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May, R. (1983). *The discovery of being: Writings in Existential Psychology*. W.W. Norton.

1. Existentialism, in short, is the endeavor to understand man by cutting below the cleavage between subject and object which has bedeviled Western thought and science since shortly after the Renaissance.
2. “Truth exists,” wrote Kierkegaard, “only as the individual himself produces it in action.” He and the existentialists following him protested firmly against the rationalists and idealists who would see man only as a subject – that is, as having reality only as a thinking being. But just as strongly they fought against the tendency to treat man as an object to be calculated and controlled, exemplified in the almost overwhelming tendencies in the Western world to make human beings into anonymous units to fit like robots into the vast industrial and political collectivisms of our day.
3. The term existence, coming from the root *ex-sistere*, means literally “to stand out, to emerge.” This accurately indicates what these cultural representatives sought, whether in art or philosophy or psychology – namely, to portray the human being not as a collection of static substances or mechanisms or patterns but rather as emerging and becoming, that is to say, as existing.
4. The existential psychologists and psychiatrists do not rule out the study of dynamisms, drives, and patterns of behavior. But they hold that these cannot be understood in any given person except in the context of the overarching fact that here is a person who happens to exist, to be, and if we do not keep this in mind, all else we know about this person will lose its meaning. Thus, the existentialists approach is always dynamic; existence refers to coming into being, becoming.
5. Existentialism is basically concerned with ontology – that is, the science of being (*ontos*, from Greek “being”).
6. Kierkegaard and the existential thinkers appealed to a reality underlying both subjectivity and objectivity. We must not only study a person’s experience as such, they held, but even more we must study the man to whom the experience is happening, the one who is doing the experiencing.
7. The central psychological endeavor of Kierkegaard may be summed up under the heading of the question he pursued relentlessly: How can you becoming an individual?
8. Truth becomes reality only as the individual produces it in action, which includes

producing it in his own consciousness.

9. Nietzsche held that one should experiment on all truth not simply in the laboratory but in one's own experience; every truth should be faced with the question, "Can one live it?" "All truths," he put it, "are bloody truths for me."
10. The phrase "will to power" means self-actualization. Nietzsche was protesting against the weak, anemic, European man he saw emerging on all sides. The "will to power" is a call to man to avoid the putrescence and to affirm himself in his existence with strength and commitment. The word *power* is used by Nietzsche in the classical sense of *potentia, dynamis*.
11. We are now in a position to see the crucial significance of the existential psychotherapy movement. It is precisely the movement that protests against the tendency to identify psychotherapy with technical reason. It stands for basing psychotherapy on an understanding of what makes man the human being; it stands for defining neurosis in terms of what destroys man's capacity to fulfill his own being.
12. The term the existential therapists use for the distinctive character of human existence is *Dasein*. Binswanger, Kuhn, and others designate their schools as *Daseinsanalyse*. Composed of *sein* (being) plus *da* (there), *Dasein* indicates that man is the being who is there and implies also that he has a "there" in the sense that he can know he is there and can take a stand with reference to that fact. The "there" is moreover not just any place, but the particular "there" that is mine, the particular point *in time* as well as space of my existence at this given moment. Man is the being who can be conscious of, and therefore responsible for, his existence. It is this capacity to become aware of his own being which distinguishes the human being from other beings. The existential therapists think of man not only as "being in itself," as all beings are, but also as "being for itself." Binswanger speaks of "*Dasein choosing*," this or that, meaning "the person-who-is-responsible-for-his-existence choosing."
13. Man (*or Dasein*) is the particular being who has to be aware of himself, be responsible for himself, if he is to become himself. He also is that particular being who knows that at some future moment he will not be; he is the being who is always in a dialectical relation with nonbeing, death.
14. The "I am" experience is not in itself the solution to a person's problems; it is rather the *precondition* for their solution. In the broadest sense, the achieving of the sense of being is a goal of all therapy, but in the more precise sense it is a relation to oneself and one's world, an experience of one's own existence (including one's own identity), which is a prerequisite for the working through of specific problems.

15. "To be and Not to Be," expresses the fact that nonbeing is an inseparable part of being. To grasp what it means to exist, one needs to grasp the fact that he might not exist, that he treads at every moment on the sharp edge of possible annihilation and can never escape the fact that death will arrive at some unknown moment in the future. Without this awareness of nonbeing – that is, awareness of the threats to one's being in death, anxiety, and the less dramatic but persistent threats of loss of potentialities in conformism – existence is vapid, unreal, and characterized by lack of concrete self-awareness. But with the confronting of nonbeing, existence takes on vitality and immediacy, and the individual experiences a heightened consciousness of himself, his world, and others around him.
16. Anxiety is the experience of the threat of imminent nonbeing. Anxiety is the subjective state of the individual's becoming aware that his existence can become destroyed, that he can lose himself and his world, that he can become "nothing."
17. This understanding of anxiety as an ontological characteristic again highlights our difficulty with words. The term which Freud, Binswanger, Goldstein, Kierkegaard (as he is translated into German) use for anxiety is *Angst*, a word for which there is no English equivalent. It is first cousin to anguish (which comes from Latin *angustus*, "narrow," which in turn comes from *angere*, "to pain by pushing together," "to choke"). The English term *anxiety*, such as in "I am anxious to do this or that," is a much weaker word. Hence some students translate *Angst* as "dread."
18. Another significant aspect of anxiety may now also be seen more clearly – namely, the fact that anxiety always involves inner conflict. Is not this conflict precisely between what we have called being and nonbeing? Anxiety occurs at the point where some emerging potentiality or possibility faces the individual, some possibility of fulfilling his existence, but this very possibility involves the destroying of present security, which thereupon gives rise to the tendency to deny the new potentiality.
19. We have stated that the condition of the individual when confronted with the issue of fulfilling his potentialities is *anxiety*. We now move on to state that when the person denies these potentialities, fails to fulfill them, his condition is *guilt*. That is to say, guilt is also an ontological characteristic of human existence.
20. Ontological guilt against one's fellows arises from the fact that since each of us is an individual, each necessarily perceives his fellow man through his own limited and biased eyes. This means that he always to some extent does violence to the true picture of his fellow man and always to some extent fails fully to

understand and meet the other's needs. It is an inescapable result of the fact that each of us is a separate individuality and has no choice but to look at the world through his own eyes.

21. The existential analysts rediscover man as a being interrelated with his world and to rediscover world as meaningful to man. They hold that the person and his world are a unitary, structural whole; the phrase "being in the world" expresses precisely that. The two poles, self and world, are always dialectically related. Self implies world and world self; there is neither without the other, and each is understandable only in terms of the other. World is the structure of meaningful relationships in which a person exists and in the design of which he participates.
22. The existential analysts distinguished three modes of world – that is, three simultaneous aspects of world – which characterize the existence of each one of us as being in the world. First, there is *Umwelt*, literally meaning "world around"; this is the biological world, generally called in our day the environment. There is, second, the *Mitwelt*, literally the "with world," the world of beings of one's own kind, the world of one's fellow man. The third is *Eigenwelt*, the "own world," the world of relationship to oneself. The reality of being in the world is lost if one of these modes is emphasized to the exclusion of the other two.
23. When we turn to the mode of *Eigenwelt* itself, we find ourselves on the unexplored frontier of psychotherapeutic theory. What does it mean to say "the self in relation to itself"? What goes on in the phenomena of consciousness, of self-awareness? What happens in "insight" when the inner Gestalt of a person reforms itself?
24. The next contribution of the existential analysts we shall consider is their distinctive approach to time. If we can help the severely anxious or depressed patient to focus on some point in the future when he will be outside his anxiety or depression, the battle is half won. This focusing upon some point in time outside the depression or anxiety gives the patient a perspective, a view from on high so to speak, and this may well break the chains of the anxiety or depression. The patient may then relax, and some hope creeps in.
25. This new approach to time begins with observing that the most crucial fact about existence is that it emerges – that is, it is always in the process of becoming, always developing in time, and is never to be defined as static points. "Time binding" – that is, the capacity to bring the past into the present as part of the total causal nexus in which living organisms act and react, together with the capacity to act in the light of the long-term future – is "the essence of mind and personality alike."
26. The future, in contrast to present or past, is the dominant mode of time for

human beings. Personality can be understood only as we can see it on a trajectory toward its future; a man can understand himself only as he projects himself forward. This is a corollary of the fact that the person is always becoming, always emerging into the future. What an individual seeks *to become* determines what he remembers of his *has* been. In this sense the future determines the past.

27. Whether or not a patient can even recall the significant events of the past depends upon his decision with regard to the future. From an existential point of view, the problem is not at all that these patients happened to have endured impoverished pasts; it is rather that they cannot or do not commit themselves to the present and future. Their past does not become alive because nothing matters enough to them in the future. Some hope and commitment to work toward changing something in the immediate future, be it overcoming anxiety or other painful symptoms or integrating oneself for further creativity, is necessary before any uncovering of the past will have reality.
28. A final characteristic of man's existence (*Dasein*) which we shall discuss is the capacity to transcend the immediate situation. Existing involves a continual emerging, in the sense of emergent evolution, a transcending of one's past and present in terms of the future. The capacity to transcend the situation is an inseparable part of self-awareness, for it is obvious that the mere awareness of oneself as a being in the world implies the capacity to stand outside and look at oneself and the situation and to assess and guide oneself by an infinite variety of possibilities.
29. The central task and responsibility of the therapist is to seek to understand the patient as a being and as being in his world. All technical problems are subordinate to this understanding. The groundwork is laid for the therapist's being able to help the patient recognize and experience his own existence, and this is the central process of therapy.
30. The first implication is the variability of techniques among the existential therapists. Existential technique should have flexibility and versatility, varying from patient to patient and from one phase to another in treatment with the same patient.
31. Psychological dynamisms always take their meaning from the existential situation of the patient's own, immediate life.
32. The third implication in existential therapy is the emphasis on *presence*. By this we mean that the relationship of the therapist and patient is taken as a real one, the therapist being not merely a shadowy reflector but an alive human being who happens, at that hour, to be concerned not with his own problems but with

understanding and experiencing as far as possible the being of the patient.

- This emphasis on relationship is in no way an oversimplification or shortcut; it is not a substitute for discipline or thoroughness of training. It rather puts these things in their context – namely, discipline and thoroughness of training directed to understanding human beings as human. The therapist is assumedly an expert. But, if he is not first of all a human being, his expertness will be irrelevant and possibly harmful.
 - Being alive in the relationship does not at all mean the therapist will chatter along with the patient. He will know that patients have an infinite number of ways of trying to become involved with the therapist in order to avoid their own problems. And the therapist may well be silent, aware that to be a projective screen is one aspect of his part of the relationship.
33. The aim of therapy is that the patient *experience his existence as real*. The purpose is that he become aware of his existence as fully as possible, which includes becoming aware of his potentialities and becoming able to act on the basis of them. Therapy is concerned with something more fundamental – namely, helping the person experience his existence – and any cure of symptoms which will last must be a by-product of that.
34. The patient cannot permit himself to get insight or knowledge until he is ready to decide, until he takes a decisive orientation to life and has made the preliminary decisions along the way.