

Psy444: Psychotherapy  
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Unit 4 Essay Questions for Chapters 6&7

## Chapter Six

1. While the deterministic views of traditional psychoanalytic focused on the fixed, unconscious aspects of life as the main drivers of who we are, existential views deviate quite a bit. It states that we control our lives and how it plays out. We are the creators, authors, and architects of our lives and that it is our choices and actions that determine who we become. In this respect, and in light of the notion of free will as expressed in Christianity, the existential values of freedom and choice and responsibility are aligned with the Christian faith system. Christians believe that humans have agency and the freedom to choose certain things in their lives. Although there can be external drivers of our circumstances, we still have the choice as to how to react to these circumstances. The existential principles are similar in this regard. However, where it starts to deviate is that, while Christians value the importance of free will and agency, we believe that God is the ultimate authority over all things including us. The implications of a sovereign God who has given his people free will is that it: 1) allows us to appreciate and work hard to live our lives in such a way as to honor our creator and ourselves; but also, 2) not be debilitated by the responsibility of having to figure it all out on our own. We can take risks to live our life to the fullest, but not be devastated if we fail or make mistakes. This at once frees us and protects us.

4. The existential view of human nature is that we are in a continuous state of growth, change and discovery. It ponders existential questions of what it means to be alive, why we are here, what the purpose of our existence is, for instance. It focuses on the notion that human beings have agency, choice, freedom, and responsibility over how they experience their circumstances.

Unlike the deterministic view that life is fixed, existential therapists believe that we have the freedom and choice to control our lives and destinies. In essence, we are who we choose to be. From a therapeutic standpoint, this type of therapy is very exciting to explore with a client as we are constantly evolving together by examining, probing, analyzing the myriad of potential avenues for self-awareness, what it means to be free, what it means to be alone together, what it means to find meaning in life, and finally, what it means to die.

5. One of the prominent components of the existential theory is that human beings are free to make decisions that impact their lives both positively and negatively. While we can't control the circumstances of our lives that are created outside of our control, we nevertheless can decide how we choose to react to those circumstances. And this agency is a freedom – freedom to become who we want to be, the awareness of consequences that result from our decisions, and the ability to act on those reflections. This means that freedom comes with responsibility. We are ultimately responsible for how we choose to act (or not act) in any given circumstance. When we are out of accord with this freedom and responsibility, e.g., not do what should do, etc. we become anxious and disconnected.

The goal of the therapist is to help clients become more and more aware of this unique agency they have to become who they want to be. What are the motivations, influences and goals of this client? What kinds of patterns does the client exhibit that prevent him/her from fully living into the freedom to choose to be who they want to be? Rather than become debilitated by choices that they have allowed others to make for them, or become paralyzed from making choices due to some perceived limitation or restriction, clients can and should take ownership of their unique freedom of choice to be who they want to be regardless of circumstances.

8. The goal of each person is to create an identity that is uniquely their own and is a reflection of their authentic self. Unfortunately, we also desire intimacy and connection with others. As a result, we can place an inordinate amount of influence from those around us. This then ties our sense of value and self-worth with what others think of us. As a result, we can lose ourselves in the approval and expectation of others. We become isolated, fearful, incomplete and existentially unmoored. It takes courage to just be who we have chosen to be. That takes intentional focus away from what others think/expect of us and rely on the core foundation of who we want to be. Facing these fears head-on and sitting in this uncomfortable, lonely place is the beginning of self-actualization. In this respect, acknowledging the very real reality that we are all ultimately alone is a healthy place to be. If we begin to solely draw on our own strength, sense of meaning and value, we can see that ultimately that is the healthiest place to be. If we do the hard work on ourselves – who we are, who we want to be, then we can begin to be truly valuable to others. I think of the flight safety instruction of first putting the mask on yourself before you can help put the mask on others. Until we find true value and worth in ourselves, we can't be equipped to do it for anyone else. And when we extend ourselves from this place of abundant self-worth, we can ironically become of greater value to those around us. Rather than lead from a place of need and deficit, we can enter a relationship with another, wholly confident and secure in who we are. Healthy relationships between individuals is characterized by freedom, wholeness, maturity, and mutual edification.

## Chapter Seven

19. The person-centered perspective believes that at the core of every person is the ability to find meaning, self-fulfillment and growth, and in this respect, Christianity espouses similar values. Christians believe that human beings, endowed with free will, can choose to be good or bad,

make good/bad decisions, including the corresponding consequences. However, the core premise of the Christian faith differs from the person-centered perspective in that, while the person-centered view focuses heavily on the individual person to search within him/herself to find meaning and purpose and growth, Christians look to God to provide that sense of purpose and meaning. Christians believe that humans at their heart are prone to evil and self-centeredness and looking inward for the answers to growth and healing will only lead to disappointment and isolation. Instead Christians are called to look to their maker to provide meaning and purpose, and that only through the power of our creator, can we have the strength, wisdom and courage to change and grow in positive ways. And once we submit to His authority in our lives, we begin to see true and lasting change. And this change is not as a result of trying harder or forcing ourselves to obey, but it happens naturally and gradually as an overflow of our gratitude and love for God.

23. Rogers believed in the inherent potential for humans to strive toward growth, self-understanding, self-direction, and self-healing if the right conditions are present. Clients who are allowed to explore their desires, motivations and actions in a safe, supportive, nonjudgmental environment can experience tremendous growth and healing, according to Rogers. He believed that humans are naturally inclined toward self-actualization where they desire and work toward autonomy, fulfillment, and wholeness. Therapists have the role of encouraging clients to do the active work toward self-awareness and self-discovery where growth and change can occur.

According to Maslow, this desire for self-actualization, which entails an ongoing process of self-realization, fulfillment, autonomy, and self-determination is a “growth force” that is best developed by the client without the directional interference of the therapist. The therapist is not the authority in this process, merely an encouraging agent.

While I agree that we all have the potential to actualize the most authentic and honest versions of ourselves, I don't believe that humans are naturally inclined to do so. In other words, I believe all of humanity suffers from the gnawing sense of inadequacy and alienation from ourselves and one another and while some have more inclination or capacity for self-awareness and self-determination, others don't no matter how hard they try. So, if we set the expectation that this goal of self-actualization is possible, nay probable if we just tap into ourselves hard enough, what happens to those who don't actually get there? Can this person handle the burden of failure that meets them at the end of this self-actualization journey?

25. The goals of a person-centered approach is for the client to arrive at their most authentic self. Questions such as, "who am I?" "who do I want to be?" "what prevents me from accepting and becoming who I want to be?" are at the center of the growth process of a person-centered client. The goal of the therapist is to help facilitate a healthy, safe, conducive environment where these questions can be explored with the client. The person-centered therapeutic process has the client in the driver's seat where he/she gets to define the goals and process of their therapeutic journey. They are the experts of their desires and motivations, which then means that they have a great deal of independence, ownership and responsibility over their therapeutic process. As a result, this process is less prescriptive but more descriptive. In other words, the focus isn't on the therapist and their knowledge or techniques. The goal of the therapist is to create a warm, caring, empathetic environment for the clients to feel safe, seen and understood. Clients should be striving for and determining their own desired outcomes and goals alongside the support and encouragement of their therapist.

28. The underlying foundation of a successful person-centered therapeutic relationship is the connection and trust that exists between a therapist and his/her client. The client must feel safe,

accepted, comfortable, empowered, understood and valued by his/her therapist. This means that the therapist must model honesty, active listening, sympathetic care, and value for the client, and an authentic way of being that allows the client to do the same. Any sense of judgment, harshness, lack of compassion and sympathy will cripple the therapeutic relationship and prevent the client from opening up and being his/her authentic self. Any expressed thoughts, reactions and attitudes that prevent the client from feeling seen and accepted will stunt the progress of the relationship and the client. I can see this being a challenge for some therapists who approach therapeutic relationships didactically, or as a problem to “fix.” In other words, if they see the client as anything other than an equal partner with whom the therapist is journeying together to help the client get to his/her most authentic self, then the person-centered approach is compromised. If the internal/external feelings or thoughts lack congruence, the nature of the relationship will prove to be inauthentic, which then compromises the therapeutic relationship as well. That said, true empathy is not to be confused as condoning negative or unhealthy ways of being, but it is not the job of the therapist to get the client to this recognition. The client must feel comfortable to face these unhealthy thoughts on their own and this requires a safe environment. The actual self-assessment and corresponding work to be done must be activated by the client, not the therapist. The therapist can help get the client get to this point, but it is always the client who has to do the work when they get there.