

NYACK COLLEGE PSY 444 PSYCHOTHERAPY AND CLINICAL INTERVENTION

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WITH PROFESSOR Dr. Stephen Maret

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NYACK COLLEGE Class Assignment Session 4:

Question # 3

Existential therapy is different from other schools of therapy in that it deals with the client as a personal being, and calls into account one's self-awareness and seeks to address the basic issues of human nature such as mortality, the value of life and the brevity of life, hence its purpose is to help individuals find purpose in life by being authentic with themselves, to make decisions and to accept responsibility for the consequences of those decisions made and be willing to make changes in habits and lifestyle patterns that are beneficial to personal development. Existential therapy is different in that it deals with human nature in the areas of expressive behavior such grief and loss, anxiety and fear, loneliness and isolation. In such matters the existential therapist address such life affecting issues from the standpoint that the client has the power within him to take responsible action to mitigate these human challenges and in the process set the course in determining his own destiny. The responsibility of the existential therapist then is to guide the client into taking responsible action, by creating his own vision of what he want to become and taking decisive action to chart the course.

Question # 6

What are the givens of the human condition? How do they coincide with or differ from the existential propositions?

From an existentialist viewpoint, the givens of the human condition are, death or the fragility of life, hence there is limited time to plan and execute such plans. Therefore, the concept of freedom or self-expression and the meaning of life are important factors in the human condition. Because death is always a present threat to life, it is the existentialist viewpoint that it is a wasteful effort to spend too much time in the past except as it connects with the present and nudges us into future reality. With this view of the human condition in mind, the proposition of the existential therapist is to help the client connect with his authentic self, be deliberate in making life decisions that will advance his cause. This view of the human condition coincides with existential thought in that if there was no limit to life, people may just amble along through life without purpose and goals. Hence, death should not be viewed as negative but be embraced as a catalyst for decision making, decisive action and accepting responsibility for the consequences for such action.

Question # 14

For the most part, existential therapy approach has a broad focus on reality and authenticity as it relates to people; and it is better suited for the multicultural context than other systems of psychotherapy. By taking into account such general themes of human experiences such as

suffering, death, love and other passions that generally reaches across the cultural divide it has a greater reach at meeting people at their current social location. Additionally, by challenging people to be responsible for their own actions and not blaming others for past actions it seeks to help clients in the rediscover themselves by summoning their inner strengths, thus the empowerment to make the necessary changes to alter the course of one's life from negative to positive.

However, because this approach is usually individualistic, it often tends to overlook the social factors which cause people to be trapped in certain life conditions that are not conducive to growth and self-development. Social factors such as immigration, poverty, hunger, racism, language barriers and past cultural experiences and customs and the fear and distrust associated with authority are primary factors that need to be addressed before the client is able to address other social and mental issues. Existentialist however, because of their unique therapeutic approach, may be better prepared to address such issues since the basic human needs are the same across most cultures.

Question # 1

Critique the Existential perspective from a Biblical and Christian point of view. What aspects of this perspective do you see aligning with a Christian worldview? What elements of this perspective do you see as conflicting with a Christian worldview?

Though distinct and separate, I find that the core of existential therapy has many similarities to the Biblical or Christian's worldview. In fact, I do contend that the existential teachings of philosophy does borrow much from the basic principles of Christian teaching. For the existentialist, the focus is on the nature of what it is to be human, and hold as its core values, self-awareness, freedom and personal responsibility to self and to others. When this concept of psychology is compared to biblical teachings, one may find that one of the core teachings of Judaism and Christianity similar: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind...**and you shall love your neighbor as yourself**" (Matthew. 22:37-39). From this verse of scripture, the biblical commandment emphasizes personal love and responsibility for God and self, it also includes the broader community, **others**. And so, bears at its core, the same **I/thou** concept as does the existential view of therapy. It is from this biblical concept that humans find relevance to the relationships they form in the societies in which they live. As the standard bearer of God's image, man finds self-worth in relationship with his creator and with the community as a whole. Hence the existential therapist in addressing the needs of the client, it us his aim is to bring the client to a place of self-acceptance as does the biblical concept of living.

Question # 21

As we compare existentialism to humanism, one should note the many similarities in the two therapeutic approaches to treating patients. It is further noted that they both share the view of the client's subjective experience when it comes to the uniqueness and individuality of the client and their ability to make critical life decisions and choices. Additionally, they hold that patients should take personal responsibility in shaping their own value system as a means of guiding them along the course of life. On the other hand, the two approaches differ, in that while the existentialist holds that humans are faced with great anxiety when it comes to choosing to create an identity in a world that lacks basic intrinsic meaning. The humanist takes the position that each person is endowed with the natural potential to actualize through which we can find meaning.

However, and more importantly, they both hold that during therapy, that the focus should be placed on the client, and the client's view of the world that surrounds him. In fact, it is both the existentialist and the humanistic view that the therapist in order to be effective in reaching the client, he needs to enter into the client's world or have an empathic approach to counseling.

Question # 22

The basic characteristics of the person-centered approach are: (a). Most people are essentially trustworthy, and that they have the vast potential for understanding themselves, and the

ability to resolve their own problems without direct intervention from therapist. (b). For the most part, people are capable of self-direction if even they seek therapeutic assistance. According to Carl Rogers, the client and not the therapist is the primary agent for constructive self-change. Additionally, one of the key concepts of the person-centered approach to therapy is that of **self-actualization**, which Rogers hold as the basic motivational force that leads to genuine change within the patient. Furthermore, that therapeutic change is due to several personal and interpersonal factors that surrounds the client, rather than to specific techniques for addressing social disorders.

Question # 24

Some of the key contributions made to person-centered therapy made by Abraham Maslow, includes the five stages of change in the therapeutic process: (a) The **preconception stage**, where the client shows no intention of changing his behavior in the near future; (b) The **contemplation stage**, where the client shows a measure of awareness of the problem he faces, but has not yet made a commitment to change; (c) The **preparation stage**, where the client is showing signs in his behavior of taking immediate actions to address the problem; (d) The **action stage**, where the client is actively engaged in steps to modify his behavior and (e) The **maintenance stage**, where the client is actively engaged in steps to prevent a relapse in the progress made during therapy. Other key contributions are the concept of self-awareness, freedom, honesty, trust and caring. It is the view of person-centered therapist that these basic elements of personality must be extoled within the client if the client is going to experience

healing, the same serves to empower him to take responsible action at making decisions in matters pertaining to life. Additionally, person-centered therapy is designed to help the client become more open minded and welcoming towards unpredictable events and sudden changes in their social structure, such as the loss of a job, or death within the family or changes in health conditions.

Question # 19

As I term this approach as, the “God-centered” approach versus the “humanistic” approach. Often as I encounter Christian couples, during the counseling session, I share with them the God-centered approach to living successfully, where biblical principles and values are extoled. Hence, scripture verses such as Proverbs 3:5, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight;”* also, Psalm1, and Joshua 1:8, *“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful”* are highlighted for reflection and discussion. Therefore, as made clear in the text, when a couple has first committed themselves to honor and respect for God in their relationship, then that same honor and respect may fairly be translated into their personal lives and intimate relationship with each other and the broader community at large.

While the person-centered view rightly holds that man is basically responsible for making his own choices and accepting the consequences of such choices; when biblical principles are used to influence those choices, the outcome often proves more beneficial in both the short and long term in that they serve as guardrails to making life's critical decisions. Moreover, being God-centered, man has a greater capacity of self-awareness, to show love and to receive love, to be honest with himself and his fellow human beings, to be empathetic and to be trustworthy by those in his social circle. Hence the humanistic or person-centered perspective as it models biblical principles, proves more effective in the lives of individuals, as they place honor and respect to God first, and then seek to model that same honor and respect to their fellow human beings as a way of self-governance and esteem building.