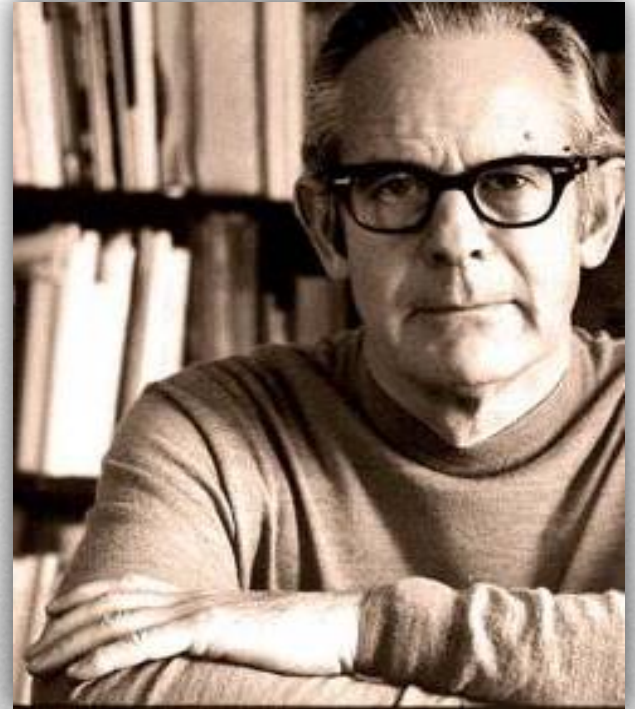
L. N. M. University, Darbhanga

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Rollo Reese May (1909-1994)

Rollo Reece May (April 21, 1909 – October 22, 1994) was an American existential psychologist and author of the influential book **Love and Will** (1969). He is often associated with **humanistic psychology and existentialist philosophy**, and alongside Viktor Frankl, was a major proponent of existential psychotherapy.

Not entirely written by **May** but his part of this book examines where the roots of Existential Psychology may have begun and why Existential Psychology is important in understanding a gap that lies in human beings. He also talks about the Existential Psychotherapy and the contributions it has made. (May, Ernest, Ellenberger & Aronson, 1958)



See also: <https://www.oercommons.org/authoring/22859-personality-theory/16/view>

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According to Serlin, Ilene, **May's** work was maintained by the balance **between darkness and light, between the experiential and the intellectual.** **May** considered the fundamental questions of human existence as the nature of evil, love and will and the meaning of anxiety and the important of myth. **May inspired many people** and it came from his ability to name the void of create in its face, to name evil but worked toward the good, to see meaningless, but to discover meaning and to face death, but create life. **May** was in the antiwar movement and many other social causes, he taught and mentored countless students and called himself a “gentle rebel” (Serlin, Ilene A. Tikkun, January 1995. pg. 65), in the face of an increasing dehumanized world.

Rollo Reese May Theories of Personalities

In his second year while being in Europe, **he began to question the meaning of his life when he came down with tuberculosis**, While being in an sanatorium (hospital), he was faced with the possibility of death, **he had a lot of time to read many literatures**, he came across a literatures that was on the writer named **Soren Kierkegaard, who was a Danish religious writer, a person that was inspired of existential movement**. **May** became inspired of Soren Kierkegaard words of wisdom that it gave **May** the inspiration of coming up with his own theory. (Dr. C. George Boeree, 1998, 2006).

According to Dr. C. George Boeree, (1998, 2006) on **May's personality Theories**, stated that **Rollo Reese May**, used different terms and invented new words from some of existentialism old ideas, for example the word **DESTINY** is the same as **thrownness** and it is combined with the word **fallenness**, which mean that part of people's lives that is determine for them, he also gave another example of the word **COURAGE**, which was used more often than the traditional term authenticity, which meant **facing one's anxiety** and **then raise above it**. (Dr. C. George Boeree, 1998, 2006).

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May's Three Modes of Existence

Umwelt is the interaction with the physical world, **Mitwelt**, is the interaction with other humans and the **Eigenwelt** is the interaction with oneself.

Umwelt (Physical world)

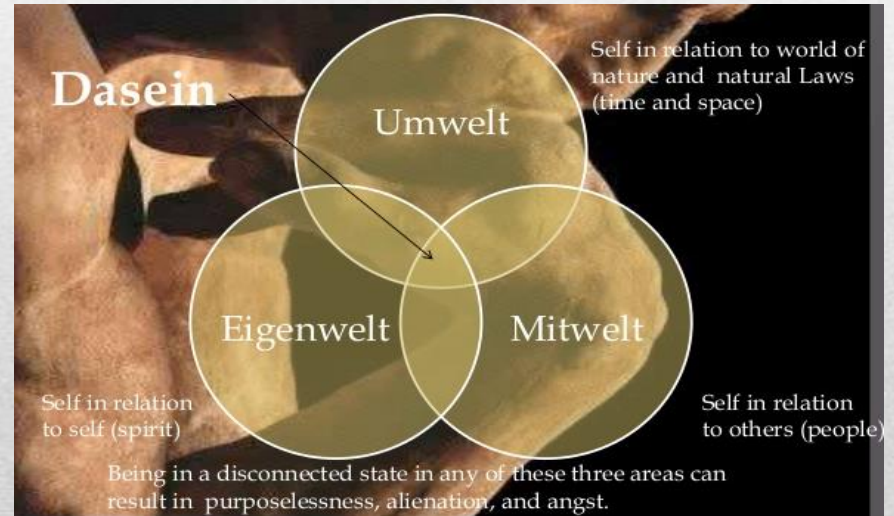
- Instinctual behaviour
- Basic Physical needs

Mitwelt (Social world)

- Unrealistic construct of relationship
- Realistic expectations and boundaries
- Who will he choose to be in relationship

Eigenwelt (Personal world)

- Needs to cultivate self-awareness



May's Stages

May was the only existential psychologist that discusses certain stages, not as strict as the Freudian development.

- i. Innocence
 - ii. Rebellion stage
 - iii. Ordinary stage
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i. Innocence

Innocence is the pre self-conscious stage of an infant, it is the innocent of premoral that is neither bad or good, the description that was given is like a wild animal who kills to eat and since the animal has to eat, he or she has to do what is must.

ii. Rebellion Stage

Rebellion stage, the childhood and adolescent is when the ego or self-consciousness of the contrast with an adult from the no of a two years old to the no way of a teenager, which mean the rebellious person wants their freedom and does not yet understand of the responsibility that goes along with it. A teenager would like to use their allowance money on what ever they want, but still what the parent to provide the money and still complain about the parent not being fair.

iii. Ordinary Stage

Ordinary stage is when the normal adult ego, conventional and a little boring, perhaps they have learned that the responsibility, but find it too demanding, and so seek refuge in conformity and traditional values. Creative is an authentic adult, the existential stage, beyond ego and self-actualizing. This is the person who, accepting destiny, faces anxiety with courage.

Rollo May's: Anxiety and Guilt

May was really interested in the human **anxiety and guilt**; he rejected Freud's interpretation of anxiety as the result from conflict that is between a person's **biological needs and the demands of society**. May felt that Freud's analyzed was too **biological and compartmentalized (classified)** and Freud's anxiety **viewed his results from the conflict of the id, ego, and superego**, but **May** approved on Kierkegaard's existential definition instead because Kierkegaard theory of human **freedom and anxiety went hand and hand**.

Normal anxiety is when a person experience the attempt to expand one's conscious or when the new values is displaced with the old ones due to changes in the person circumstances and it is an integral of a healthy growth, May's theory consists that all growth of anxiety is the creation of surrender past values (May, 1967, p. 80).

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Neurotic (fearful) anxiety is when a person **hasn't met their normal anxiety on the time** of the actual crisis in their growth and **the threat to their values**, which the neurotic anxiety ends in the result of the previous unmet normal anxiety (May, 1967, p. 80). May's theory on **normal anxiety** and **neurotic anxiety**,

Normal Anxiety one is when the person is **having a problem, but not major** and the problem can be solve. Example, when it is time to write a **paper my normal anxiety kicks in** and I **start feeling shortness of breathe and then I can't concentrate on what I am doing and then I have to walk away for a little while to relax.**

Neurotic anxiety is when a person have problems and can't control their feeling and start to think that **life is not going to get better for them, they start to become depress, feeling lonely and don't know what to do, but it all depends on the circumstances the person is going through.**

Rollo May's: Description of Love

May had four description of love and they are:

- i. Sex
- ii. Eros
- iii. Philia and
- iv. Agape

i. Sex

Sex is the biological drives that can be satisfy by engaging in sexual intercourse, the same way eating a meal that can satisfy the hunger drive, which both can be triggered by the need and the availability of an object that will satisfy the need, (May, 1969, p.73).

ii. Eros

May's one important demon (enemy) was the eros to him **was love not sex** and in the **Greek mythology was the minor god pictured as a young man and later the eros had transferred into an annoying (irritating) little cupid (Kaamdev), he understood that love was the need that people have to become as one with another person and was referred of an ancient Greek story that was by Aristophanes, that people was originally a four legged, four armed and a two headed creature and people became to prideful that the gods spilt (fallen) the people into two, male and female and had cursed us with the never ending desire to recover the people missing in half, according to May, like any demon, eros it is a good thing until it takes over the personality and the people would become obsessed with it.** May also believe that the theory of will is another important concept and it was the ability for a person to organize their lives in order to achieve in their goals and that will is also a demon that can have potential to take over a person. **Another definition of will is the ability to make a wish to come true (Boeree, C. George, 1998, 2006).**

iii. Philia

Philia is the third of love which is a friendship or a brotherly love. According to May, Eros cannot last for long without Philia because the tension of continuous attraction and passion would be too great (May, 1969). Philia is the relaxation in the presence of the beloved with accepts the other's being as being; **it is simply liking to be with the other, liking to rest with the other, liking the rhythm of the walk, the voice, the whole being of the other.**

iv. Agape (open)

Agape is the fourth type of loving, which **May** states (1969, p. 310), is the **unselfishness of concern for one's partner and the aspect of love that is unconditional.**

Conclusion

According to May an approach of the study on human nature, should not reduce the collection of habits, brain functions, genetically determined traits, early experiences or environmental events, all that is needed for science of humans are based on the ontological characteristic of humans and that science should take into consideration of human freedom and the importance of their phenomenological experience, the use of symbols and myths and the ability of the past, present and future in making decisions should value the process.

May did not rejected the idea of the objective study of humans, but felt that the traditional scientific methodology was not appropriate, but he felt, what was needed was an approach of the studies of humans as whole, unique, complex beings.

Rollo Reese May theories of Personality was inspiring, because as a psychologist, he consider the people as human beings, not just an experimental objective. His theories explain of different type of anxiety and what they meant in the human nature.



Thank You
