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# Thanatos-Eros, Being-Non Being: Psychoanalytic - Existential Connection

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Thanatos-Eros, Being-Non Being:  
A Psychoanalytic - Existential Connection

A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Department of Counseling  
and the  
Faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
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by  
Ryan D. Miller  
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Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This Thesis examines and shows the relationship between Sigmund Freud's Death Instinct and Life Instinct Theories and their relation to the Existential concepts of Being and Non-Being. These intertheoretical concepts were interpreted in order for practitioners of Psychotherapy to be better acquainted with both concepts; so they may be better used in the mental health professions. A discussion of the two concepts as seen in Existential Psychotherapy and Freudian Psychoanalytic thought was presented and expanded upon and the relationship between the two was explained.

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## I.

**INTRODUCTION**

In our industrial society a superficially close relationship among men has developed, yet man as an individual has become less and less aware of the totality of life. Living has become objectified, intellectualized, materialized, estranged. Existentialism and psychoanalysis are two of the movements which have started to reverse this trend... (Colm, 1966, p.164).

The Human race has always faced a problem: the path on which humankind treads can be a precarious one, full of death and life itself. In life, we deal with the basic struggle between life and death every day. In traditional psychoanalytic theory, the terms life instinct (eros) and death instinct (thanatos), have been used to describe the dynamic pull these two forces exert on the unconscious of the individual (Freud, 1950). Sigmund Freud based his two drives on a biological model. The existential model is based on an experiential model.

In existential psychology, the terms being and non-being have been discussed in much the same way as the life and death instinct (May, 1958), and a relationship seems apparent. Unlike the biological basis of Freud's theory (Hall, 1954), the existential being and non-being both focus

on an experiential angle to life and a biological concept in dealing with suicide and life. Both theoretical disciplines reveal a historic past, both fraught with change and revision. The fact remains that the death and life instincts and being and non-being are core concepts of their respective theories.

Over the course of a lifetime a person may feel the pull of one side or the other in the dynamic struggle to live. According to psychoanalytic theory, two dynamic polarities of instinct, those in the service to death, and those in the service to life, compete through the ego (Freud, 1940). These opposing forces are called the death instinct and the life instinct. The traditional domain of the death instinct has been the superego, whereas the life instinct resides in the ego (Freud, 1950).

In psychoanalytic theory, the concept of the death instinct is the drive to return to the inorganic state that man came from (Freud, 1940). This concept directly relates to Freud's training as a physician, for these concepts are based in biology. In contrast to the concept of the death instinct, the life instinct is the drive toward survival and bodily needs (Hall, 1954). Eating and sexuality are examples of the life instincts.

Libido is the special Freudian word for the energy of the life instincts, the motivator to continue the process of living. In true dualistic Freudian fashion, the libido



therefore battles the death instinct for the survival of the organism. In the end, the death instinct prevails, for the final accomplishment of the death instinct is the annihilation of the individual (Freud, 1950).

In existential theory there also exists a duality: being and non being. These two concepts are related to the Freudian concepts through living life and anxiety. Existentialism accepts death as an ontological truth (Yalom, 1980). Being is centered on the awareness of the individual and his ability to accept his life, though it is doomed to death, and to project himself into the future through responsible decision making. Non-Being is related to the death instinct in that it is the recognition of this basic fact, death, and the drive toward it that creates basic anxiety in life. Basic anxiety is seen in mankind exclusively on this issue, for we all know on some level that we are to die. What humans do with the basic facts of life and death and how anxiety and responsibility enter the picture encompass non-being.

## II.

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY**

A great tradition exists in the field of Psychology today: the legacy of Sigmund Freud. From the early days of Dr. Freud's practice in Vienna to the historical popularity of psychoanalysis, Freud's insight into the human mind was undeniable. Freud was the originator of the organization of

Personality: the Id, Ego, and Super-Ego (Freud, 1950). The dynamics of personality were given great attention by Freud. The interworkings of psychic energy, Instinct, Consciousness, Unconsciousness, Drive Theory, and the Personality formations (Hall, 1954) are concepts most modern practitioners are aware of and may use frequently. The development of personality was perhaps Freud's most famous contribution to the 20th Century. Freud stressed sexuality as a prime behavioral factor in the development of human beings. Within the development of personality lie the concept of identification, displacement and sublimation, and the functions of the Ego (Freud, 1940). Therapists and many people in general society speak in terms of the defense mechanisms of the ego including repression, projection, and reaction formation. The historical popularity of Freudian terms such as these has sustained psychoanalytic theory and captured the attention of the general public.

The Psychosexual stages of Development are hallmark concepts of psychoanalytic theory. Freud believed that all humans progress through some or all of the stages of development which include the Oral, Anal, Genital, and Latency periods of childhood development (Hall, 1997). It was later in Freud's life, after the publication of Beyond the Pleasure Principle that the solidification of the concepts of Thanatos

and Eros (death and life instincts) took shape. Once again Freud drew on his knowledge of medicine and biology to draw the parallel between the birth and death of cells to the plight of all mankind. Through science we have come to understand the scientific given of entropy: the eventual breakdown and destruction of all things.

The eventual obliteration of all things was the concept Freud had in mind when he observed the drive in his patients toward entropy, toward the breakdown and demise of the self. It is postulated that before a person dies, the very need to die is so strong that the inevitable has been prolonged, that the urge is given in to. From the birth and death of a single cell to the birth and death of a human being (Freud, 1950), Freud knew that we live in the world as doomed creatures, that the call of entropy is too strong for any organism to cheat.

What keeps us alive in this time before death? One basic sub-instinct of the life instinct is sexuality (Hall, 1954). The procreation of life is thereby life renewed for the creator of a new being. Love is a derivative of the sex instincts. There are several cross-instincts that fit in both the death and life instincts: eating and sleeping.

Psychoanalysis (through the lineage of Sigmund Freud) over the decades has been carried on through two tracks. Classic "Orthodox" freudian psychoanalysis is referred to as the "Vienna School." This Vienna School retains the basic

Freudian concepts and strays very little from the course Sigmund Freud set for the study and practice of his theory (Gomez, 1997).

In Europe, America, and indeed all over the world there are practicing psychoanalysts who still use the basic texts and writings of Sigmund Freud in their medical or psychological practices, and do not stray in theory from the originator. Starting with European psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, a new offshoot of psychoanalysis formed, this new split from Orthodox Freudian theory was called Object Relations (Gomez, 1997). Both Object Relations and followers of the Vienna School still practice psychoanalysis, although the Object Relations Psychoanalyst segment seems to be better represented in the United States.

Psychoanalysts in the United States must either complete medical school (psychiatry) or in some cases a clinical or counseling psychology program. After formal schooling, students must undergo their own personal psychoanalytic analysis with a trained psychoanalyst in addition to completing coursework in the study of psychoanalysis. When the years of their own analysis, coursework, and analytic supervision are complete, the Doctor or psychologist is now a psychoanalyst. Contrary to a common misconception, psychoanalysis is indeed alive in the world today with practicing psychoanalysts in most major cities in America.

## III.

**A Brief History of Existential Psychotherapy**

In the beginning there were the philosophers. From Husserl, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Heidegger and even Camus the existential position grew. The essential concepts of freedom, responsibility, despair, nothingness, the will, meaninglessness, isolation, and consciousness have been discussed as the bedrock of existential philosophy (Yalom, 1980).

Born from this philosophy came existential psychotherapy. This theoretical outlook is a philosophy, a set of ideas and values, a given set of beliefs, rather than a "technique" like Gestalt or Transactional Analysis (Corey, 1986). Indeed other "techniques" like Gestalt may fit snugly in the frame of existential psychotherapy and create a total picture for the therapist: one of theory and one of pure practice.

Existential psychotherapy is one of the "dynamic" depth psychological therapies, one which recognizes the internal turmoil and struggle of polar extremes in both the client and in society. Yalom defines existential psychotherapy as "a dynamic approach...which focuses on concerns that are rooted in the individual's existence" (Yalom, 1980, p.5) Other dynamic therapies besides existential psychotherapy and psychoanalysis include Jungian Analysis, Ego Psychology, and Object Relations Analysis.

Existential psychotherapy rose to popularity in war-torn Europe of the 1940's (Cory, 1986), and gave rise to a new form of viewing mankind and the experience of life. Existential psychology also has a way of viewing mental illness and the "problems of living" through health rather than sickness, as two other major therapies (psychoanalytic and behaviorism) do (Cory, 1986).

Postwar Europe nurtured such Existentialist Psychotherapists as Ludwig Binswanger, and in the United States Rollo May and later Irvin Yalom (Corey, 1986).

These psychotherapists are some of the leading vocal advocates of the existentialist framework, and are seen as being the very bridge from the existential philosophy movement to putting existentialism to work for humanity: existential psychology. Many publishing existential psychotherapists are psychologists or physicians, who have also received postdoctoral psychoanalytic treatment. It is very interesting that almost without exception, the leaders in the field were once students and practitioners of psychoanalysis.

Existential psychology can be seen as truly interdisciplinary, but the main givens of existence and the basic philosophy bind these special practitioners together. The rise of existential psychology began and flourished in the 1950's and 1960's. This postwar period of transition and growth in psychology brought new interest in dynamic

psychologies, and the popularity of existential psychology began to bloom (May, 1956).

Irvin Yalom and Rollo May have been the leading American authors and proponents of existential psychology in the United States and have defined the essential concepts (Ultimate Concerns) of existential psychotherapy as follows:

1. Death - seen as the core conflict and tension between the awareness of death and the wish to continue to be.

2. Freedom - the absence of external structure, the dread and belief in the individual having the ultimate freedom and responsibility for his own world, life design, choices, and actions. This shift of responsibility from soft or hard determinism to the self produces "existential anxiety", the wish for grounding in a world that offers none.

3. Existential Isolation - the fundamental isolation from creatures and the world in general. No matter how close each of us becomes to another, there remains a final, unbridgeable gap; each of us enters existence alone and must depart from it alone.

4. Meaninglessness - this existential dynamic conflict stems from the dilemma of a meaning-seeking creature who is thrown into a universe that has no meaning (Yalom, 1980, p.9).

These "Ultimate Concerns" also take into account the concepts of being and non-being. Being can be defined as "the person who is responsible for his existence choosing, being is a participle, a verb form implying that someone is in the process of being something, projecting our potential into action" (May, 1958, p. 51). Certainly this seems like a philosophical definition, perhaps more in tune with textbooks than modern psychotherapy.

Being is actually defined in this way in the therapy session as well as in life as the definition goes upon further inspection. Being is the active pursuit of life, the struggles, tragedies, joys, and triumphs of the will, it is an active process that man pursues (Moustakis, 1995). In the process of psychotherapy, clients will be reassured that their lives must be led actively, and that the client must take an active role in life, not simply let life act upon the individual. Also in the process of psychotherapy, special attention must be paid to this idea of, "existential isolation." Mankind can be isolated so much from himself that he feels not only cut off from himself, but from other people and society in general. Fear has been given as an example of an experience that in extreme form can isolate a person from the self (Johnson, 1971, p.118).

Non-Being can be seen as death. Death awareness is the fuel that drives the existential psychotherapist to remind the



client to actively pursue Being. The very fact that humans may at any time be close to their own demise coupled with the fact of the absolute certainty of death, these two truths serve as the drive to live life, to make life seem precious and a gift to be cherished.

A redemption of life has been written about in the past through death: death is the cause for our life. If one were immortal, the zest for life would not be as immediate as one who knows that death is coming, and the time of death can never be known (Yalom, 1980).

Both existential psychotherapy and psychoanalysis deal with the concept of death, and of life. Life and death are indeed not seen and interpreted as such in the same way that the Judeo-Christian tradition teaches. Many leading existential psychiatrists and psychologists believe that a belief in everlasting life (salvation) is pure death denial, an unwillingness to look at the stark reality, see death as finality, and actively pursue Being (Yalom, 1980).

Both theories are grounded in this life, and death is a subject for the here and now. Death is seen in both theories as the fuel that drives life, the concept of death is not looked at in an "afterlife" sense, but as the ultimate end of an individual. It is the very fact of life and the fact of

death that mankind lives a life of meaning in existentialist psychotherapy (May, 1958), and lives a life instinct according to Freud (Hall, 1954).

#### IV.

##### **The Death and Life Instincts In-Depth**

In the spirit of psychoanalytic theory, we have been taught by Freud that wish fulfillment consists of impulses that seek gratification and discharge, then dissipate when wishes have been granted (Freud, 1950). It would appear that the life and death instincts are directly in opposition to each other, that the very definitions of the theories cancel each other out.

How can it be that the body is trying to preserve life, to continue it, while at the same time seeking to destroy itself? This dualism could be in itself seen as a riddle, but this theory has a scientific and biological foundation that shows the link to the biological truths we may take for granted. As human beings we feel the need to protect ourselves, and to procreate. Hormones, puberty, and time itself bring the life instinct to full fruition for all creatures.

The body knows to protect itself, and the urge to procreate on the biological level is an everyday occurrence. What is known but much less spoken of is that the body knows

it will die, and it has ways of making itself do so. Locked in the subconscious, the brain knows this and prepares itself. "The fundamental insight that there is a biological imperative underlying at least some instances of self destruction is one wholly validated by modern biological research" (Badcock, 1988). Just like the universal principal of entropy, the body is finite, meaning death is imminent. According to Freud, the body knows it must carry on life, live life, yet destroy itself in time.

Historically, Freud's Death and Life instincts can perhaps be traced to the theory of an ancient philosopher of Greece. Freud was influenced by Empedocles of Acragas who was interested in and wrote on the dualism and the polarity of human conflict. Born in 495 B.C., Empedocles had concluded that two fundamental principles, roughly translated as love and strife, were always at war with each other in their efforts to gain the upper hand. While love sought to unify, strife sought to divide and fragment. Freud, of course, linked the principle of strife with the death instinct (Gabbard, 1996, p. 226).

Freud was able to use the great myths and stories of western civilization to form his theories, to place them in a worldwide context. After the death of Freud, the Instincts were carried on by other Neo-Freudian psychoanalysts. Freud was always committed to a dual instinct theory, and up until

the early 1920's distinguished between the ego-instincts, that were self preservative, and sexual instincts. These were considerably modified and replaced in his later work by Life and Death Instincts, which were, as we have seen, the foundation of (Melanie) Klein's work (Phillips, A. 1988, p.123).

Today the instincts remain a very important part of psychoanalytic theory, and continue to be a topic of debate among scholars. Freud believed that the dualistic nature of the life and death instinct were not in opposition to each other (Freud, 1940). The life instinct preserves the future of mankind to ensure that the body will die according to an inner law and not at the whim of any avoidable circumstances. The death instinct seeks a return to the inorganic state, the one true state that seeks the elimination of all stimulation, death (Freud, 1950).

The death instinct as metaphor and psychological reality can be seen in client behavior in both outpatient psychotherapy, and inpatient counseling in a Psychiatric Center. Mankind's use of the death instinct as a metaphor is said to, "numb and or deaden oneself by postulating an urge to return to a zero point. (Man) commits a kind of psychological suicide by emptying or denuding experience, by becoming inanimate" (Eigen, 1993, p.105). As human beings aspire to and live life through engaging it, there is always the fear

and reality of loss, rejection, and failure. The breaking apart of hope in life and the return to a state of numbness is the manifestation of the death instinct.

Freud believed in a kind of sabotage by the client in therapy, a carryover from the death instinct. The term "negative therapeutic reaction" was used by Freud in outpatient psychotherapy to describe the inability of a patient to make a total therapeutic gain from the process of therapy (Eigen, 1992).

Freud believed that the individual tended to undo advances made; so much so that the analytic struggle or an individual's life might be in jeopardy. Freud also noted that no matter how much an individual gained from therapy, some maladaptive elements persisted. The individual clung to a smaller version of himself than he needed to. It was as if an area of death stained the personality and the best therapy could hope for was to help an individual take up a better attitude toward it. The individual had to build up a tolerance for his tendency to diminish himself or die out or kill himself off (Eigen, 1992, p.12).

Another danger of the death instinct according to Freud was its ability to change the perceptions of an individual concerning reality. If a particularly susceptible person loses touch with the meaning of their

life or their mortality, the consequences would be dire. "The sense of unreality may increase as the need to die in the face of one's sensitivity mounts. One of the greatest weapons of the death drive is to make life appear to be unreal" (Eigen 1992, p 13).

Patients in psychiatric hospitals frequently cite feelings of hopelessness, a feeling that life for them seems like a dream, not real, a horror they best should not deal with. This type of response from such a patient shows the ability of the death instinct to pose a mortal danger to those in crisis, particularly teenagers who think in terms of dichotomies. The death instinct is a pull on the life force and can prove fatal to those in the best of health, or those in crisis (Yalom, 1980).

Several Neo-Freudians including Melanie Klein have accepted the instincts and expanded upon them. Work after Freud by these authors has expanded and included children and infants in the psychodynamic process of the opposing forces of the life and death instinct (Guntrip, 1971). Melanie Klein focused on infants and very young children in her practice, and saw, human life as an intense hidden dramatic tragedy, a psychodynamic and fearful struggle between the forces of love and death inherent in the baby's constitutional makeup. Quite clearly, in Klein's estimation, the Death Instinct overshadows the love or Life Instinct, and is the true and

ultimate source of persecutory and all other forms of anxiety." (Guntrip, 1971, p.55).

Clearly some neo-freudians believed in the power and the struggle of the instincts, and how these factors not only effect adults, but children as well. Klein believed the death instinct was a major developmental milestone in the formation of the child. It was thought that the internal battle between the death and life instincts that rages inside the infant through adulthood, would ultimately control the individual until the death instinct claimed the life (Klein, 1969).

On the cellular level, the life instinct creates male and female gametes which unite and start the process of organic development, which in turn postpones once again, the goal of the death drive. The life instinct postpones the final extermination of the body, by creating anew (Freud, 1950).

So it seems that the death and life instincts work hand in hand to keep the individual alive, to procreate, to protect itself, but ultimately die by the very force of nature that conceived it (Robin, 1989, p.312).

The life instinct can be seen as simply the desire for the body to develop, grow, thrive, and procreate. Freud referred to the life instinct as Eros, and the death instinct as Thanatos (Freud, 1949). Eros serves mankind through growth, and prosperity of the body.

In modern times mankind is continually making the quality

of living greater, thanks in part to technology, exercise, medicine, and a greater understanding of how the body works. The life instinct (biological and psychological), is so strong in many individuals that the very essence of life is carried on in excess of one hundred and five years. With the increasing developments in cellular and molecular biology, scientists are continually finding advances in ways to improve the quality of life, to enhance the time we have and to make life more rewarding. A positive self philosophy, exercise, good nutrition, and the proper psychological mental health all aid the life instinct.

The sexual instincts are a major part of the life instinct, the body carries itself on through procreation (Freud, 1949). Freud believed the ultimate aim of the life instinct was, through sexuality (procreation), to preserve life against the death instinct for a relatively long period.

The life instinct, like the death instinct serves us on two fronts, in everyday biological functioning, and in the realm of the subconscious. On the daily biological front, the body wages the battle between death and life everyday from the cellular level on up.

Like the death instinct, "Eros is an internal force, inherent within the individual: atom, cell, living individual or psyche" (Laplanche, 1976, p.108). The biological and



psychological melding in the form of the instincts is exactly what Freud meant when he described the instincts existing on more than one level.

First and foremost Freud was a physician, a man of medicine who knew the body wages its battles on the cellular level first and foremost (Hall, 1954). The life instinct can be seen all the way from the generation of brand new cells, to the procreation of a new human being through the act of sexuality. Mankind could be said to grow and mature psychologically along the lines of the life instinct as well. The maturity of the mind and the development of new ideas, to grow, to come to great revelations can be seen as the progressive opposite of the death instinct.

The life instincts are conservative in the same sense that they bring back earlier states of living substance; but they are conservative to a higher degree in that they are particularly resistant to external influences; and they are conservative too, in another sense, in that they preserve life for a comparatively long period. They are the true Life Instincts (Freud, 1950 pp.533). Freud believed the Life instinct serves life through creating it, protecting the body from external harm, and enabling the individual or organism to continue its functioning through health.

Far greater than a single celled organism, mankind has an increased capacity for life, and the struggle between the

death instinct and the life instinct lasts until death. The fusion of the two instincts forms the bond that drives life itself, and death ultimately for us all. Freud believed that the fuel of the life instinct is the libido, the actual drive to sexualize, to create.

If the thought process of the instincts is followed, and if mankind does actually seek self annihilation, than the only thing that keeps us alive at all according to Freud, is the externalization of the death Instinct into outward forms of aggression and violence.

Freud believed that one function of self-preservation (life instinct) is to die according to inner law and not from any avoidable circumstances (Robin, 1989, p.312). What does this mean to a practitioner with clients who exhibit depression, morbidity, and suicidal ideations? Freudian theory would reach for the death instinct as becoming too powerful in the psyche for such a client, the ever present shadow seeking to destroy the client. As with the life instinct, the death instinct serves to destroy on two levels, the biological, and the psychological.

Psychoanalytic theory would postulate that advanced hopelessness, depression, suicidal ideation and completion serve the death instinct. The subconscious drive to obliterate itself, to return to a state of nothingness is not balanced and kept in check for many people by the life instinct, and

this disparity leads to self- destruction (Freud, 1950). This is an unconscious process initially, but can be later seen in the affect, behavior, disparity, and general psychological functioning of an individual. While the body is continuing to age, cells die, and the body begins to atrophy and slow down. Freud believed an individual can preserve life by projecting the inward self-destructive tendencies outward onto others, which may be seen as the cause for violence and wars.

The aggressive drive toward others stems from the projection of the death instinct. This simple idea can be seen and observed in clients in psychotherapy who exhibit an inward hatred, a sense of self loathing, which becomes transformed into self hate.

Self hate can lead to outward aggression toward others. For Neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, aggression was a direct line to the death instinct. Klein, like Freud, believed that aggression whether directed at others or at the self was the acting out of the death instinct. "For Kleinian theory, destructiveness is an innate propensity which each individual ego is fated to wrestle with within himself from the start. It is thus fundamentally intra-psychic" (Rayner, 1991, p.109). Aggression in the self is seen as rooted in the Instincts, the force to harm self or others resides in the struggle within the self.

A key part in understanding the very nature of the death

and life instincts is the fact that these two concepts are in themselves theoretical ideas. There has not been empirical testing done on subjects to quantify or measure the levels of death and life instinct inherent to one person or another. There is no empirical data to measure these concepts, and this is a problem for many mental health professionals. These two concepts have taken the brunt of much criticism over the last eighty years, and most clinicians reject these concepts including, curiously enough, many psychoanalysts.

Freud gave very specific insight into the death and life instinct. In An Outline of Psychoanalysis Freud lists two basic instincts, Eros and the destructive instinct. The contrast between the instincts of self preservation and the preservation of the species, as well as the contrast between ego-love and object-love, fall within Eros. The aim of the first of these basic instincts is to establish ever greater unities and to preserve them thus-in short, to bind together; the aim of the second is, on the contrary, to undo connections and so to destroy things.

In the case of the destructive instinct we may suppose that its final aim is to lead what is living into an inorganic state. For this reason we also call it the death instinct. If we assume that living things came later than inanimate ones and arose from them, then the death instinct fits in with the formula we have proposed to the effect that instincts tend

towards a return to an earlier state.... In biological functions the two basic instincts operate against each other or combine with each other. Thus, the act of eating is a destruction of the object with the final aim of incorporating it, and the sexual act is an act of aggression with the purpose of the most intimate union. This concurrent and mutually opposing action of the two basic instincts gives rise to the whole variegation of life (Freud, 1949, p.5-6).

By this illumination of the theory, the fusion of the two instincts becomes very clear. These two instincts are the motivation, the engine that drives both biological and psychological life. The dualistic, yet integrative aspects of the drive theory are the reason for both the continuation of the species, and in the end, the individual disintegration of it. Criticism of the theory suggests that it places a pessimistic or reductionistic view of the nature of man above one that values ethics and individualism. Authors have suggested in critique of Freudian theory that the dualistic concept is a bleak, pessimistic one, a theory that discounts the very nature of the ability of mankind to shape destiny (Corey, 1986).

When the theory (all Freudian theory) is taken in a historical context, the instincts can make logical sense. The instincts can be seen in the light of the great war Freud witnessed, the anti-semitism of Europe, the sexual repression

of the period, the advances in cellular biology, the cancer that eventually ate away at himself, and the political upheaval of the times. A war that obliterated much of Europe and caused massive bloodshed on the continent can be seen as the natural self aggression and aggression toward others of the death instinct.

If Freud had lived to witness the horrors of the completed second war, perhaps his conviction would only be more strengthened. Mankind is by nature an animal forged from violence, conflict, aggression, and a creature ruled by an inner need to fulfill a natural death. The inner drive to live in peace and procreate combined with the need to show aggression to the self and others creates Freuds' Instincts, a duality that he felt rules the lives of everyone. Drug and alcohol abuse, self mutilation, suicide, self hate and other self harm show the death instinct extended to the self, an inward expression of the power of the Id.

The physiological and psychological concepts of excitation have been spoken of in the realm of the instincts in psychoanalysis. When a given client is excited and stimulated in life, it has been said that this balance, the equilibrium with inactivity is served by the life instinct. This excitation drives the individual to follow the biological and psychological happenings of the day and serves to

stimulate the individual.

Total lack of excitation is born of the death instinct. On a psychological level, this process can be seen in chronic depression. The biological concept of failure to thrive could be seen as a void in excitation, this being served up from the death instinct. The truth of too much or too little of one thing carries over to pleasure in psychoanalytic theory. Pleasure provides the individual with a sense of happiness, with a sense of euphoria in life. In stark contrast to the positive pleasure, is the overindulgence in pleasure, which can be counterproductive to the individual. Counterproductive effects from the use of pleasure is the abomination of the very essence of the happiness pleasure is supposed to create.

While prescription drugs can cause pleasure, (the extermination of negative symptoms), abuse of such a drug turns to a negative stimulus. This is the way the death instinct weaves its way and entangles itself in the very fabric of what is good, pleasurable, and life bringing to the individual.

The Freudian instincts offer the world a kind of human behavior explanation. Instead of a superficial-sentimental view of humanity, human beings are forced to look within themselves and see both the positive and the negative aspects of our existence. There is great liberation in knowing that death can become a natural and expected part of life, a

biological and psychological means to an end.

Understanding the nature of human aggression and self harm as it relates to the death instinct can give reason for some of our worst wars and conflicts (Freud, 1950). There is a celebration in the life instinct, a kind of protection of the species and of the self that makes mankind adapt and control his life as much as possible. The unity of the instincts provides a framework for a person to accept life as it is, with all the forces of aggression, sexuality, and self preservation that life shows us.

## V.

### **Being and Non-Being In-Depth**

Man is only a reed, the feeblest reed in nature, but he is a thinking reed. There is no need for the entire universe to arm itself in order to annihilate him: a vapour, a drop of water, suffices to kill him. But were the universe to crush him, man would yet be more noble than that which slays him, because he knows that dies, and the advantage that the universe has over him; of this the universe knows nothing (Pascal, 1966, p.35).

The concept of being and non-being is that of life and death on the literal level, and that of growth and stagnation in the metaphorical sense. In terms of a definitive (literal)



meaning, being is seen as "the process of life...the basic given of all experience" (Bugental, 1965, p.27). As living animals, we are all engaged in the literal process of being, but this does not mean we are engaged in the metaphorical process of discovering our being. Being in the metaphorical sense has been defined as an experience that is unique to mankind alone, for it alone is capable of understanding the struggle of existence.

It has been pointed out that, "Man is the being who can be conscious of, and therefore responsible for, his existence" (May, 1958, p.41). Being is seen as the active pursuit of life, the mindfulness that comes with the pursuit of living a life of meaningful existence, not a life of passivity and stagnation. Being aware of our own existence and the responsibility this entails is one of the hallmarks of human experience (Yalom, 1980). As creatures who are not driven by pure survival needs alone, we are able to conceptualize our relationship to the world and pick a path in it for ourselves.

How does one find out about their sense of metaphorical being? A combination of meditation and a time to reflect on the issues of life lead to a better sense of the self. Psychotherapy can take the form of exploring being, finding out more about the sense of self and the values and conflicts that the individual may struggle with. "The achieving of a sense of being is a goal of all therapy, but in the more

precise sense it is a relation to one's self and one's world, an experience of one's own existence (including one's own identity)" (May, 1958, p.44).

Being provides a self esteem based on living life as the person desires. Being is not the fruition of a life dictated by the super ego. An acceptance based without personal introspection on the values and laws of society or anything for that matter, is merely a level of conformity, not an aspect of being (May, 1958).

A key element of finding out about what makes a person unique, what makes them an individual, is the study of learning which values are to be held as important. Conformity to laws, to rules of society in general, might be done so after the individual has reasoned and internalized these rules and laws for oneself (May, 1958).

The active pursuit of being and staying true to oneself necessitates holding true to what is sacred, to what one holds to be true. Any deviance of these ideals leads to conformity and the stagnation of the self, which in turns leads to the metaphorical non-being. By staying true to the awareness of the self, individualization and growth can occur.

Modern philosopher Martin Heidegger was concerned with breaking down the word "Being" by proposing and explicating a separate definition for two versions of the word. "Being-In-The-Midst-Of-The-World entails doing and being for others,

functioning as an instrument to do others bidding; in short living inauthentically. Being-In-The-World, on the other hand, is characterized by presence or responsiveness to the world (with all its possibilities and limits)" (Schneider, 1995, p.61). Breaking these obscure words down into two parts gives an easy to follow dichotomous modality to operate out of.

Being-In-The-World is the mode of operation for mankind to live a life of positive being, not one of just pure existence. Being-In-The-Midst-Of-The-World is not the preferred state for mankind to operate from. This state brings suffering and a discontinuity with the world. When being is used in reference to being and non-being by existential psychotherapists in therapy (Moustakis, 1995), Being-In-The-World is what is being referenced.

True being is to be aware of the ultimate concerns of death, meaninglessness, isolation, and nothingness. In our daily rituals and routines we have created work, distractions, and pleasures that keep us from facing these ultimate concerns on a daily basis. "Continuous awareness of such profound problems of existence would cause us terrible anxiety. Our diversions, if they are effective-that is, flexible and mature-allow us to go about our daily lives relatively unencumbered" (Schneider, 1995, p.266). It is necessary for people to not face the problems and cruel facts of existence all the time, for to do so would be unproductive. Part of

being according to the existentialists is knowing of the ultimate concerns and facing them. To not be aware of these concerns is to be shut off from the true nature of life and can set a person up for psychological dysfunction.

Non-Being is the antithesis of being. In the literal sense non-being is death, non-being is also the "diminished awareness or reduced actualization in a person's potentialities" (Bugental, 1956, p.27).

With this term being spoken of on two different levels, this concept deserves closer inspection.

As we exist, as we live, we evoke the potentialities of life, and through living we are said to exist in a state of being. Just as metaphorical being is pursued and the individual stays true to themselves, it is possible to be thrown off track, to be thrown off one's own center.

Clients in psychotherapy have been known to complain about "losing their sense of self, or being", especially when it comes to love. This loss of the self, the loss of being can be attributed to several things. A disjointed relationship with the self, and/or feelings of dissociation from others and nature can account for loss of being (Yalom, 1980). When the self is cut off from the reality of existence, and being in life is in a state in turmoil, a period of time without direction and inner purpose ensues.

Being serves mankind as a kind of process forward of becoming more genuine, as existentialists would say: more authentic. "Being is to becoming as structure is to process. Becoming is the way in which orderly change in structure occurs within a context of chronological time" (Weisman, 1965, p.63). This process of becoming, of personal growth means that a person is aware of their inner confrontations and struggles, and freely picks a path in life to be followed with meaning.

Several plays by Sartre and the novels by Camus can be seen as clear examples of failure to be in touch with Being, as would be Shakespeare's Hamlet (May, 1958). The prince of Denmark was at odds with both the literal being and non-being questions to life. There is a clear cut choice to live and act through following a meaningful path to Hamlet. Rather than suicide (non-being) out of despair and rage at his Uncle, or a continued floundering or the will (non-being once again), the commitment to act and strike takes hold.

By not being mindful of the directed drive through life, the individual is cut off and unaware. This state is the negation of a truth that being and becoming in life are one. When one stops the progress and the process of inner life or mindfulness of the outer interactions, the process of growth is stopped. "What is often required, (when one loses the sense of being) is an inward turn and, through self dialogue and

reflection, the recovery of one's powers, and the exercising of these powers to regain one's self. In renewal of being, one returns to what is immediately real, within one's own awareness" (Moustakas, 1995, p.116).

In order to restore mindfulness to the individual, Moustakis states that the individual must look within themselves, to find an inner core direction, to find a path in life. It is very important for clients in psychotherapy to be in touch with their own sense of being, to help restore a sense of truth and purpose to their meaning in life, and to face the issues they bring to therapy in a meaningful way.

Take Alex as an example of a case study on the loss of being. Alex is a 17 year old male who is admitted to a psychiatric residential treatment hospital for long term treatment. Alex brings to the hospital Chemical Dependency Issues, Conduct Disorder, relationship problems with both parents, suicidal ideations, and a kind of free floating resentment to the world.

Alex also brings with him a sense of humor, an articulate, well functioning persona, and an ability and desire to deal with the issues that have brought him to residential care. During the developmental process, Alex was exposed to addiction and disjointed parenting in his nuclear family. Upon further inspection, Alex speaks of turning to drugs and alcohol as a method of dealing with instability in

his homelife. Alex said that he had left a part of himself in the past, and lost track of who he is, and who he wants to become.

By relating to popular music to deliver his message of inner turmoil and resentment, Alex seeks in a kind of symbolic message when his radio blares the therapeutic message he wants the world to know he is feeling. When pressed, Alex will speak of feeling at odds with the world, of not having a very firm idea of who he is or what he stands for, and ways out are suicide and chemical dependency.

The cessation of life as we know it, is the period of non-being, the antithesis of existence. Non-Being as metaphor has more to do with existential philosophy than the biological states of being alive or dead. When an individual hides from their existence, is mired in nihilism produced through the realization that life is absurd, or an individual floats aimlessly through life as would a child or adolescent, the individual is said to be existing in "Inauthenticity" or Non-Being (Muustakis, 1998).

Non-Being is seen as the stagnation of life, the life unexplored and unactualized, a life of escape from rather than a confrontation of the existential issues of hopelessness, absurdity, meaninglessness, and death (Yalom, 1998). The very intelligence of mankind as a whole makes the awareness of living a life of being, possible. Surely the lizards and

tigers are not capable of the self awareness of a human. This awareness of the constraints on, and yet the possibility of freedom in life is what sets humans apart. "Mankind is that particular being who knows that at some future moment he will not be; he is the being who is always in the dialectical relation with non-being, death. And he not only knows he will sometime not be, but he can, in his own choices, slough off and forfeit his being" (May, 1958, p. 42).

By developing a sense of being, an individual develops a sense of self, a sense of direction, and a set of ethics. Values come from being. A strong sense of being leads to an increase of self esteem and sense of potentiality (Moustakis, 1998). Mankind is a sort of creature in progress, one constantly changing. When mankind accepts the sense of becoming or being, he sets in motion a sense of potentiality. Being and non-being need and use one another for the shared outcome of the fruition of life. Being uses non-being to give life meaning, to give drive. Existence can be negated, moved away from if an individual so chooses.

An individual who is aware of non-being, and the threat to living life in full, may be more apt to pursue life with more awareness. "Without this awareness of non-being - that is, awareness of the threats of loss of potentialities in conformism- existence is vapid, unreal, and characterized by lack of concrete self-awareness. But with the confronting of



Non-Being, existence takes on a vitality and immediacy, and the individual experiences a heightened consciousness of himself, his world, and others around him" (May, 1958, p.48). Non-Being makes being richer, makes life more urgent, makes the pursuit of Life seem noble.

## VI.

### The Interdisciplinary Relationship is Revealed

Being and non-being can be understood in a metaphorical sense or in physical reality, as can the Freudian concept of death and life instinct. It is imperative to understand that all four terms, being and non-being and life and death instinct have two separate parts: the biological and the metaphoric (philosophical). The concepts Freud employed and used in his writings are both the biological and philosophical precursors of being and non-being, a term later used by the existentialists. Both traditional psychoanalysis and existential psychology use the same principle that life forces (being, life instinct) are in constant conflict with the forces of death (non-being, death instinct) and that the forces of death will ultimately triumph (Freud, 1950). Both schools of thought are in agreement that mankind is continually in struggle with his potential, and that a true sense of tragedy in life is evident in the struggle of man (Yalom, 1980).

Where Freud left off with his heavily biological frame of reference for his instincts, the existentialists pick up. One example of the Freudian instincts coupled with being and non-being can be found in the work of Camus. In Albert Camus's essay on The Myth of Sisyphus, we come to know the plight of the ancient boulder roller in a different light. As the Myth goes, Sisyphus was sentenced to an eternity in the afterlife of pushing a large boulder up a mountain, only to have it roll back down again once it reaches the zenith. The myth itself produces a kind of fatalism, a sort of nihilistic interpretation of the kind of wicked punishment the gods can deliver for an eternity. The myth could be seen metaphorically as the plight of humankind, we are all doomed to the predetermined conclusion of death (Camus, 1955). The question of why we must die and the eternal question of the meaning of the struggle (life: pushing the boulder up the hill) is one that has been foremost on the minds of mankind for thousands of years.

Camus poses an answer to us to the myth of Sisyphus, the end is predetermined, so we must make meaning from our life, make each hour count. There is dignity and meaning in the struggle. In theory and in practice, both concepts of Freud and the existentialists are once again linked. Life (pushing the boulder) can be viewed as both the life instinct and as being in the biological sense, and as being, in the

metaphorical sense. In the myth, the death instinct (the sentence) has already been passed, and now meaning must be found in what would seem like a pointless existence.

The existential concept of being is an extension of the metaphorical meaning of the life instinct. Where the life instinct tells us of Eros, the literal drive to exist and procreate, being tells us how to live and how to get along in the state of the life instinct. Being-In-The-World tells us the how and specifies the actualizing of a meaningful existence. I believe Being-In-The-World is an extension of the Life Instinct, the how of "enduring life" according to Freud. Life may have been "endured" for Freud or other determinists, but a way to take process and enjoy life is to lead it in an authentic manner, through Being-In-The-World being.

Meaning can be made in life and even though the biological certainty of the death instinct will surely prevail, the life instinct serves to transcend us and our actions, to make meaning for ourselves.

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