Playing with Polarities of Existence:  
Toward Understanding a Pivotal Passage in the Life and Work of Rollo May

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Abstract

In this chapter the author applies an existential-dialectical-phenomenological (EDP) method toward understanding two so-called case histories, which in reality are self-analyses, in the works of Rollo May. In these two self-analytic case histories, May describes a pivotal passage in his life which richly anticipates the major themes of his prolific and productive contributions to existential-humanistic psychology.

In a 1987 interview with the author (Hannush, 1999a), Rollo May responded to a question regarding a clinical vignette that appeared in one of his writings by affirming, on the one hand, that the patient, Philip, in this case history was May himself in disguise and, on the other hand, by adding that the case history was a composite that contained, at least, some autobiographical elements. Here is what May had to say:

Yes, I am Philip, incidentally. Philip is, as he is presented that book [Freedom and Destiny], a composite of different characters and that part of it is certainly me. It’s amazing how much they are alike, isn’t it. I never realized that. Once I write something I forget it and I may write it over again. (Hannush, 1999a, p. 133)

After publishing my interview with Rollo May and confirming my hunch that there was a striking resemblance between the case history of “Philip” and the life history of May himself, I came upon Robert H. Abzug’s discovery that Rollo May had also disguised himself behind the case history of “Charles D”, that appeared in a much earlier publication, entitled The Springs of Creative Living: A Study of Human Nature and God (May, 1940). According to Abzug (1999),

May’s case history of Charles D. is literally one of self-analysis. From beginning to end, with only minor details changed, Charles D.’s history is Rollo May’s history. Many of the quotations from Charles D. come almost verbatim from May’s own
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Now Abzug had interviewed May, and, as indicated in the above quotation, seemingly had access to May’s “diaries and letters”. In fact, Abzug was intending to write a biography of May which has not materialized as of today. Abzug does not say, as does May in my own interview with him regarding the case of Philip, that May himself owned up to the fact that he was Charles himself. The inference, however, seems incontrovertibly and unambiguously clear.

In this chapter, I will apply an existential-dialectical-phenomenological (EDP) method to these two so-called case histories or self-analyses in an effort to understand a pivotal passage in Rollo May’s life (Hannush, 1999a; see also Bilmes, 1978; De Carvalho, 1999; and Schneider, 1999) which richly anticipates the major themes of his prolific and productive contributions to existential-humanistic psychology (See Hannush, 2002, Chapter Five; 2001; 1999b).

Method

The existential-dialectical-phenomenological (EDP) method outlined here is a variation on a method that I first developed under the guidance and mentorship of my dissertation director, Amedeo Giorgi, in 1981. The method was originally tailored to the rigorous study of linkage between the lives and works of John B. Watson and B. F. Skinner (Hannush, 1983). It was later applied toward understanding the autobiographical work of the American novelist Richard Wright (Hannush, 1985). Recently, in another version, it was applied once more to understanding cultural tilts (Hannush, 2007). The theoretical underpinning of the EDP method is described in my article, “An Existential-Dialectical-Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Cultural Tilts: Implications for Multicultural Research and Practice” (Hannush, 2007). In the present study, four methodological steps are adapted to the nature of the present project. But before describing these steps, a brief definition of the term "dialectics" is in order.

Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery distinguish between "dialectics-as-ontology" and "dialectics-as-epistemology". “Dialectics-as-ontology refers to a view of reality as the dynamic interplay of opposing forces [or polarities], whereas dialectics-as-epistemology refers to a method of reasoning by which one searches for understanding through the clash of opposing arguments [or forces]” (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996, pp. 18-19). This kind of methodical understanding aims at elucidating the essential complementarity between seemingly oppositional and conflictual polarities, such as separateness versus connectedness. In this dialectical sense, seeming functional opposites define, require, and lend meaning to each other. Without connectedness, there can be no separateness. The initial tension-producing imbalance provides an opportunity for the achievement of balance-producing complementarity between what first appeared as mutually exclusive opposite forces (For a more in-depth discussion of dialectics, see Hannush, 2007).

Four Methodological Steps

1. After familiarizing himself thoroughly with the life and work of the subject, Rollo May, and the two so-called case histories or self-analyses in particular, the researcher captures
the heart of the life narrative as described by the subject, while remaining faithful to the subject’s language.
2. The researcher distills the subject’s narrative into concise language.
3. The researcher embarks upon the transitional step of moving back-and-forth between the language of the subject, as distilled in Step 2, and a description of the subject’s life narrative through the language of dialectics. Here the researcher is attempting to be selectively attuned to and focused on those dialectically thematic tensions in the life narrative that the subject is struggling with and attempting to resolve. For example, the researcher tries to answer the question, "Are there polar needs or desires that the subject is attempting to resolve which at first appear as opposites and mutually exclusive, but, at a deeper level, prove to be complementary?"
4. The researcher moves toward capturing essential life themes from a dialectical perspective. The researcher retells the life story of the subject in dialectical terms.

**Rollo May: A Brief Biography**

Rollo May, the first son of six children, was born in Ada, Ohio on April 21, 1909. May described his parents as austere disciplinarians and anti-intellectuals. He was “raised in the Protestant culture of the small-town Midwest by a devout mother and a father who was a YMCA field secretary” (Abzug, 1999, p. 60). When May’s oldest sister had a psychotic episode, his father attributed it to too much education. After receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree, with a major in English, from Oberlin College in 1930, he spent three years teaching at Anatolia College in Thessaloniki, Greece. In Europe, he traveled, painted, and studied psychology at Alfred Adler’s seminars in Vienna. After returning to the United States, he pursued a divinity degree at Union Theological Seminary. There he studied with Reinhold Niebuhr and with Paul Tillich, who became a mentor and a life-long friend. “Under Tillich’s tutelage in particular, he had plunged into Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Berdyaev, and other Christian radicals or critics of the faith” (Abzug, 1999, p. 60). May’s deeply religious orientation, in relation to which his interest in philosophy and psychology were subordinated, is revealed in a diary entry written in 1936: “But religion especially is in crying need of its leader. I am fitted to be that leader. I feel called to it […] The world calls – I must give" (Abzug, 1999, p. 60).

Between 1940 and 1947, May confronted death at the hands of tuberculosis and, almost simultaneously, gave up an established career in the Christian ministry for the riskier trade of psychological counseling. These two events together constituted an extraordinary turning point in May’s life, one that drove him in search of a more authentic confrontation with life. (Abzug, 1999, p. 59)

After taking time off from Union Theological Seminary to work as a student counselor at Michigan State University, he returned to earn his degree in 1938. After his graduation, he married and accepted a position as a minister in a New Jersey church. In 1942, having become deeply dispirited, he resigned his ministry position and started his doctoral work in psychology at Columbia University. After recovering from his contracted disease of tuberculosis, May opened his counseling practice in 1945. He earned his doctorate degree from Columbia in 1949.
Overworking and overextending himself, May attributes the fact of his succumbing to the disease of tuberculosis to “trying to be something I wasn’t” (Abzug, 1999, p. 61). Additionally, May provides the explanation of having found “spiritual reality” in his counseling work and not in his work as a pastor in a suburban church as a reason for his career shift and change of calling.

In my interview with Rollo May (Hannush, 1999a), May states that upon seeing Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman he was shaken to the core of his being. In response to my invitation to reflect on this, he says this: “You see, the salesman, Willie Loman, was like my father. [...] I thought that at the time I saw this drama that the drama was written about my father” (p. 130). Like his father, a Loman-like tragic figure, May had believed in the Horatio Alger myth – that if you worked hard, then you will achieve success. At a critical junction in his life’s journey, a pivotal passage that will be central in this study, May had become conscious of the contradictions and opposites within himself and, with uncanny acuity, he glimpsed the presence of these contradictions and opposites in the American culture.

I knew American characteristics – such as generosity, friendliness, courage to risk an experiment, energy – of which I was proud despite the fact that they go hand-in-hand with their opposites such as violence and money-mindedness [...] Loyalty to my country made all the stronger my hatred of national violence and spiritual vacuity. (Hannush, 1999a, p. 130)

In the interview, May describes his parents as having been strict and sexually repressed midwesterners. May had this to say about his father’s attribution of May’s older sister psychotic breakdown to "too much education": “I sensed how inhumane and destructive this remark was” (p. 130). May appropriated what he calls mid-western character strengths of courage, generosity, hard work, perseverance, and experimental risk-taking, but at the same time describes himself as having been “to some extent maimed by the disease of anti-intellectualism” which he hated (p. 131). He grew up surrounded by "a kind of religious evangelism" of which he was a part and at the same time, he grew to hate. But even though he grew not to like it, it had given him "a kind of strength". Similarly, he describes his father in ambivalent terms. Although insensitive and anti-intellectual, he was a psychologically strong man. May has this to say about his father’s insensitivity: “[My older sister] was a very pathetic person and she suffered a great deal, and he [my father] never had much sympathy for her” (p. 131). May says further of his father: “[From] my father I got the idea that life is serious, that one ought to do the best one can, one ought to serve other people the best one can – all these are aspects of being. I would not have used the word "being" then, but I later realized that it fitted my background” (p. 134). The word "being" itself he appropriated from Paul Tillich. May here links his personal and vocational passionate preoccupation with the quest for understanding our sense of being – the main concern of his life.

May describes his mother, who was orphaned as a child, as a “strong woman […] [who] had a very bad temper” (Hannush, 1999a, p. 132). “[My parents] used to fight a lot. She was also very courageous. She raised six children and I have to admire her for this kind of courage. Nevertheless, I never got along very well with her” (p. 132).

Reflecting on the year in which he experienced a "nervous breakdown" while teaching English to Greek students in the spring of his second year at Anatolia College, May says, “As the year went on I found that my habits and principles, coming from a typical small town, mid-
western childhood, such as hard work, fidelity, honesty and so on, stood me less and less […] [The] rules, principles, values by which I used to work and live simply did not suffice anymore” (Hannush, 1999a, p. 132). He came to the self-discovery that he had to let go of his moralistic and rigid principles and learn to be appreciatively attuned to the beauty of and kinship to life in the here-and-now.

Application of Method

METHODOLOGICAL STEP ONE

After familiarizing himself thoroughly with the life and work of the subject, Rollo May, and the two so-called case histories or self-analyses in particular, the researcher captures the heart of the life narrative as described by the subject, while remaining faithful to the subject’s language.

Rollo May as “Charles D.” (May, 1940)

The case of Charles D. is described in the second and third chapters of May’s book, The Springs of Creative Living. In Chapter Two, which is entitled “But What Kind of Meaning?”, “Charles” first appears under the sub-heading, “Authoritarianism – Thou Shalt and Shalt Not”. Charles, we are told, is in his early thirties. He sought counseling because he was ambivalent about his marriage decision. He belonged to a mid-western family. His parents are described as intelligent, hard-working. But most of all, they were continually concerned about “moral details” and with “strong character”. Additionally, they displayed “a great aversion” toward sexuality. More than that, their marriage is described as not having been a happy one. He recalls several quarrels that occurred during his boyhood.

As a college student, Charles was deeply religious. He focused his energies on developing his “character”. But even though he had “rich religious experience” in his junior and senior years, “his outstanding memory of his college life was one of loneliness and isolation”. Although he was generally liked, he did not establish close friendships. And even though he had several girlfriends, he was not able to “move into sound love”. His non-coital sexual play and masturbatory activity were followed by deep feelings of guilt.

May also describes the Charles of this period as being “highly moral in the authoritarian sense”. He set up rules – regarding time management, study habits, physical exercise, health, and so on, and resolutions and focused his energies on meeting them. A diary entry contained a maxim to follow in order to develop his character: “keeping my body at its best, giving attention only to what is right, controlling my will”. Interestingly, when he tried to combat his loneliness by making rules to be more friendly, he ended up making himself “more self-conscious”. Similarly, his resolutions to cease masturbating only intensified his “temptation to masturbate”.

After graduating from college, Charles taught at an American college in Egypt. He fell in love with an American girl, who lost interest in him, which he attributed to his inability to express his affection for her. During the first two years there, he continued to focus his energies on building his character, “making and remaking resolutions about his life and work”. His ultimate resolution was to become Christ-like. His deepest desire was to appropriate the Christian attitudes of patience, sympathy, strength of purpose, moral strength, and devotion to the call of
teaching. Again, even though he was generally liked by his colleagues, “his loneliness increased”. In spite of his vacillation between the joy of solitude and the heavy burden of isolation, he “clung tenaciously to his religion”. His belief in God was “most important” for him in this period of his life. He felt that he was God’s “special representative. He wanted to have an impact on the “character development” of his students. Still, in this endeavor he felt self-conscious. He came to the realization that the students were discretely laughing at the teachers, including Charles. They perceived them as idealistic hypocrites who were unable to practice true Christian love. He came to the realization that “our emphasis on character development was defeating itself” and that it was a “self-centered” endeavor. Instead of connecting him to others, it was closing him off from others. It dawned upon him that something was wrong and that his “life had not been real, solid, genuine”.

It was at this time that Charles experienced a “nervous breakdown”. The “breakdown occurred simultaneously with the realization that the meaning by which he had been living was destroyed” (May, 1940, p. 47). To find a cure, he had to find a “new meaning”, a new life scheme. In the previous year, sensing the impending failure of his life style, he had “thrown himself into his work with increasing vigor” in a desperate effort to shore up his previous pattern. “The human being fights hardest for his psychological pattern just before it collapses” (May, 1940, p. 47). May describes this life style as an “authoritarian kind of life”. An authoritarian person, says May, attempts to live by rules and principles external to himself. The authoritarian individual, continues May, “finds his true meaning in life in subjecting himself and his desires to this [external] structure [or authority] by dint of a strong will” (May, 1940, p. 48).

The case history of Charles continues under the next subheading, entitled “Romanticism – The Full and Free Life”. After a one month rest and a “partial treatment by a psychotherapist”, Charles comes to the realization that his moralism had been used by him as means of shoring up his prestige and pampering himself. He had consequently become focused upon himself. What he needed was to “forget” himself, to let himself go, by letting his rigid rules go. He needed to set himself free by pursuing the “spontaneous life”. This he came to call his “romantic period”. He joined a group of roving musicians. His inhibitions subsided, as his “senses came to life”. He fell in love with an attractive and talented American girl, who similarly was reacting “against a too rigorous background”. He was no longer hesitant and timid, for he approached this relationship with “courage and freedom”. Upon returning to his teaching he separated from her “successfully”. His orientation toward work changed. He did not take it too seriously. He was no longer overly conscientious. He made more close friends and “fell in love with five different women”, who had a difficult time separating from him. But now, with his new orientation, this “was not his worry”. He now worshiped “experience” and Walt Whitman’s writings became his “bible”.

Still, Charles wanted to “contribute to his fellow-man”. He came to the conclusion that he could help others, who had been failed by religion, overcome their “restrictive dogmas” and their fears by understanding themselves through psychoanalysis and thus cultivate the courage to “let themselves go in love”. But at the same time he also started to doubt the applicability of his new vision of understanding and love to resolving larger issues, such as the emotionally-laden irrational conflict between the nations of Europe.

Charles returned to America to teach and to assume the mental and financial responsibility that fell upon him after his parents were divorced. He began to realize that “the Whitmanesque
view” did not account for the tragic elements of human experience, of the “dance of life”. Consequently, his doubts regarding his new meaning or purpose in life intensified. Although he was “still falling in and out of love, even with college girls whom he taught” (May, 1940, p. 54), he had more difficulty surviving these affairs. In a diary entry, he writes, “Life is too much for me”. After succumbing to an illness and taking two months to recover, he changed his job and moved along a plateau for two years” until he had to face “the marriage decision” which necessitated his seeking counseling.

May now reflects on the dialectical tension between authoritarianism – with its emphasis on determinism and rigid external structure and romanticism – with its emphasis on freedom and self-expression from the inside out: “It is significant that Charles D., in his earlier partial psychotherapeutic treatment, absorbed the romantic self-expressive emphasis without the corresponding structure to serve as a balance” (May, 1940, p. 55). May retrospectively ruminates that structure provides the necessary complementary pole to “a creative dialectic of human personality”. Just like Jean Jacque Rousseau, Charles (May) finds a contradiction in himself and in human life, “which gives a tragic depth to human existence”:

Rousseau was rebelling against sterile rationalism of the eighteenth century French drawing room, and Charles D. was reacting against Pharisaic authoritarianism. In the very reaction, however, one uses the structure one attacks as a pivot-point. […] Some “play of opposites” is necessary to give a dynamic balance to personality. (May, 1940, p. 58)

The next subheading is entitled “A Dialectic of Personality”, of which the previous sentence in the quotation is an example. Here Charles’s dialectical dilemma is described in the following terms: “Charles D. […] became more rigid in his authoritarianism as he felt it collapsing under him, and he pushed ahead to more experience when his romantic way of life was tottering” (May, 1940, pp. 58-59). Charles paid a mental health price for not being able to find a balance and hold a flux between determinism and freedom. Charles “fell into ill-health when he assumed himself to be either entirely determined (as in the authoritarian stage) or entirely free (as in the romantic period)” (May, 1940, p. 60). He lacked the creativity and courage to “avail himself of his freedom and the humility to place himself in accord with the structure of life” (p. 60).

May continues to delve into Charles’s case history in Chapter Three of his book, The Springs of Creative Living. In the subheading entitled “Charles D.’s Crisis”, May describes in further detail Charles’s decisional dilemma: To marry or not marry Helen R. It is a classic approach-avoidance, emotion-laden conflict. The emotions run the gamut from passionate enthusiasm, to jealousy, to fear and flight. Helen is described by Charles as being attractive, well-educated, and comes from a good familial background. But, she is also described as not “sufficiently high type” and did not have a “strong” enough of a personality. To avoid following the divorce pattern set by his parents, Charles was resolved to “keep his ideals high”. Yet at other moments he ruminated, “Perhaps he could help her develop after marriage to be the "strong" kind of personality he could love” (May, 1940, p. 64). As May sees it, Charles not only intellectualized, but also spiritualized his problem by elevating it to the “altruistic sphere”. By hiding behind a façade of “unselfishness”, Charles is hiding his selfishness. His superiority is masquerading as unselfishness. May reflects on Charles’s indecision in the following manner:
As had been his habit in previous emotional disturbances, he filled his diary with introspective searchings of his mind and heart, trying to decide intellectually whether or not this was the girl he should marry. This endeavoring to settle emotional problems via the intellectual route is a common error in our modern culture, and one of the central contributions of modern depth-psychology is in pointing out that the major problems of life are emotional rather than intellectual and need to be "clarified" rather than settled by logic. (May, 1940, p. 62)

In the section entitled “Weakness and Strength”, May describes Charles’s ambivalence as a “weakness-strength dilemma”. Because Charles is insecure (weak) himself, he cannot tolerate Helen’s weakness. He wants Helen to embody the strength he lacks. Charles’s idealism and sense of specialness and superiority compensated, according to May, for Charles’s weakness. His idealistic striving toward perfection was stimulated by Helen’s imperfection. Again, May reflects on Charles’s problematic situation:

Being soundly in love means a direct movement of the total personality, in which one person reaches out toward another on all levels without bothering much about the perfections and imperfections involved. One can define love as that attraction which appeals to one’s strength rather than to one’s weakness, that attraction which is not a compensation for one’s own inferiority and not a means of finding neurotic dependence. (May, 1940, p. 68)

May, once again, links Charles’s personal dilemma to our common cultural dilemma: “The weakness-strength dilemma is fairly common in our culture” (May, 1940, p. 66). May then asks, “What was the real flaw in Charles D.’s personality which had kept him from making a successful marriage decision?” (May, 1940, p. 70). His answer is that “he could not achieve a [balance in the] polarity between his freedom and determination” (p. 70). Charles could not accept that to a certain degree he was determined. He could only gain his relative freedom when he simultaneously accepts his determination.

“He could not relax and accept the facts of creation” (May, 1940, p. 71). Charles could not accept that he was partly determined by his body, by people in his environment, and by his destiny, which included the facts of life and death. Thus he could not fully enjoy pleasures such as eating or sexual love. He could not make use of his determination or necessity as way to cultivate his character. He could not use these determining forces in a creative fashion. Consequently, he could not use his freedom to mold his own character development. Instead of accepting these determining forces and thus gaining relative freedom, he enslaved himself by insisting on perfection – “he must choose perfectly and the girl must be perfect” (May, 1940, p. 71). He assumed a God-like position of superiority by judging Helen “minutely” and by assuming responsibility on her behalf. “He acted as though he were the arbiter of her destiny” (p. 71). After discovering all this in therapy and thus achieving “clarification”, Charles was able to accept his own imperfections and “could make his marriage decision healthily and courageously” (May, 1940, p. 72). His marriage decision came several weeks after his therapy ended: He “proposed to Helen and she accepted” (p. 69). A year after Charles’s marriage, he said to his...
therapist: “It turned out to be an excellent marriage […]. [It was] certainly worth the neurotic agonies I went through at the time of my consultations” (pp. 69-71).

In the last section of Chapter Three, entitled, “Making One’s Own Decisions”, May states that to be free does not mean giving expression to one’s impulses and desires without selectively keeping them in check.

This was Charles D.’s mistake: he acted as though freedom consisted of promiscuous flowing out of oneself in dominating others. The failure of this concept of freedom is shown in his inability to make decisions. He was not autonomous; he was in reality enslaved by his need to dominate. There is no such thing as “pure” freedom – we can only use our freedom to decide for and with other people and things. (May, 1940, pp. 73-74)

**Rollo May as “Philip” (May, 1981)**

On January 14, 1987 I interviewed Rollo May at his home in Tiburon, California. In that interview (Hannush, 1999a) the following question-and-answer transpired:

M. J. Hannush:

Dr. May, in a chapter entitled, “One Man’s Passage” in your book *Freedom and Destiny* [May, 1981], you present a detailed description of a case history of a man named “Philip”. Toward the end of Philip’s story you make mention of the following: “For some reason not clear to me at the time but obvious later, Philip then told me about his three years at Robert College in Istanbul where, on his graduation from college, he had gone to teach. The second year there he had felt painfully lonely due chiefly to the isolation in a foreign land where the English-speaking group was small and boring, and teaching English to Turkish boys was not that absorbing. Philip had followed his usual defense. He threw himself into his work with even greater zeal, but the harder he worked the more isolated he felt. Finally he collapsed and had to go to bed for a couple of weeks. This he called his nervous breakdown. He then changed his life style, he told me. He began to draw, he wandered around drawing poppies in the fields and old mosques in Istanbul, he gave up his habit of rigidly planning his life and began to take flow of energy as it came, but all without aim or sense of direction, isolated, feeling often like nonentity since all of his old ways of proving his worth no longer worked”. Dr. May, this is almost identical to your own early life story…

R. May:

“Yes, I am Philip incidentally. Philip is, as he is presented in that book, a composite of different characters and that part of it is certainly me. It is amazing how much they are alike, isn’t it. I never realized that once I write something I forget it and I may write it over again.” (p. 133)

After graduating from Oberlin College in 1930, with a Bachelor of Arts’ degree in English, May spent three years as a missionary teacher at Anatolia College, in Thessaloniki, Greece. In his case history of “Philip”, May simply substituted “Turkey” for “Greece.”
In this case history, which is entitled, “One Man’s Passage”, May divides the life narrative into seven sections, the titles of which are intriguing:

1. The Fear of Abandonment.
2. The Acknowledgment of Destiny.
3. The Confronting of Mother.
4. Little Philip.
5. Anger as a Path to Freedom.
6. The Green-Blue Lad.

Philip is described as being in his middle fifties when he enters therapy. He is gripped by jealousy because his partner and lover of several years, Nicole, expressed a desire to feel free to seek simultaneous relations with other men. She had threatened to act upon this unless Philip married her, which he was reluctant to do because of his two failed previous marriages. Philip is an architect; Nicole is a writer. They both have children from their previous marriages. As May, the therapist, listens to Philip the client he comes to construe an image of Philip as “a man of powerful idealism, reaching upward toward the sky which promised freedom, but at the same time unintegrated with and hopelessly bound to the mud [of the earth]” (p. 25). The reader is told that although the relationship between Philip and Nicole started off on a very harmonious accord – where there was tenderness, warmth, sexual enjoyment, and intellectual stimulation, there had also been an episode of betrayal, whereby Nicole had connected with a former intimate college friend with whom Nicole had fallen in love while on a trip to put her children in school. “Philip’s world collapsed” (p. 26). But after a period of six weeks “Nicole got over her infatuation […] [and] was back in love with Philip” (p. 26). Because of his “need for security” (p. 26) Philip did not question Nicole’s promise of future fidelity. He offered her further financial support to keep her contented in his relationship with him.

But it was a second episode of infidelity that triggered Philip’s seeking of therapy. Between episodes, Philip had his doubts about Nicole’s allegiance to him and her motives for staying with him. But in an entry in a diary he says, “But I am very lonely” (p. 27). Upon his discovery of the second betrayal, Philip tries to be more accepting and accommodating of Nicole’s actions. He asks himself, “Are we living in a new age, […] when promises and rules and roles are all thrown overboard?” (p. 28). Although May the therapist does not say this directly to Philip, he feels that these so-called “principles [or beliefs] seemed to me to be rationalizations with a masochistic feature” (p. 28).

After a short hopefulness-restoring hiatus, yet a third incident transpired. May asks, “Why didn’t Philip break off this relationship?” (p. 29). The feeling of love is not a sufficient answer, May writes. He describes Nicole as needing her “space” and “freedom” (p. 29). What, May asks further, accounts for Philip’s inaction, paralysis, or passivity? Jealousy, he states, has been Philip’s “Achilles heel all his life” (p. 29). And this includes his earlier two marriages, even though he was the one who initiated the divorces. May conjectures that, although Philip has been unaware of it, the roots of his jealousy started in the very early years of his life. Because of the time limitation imposed on the length of therapy – six weeks, May mentions that he had to use certain therapeutic techniques that he did not typically use. Although May does not name these
techniques, the reader can surmise some of them from May’s description of his therapeutic mediations. “One of my tasks in therapy with Philip was to get across to him that this struggle he was engaged in was bound to be self-defeating […]. I pointed out to Philip how hanging on to this way of life [searching for women that will undo his childhood losses] was also hanging on to his mother” (pp. 33-35). In other words, May found himself using a didactic-interpretive therapeutic technique because of the short-term nature of the therapy. It is also possible that the use of the empty chair therapeutic techniques may not have been something May typically used in a naturally unfolding joint therapeutic journey. “At my suggestion, Philip had a conversation with his dead mother in my office. In the fantasy, his mother was sitting in the opposite chair” (p. 37). Or, in the same vein, asking Philip to bring a childhood photograph of himself and instructing him: “Philip, this little boy is in that period which you walled off, encapsulated. Please call him back to mind now. Have him sit in this other chair. Talk to him, and let him talk to you” (p. 39). And yet again, May instructs Philip to “Imagine Maude [his sister] sitting in the chair now. She’s been dead for two moths. Tell her what you really felt” (p. 43). And lastly, May instructs Philip in the last therapy session: “Please close your eyes and imaging yourself back at that time in your life [his three years at Robert College in Istanbul] […]. Be that young man who had that "breakdown" […] What is he doing?” (p. 49).

1. The Fear of Abandonment (pp. 30-32):

May describes Philip’s mother as having been a borderline schizophrenic. She was emotionally unstable and given to hysterical blowups. In her treatment of Philip she oscillated between tender, loving care and cruelty. Philip had an older sister who was without doubt a schizophrenic. She later spent time in a mental hospital and had subsequently died just before Philip started therapy.

Philip thus grew up in a home with two unpredictable women. He came to see his early mission in life as involving vigilance toward his mother and sister and rescuing them when the need arose. “Philip would understandably not be free, but rather would require that he be continuously on guard or on duty” (p. 30). May remarks that Philip was to reenact the vigilance he acquired early in life in his relationship with Nicole. He adds the following comment: “Freedom in such a situation would be like Michelangelo’s half-finished statues of slaves: freedom within the bonds of slavery” (p. 31).

Just like his mother, Nicole alternated between being lovingly tender and brutally cruel. Her brutal honesty about her infidelities made her harshness doubly difficult to bear for supposedly she was acting upon the “principle” of truthfulness. Her unpredictability simply repeated an “old pattern” established early in Philip’s life. In fact, May conjectures that it probably was critical to Nicole’s attractiveness in Philip’s eyes. Having learned that his survival as a child was contingent upon assuming responsibility for his mother and his sister, he now found himself having difficulty breaking himself free from the burden of excessive responsibility toward women.

Another reason he could not break free was his sense of responsibility for the woman; his survival as a child had depended on how he responded to his mother and sister. Both of his previous marriages had been with women who “needed” him. He had a strong sense of duty to take care of women; the more crazily they behaved, the
stronger was his need to take responsibility for them. These things were in some way twisted into the cords that bound him to Nicole and enslaved him. (p. 31)

Philip has been visited upon by “destiny” in the form of Nicole (p. 31). But instead of seeing it as a “roadblock”, May views it as “an opportunity – indeed, a requirement – to work through the remaining problem with his mother and sister” (p. 32). It is only by seizing this opportunity that Philip will be enabled to achieve “personal freedom” (p. 32). A neurotic problem, which is a part of a larger complex whole, can be “fateful” in that it surfaces at a time in one’s life and demands attention and resolution. From this perspective, it is a blessing in disguise. In his last therapy hour, Philip links his transformation in therapy to his transformative experience that followed his so-called “nervous breakdown” in Turkey [in reality, Greece]. “Philip subconsciously associated that [best] summer with his present moment [in the last therapy session]” (pp. 50-51). May interprets this as an expression of a therapeutic movement “from despair to joy”.

As a child, Philip had felt the pain of loneliness. Additionally, he had experienced guilt at being healthy while his sister suffered from schizophrenia. This repressed guilt surfaced at times through the symptom of physical pain, pain in the neck. A (physical) symptom does not arise by sheer “accident”, but rather is a revelation of one’s “inner destiny” (p. 32).

2. The Acknowledging of Destiny (pp. 32-37):

May begins this section by asking Philip to bring a photograph of himself dating back to the first two years of his life. Upon inspecting the anxious vigilance in the child-Philip’s eyes, May infers that Philip “must have imbibed with his mother’s milk the fateful "truth" that one cannot basically trust the world” (p. 33). A “schizoid mother” and a sister with a disturbed mind made up Philip’s world in his first two years of his life. Philip had to adapt to this difficult destiny. Philip survived by developing an interpersonal pattern of placating and pleasing others and an ability to detach himself when in danger and keeping his real thoughts secret. Paradoxically, it was this acquired “talent” that included “hypersensitivity” to the intentions and desires of others – an almost “psychic quality”, that contributed to the making of a successful architect and a likable person, especially in the eyes of women-lovers. “But one cannot make such compromises without penalty. The penalty came from the fact that whenever a relationship got below a certain depth, Philip became panicky” (p. 33). May likens the process of acquiring this compensatory relational style to the imprinting of a duck to a rabbit who repeatedly nipped [the duck] to drive it away to no avail. He then interjects, “I [Rollo May] felt like crying out to the duck [Philip], For God’s sake, go away and find your own mother! Don’t continue just being bitten and hurt” (p. 34). Even in his fifties, May reflects, Philip still looks “in the face of every woman he meets with the silent question: Are you the one who will make up for my loss?” (p. 34)

One of May’s goals in therapy was to help Philip realize the futility of this self-defeating search for a “good mother” to compensate for the “bad mother” of his early years. His primary challenge as a therapist was to assist Philip in confronting and reconciling himself to his fate or destiny. He points out to Philip that to hang on to his mother is to hang on to a relational pattern. The missing mother cannot be restored. By blindly and repeatedly attempting to transform the bad mother into a good mother, Philip is hitting his head against a stone wall. He is at the same
time cutting himself off from new and alternative possibilities. Simply stated, Philip was losing his freedom.

May points out that not only was Philip damaged by his fate, but a gift was also bestowed upon him by his early destiny. May asks rhetorically, “Would Philip have developed these talents which led to his high status in the world of architecture if he had not experienced such a disturbed family life?” (pp. 35-36). Agreeing with Alfred Adler, May adds that creativity can emerge as a compensation for early trauma. Freedom and creative possibilities, May muses, may be born out or in spite of the burden, loneliness, and pain of early childhood and adolescence. Creativity may be the result of the disproportionate disparity between early disappointment and high aspiration. May concludes this section by saying that he wanted to assist Philip in accepting his destiny not “in order to achieve creativity […] but simply because it is” (p. 37).

3. The Confronting of Mother (pp. 37-39):

May then encourages Philip to engage in an imaginary conversation with his dead mother and then to assume the role of his mother in the conversation. From this fantasy exercise, Philip gets in touch with his fear of his mother, of having to prevaricate in order to survive. Additionally, Philip asserts this stage of filial fright has come to an end. Through role reversal he learns that his mother, who had been orphaned, was a courageous woman who passed on her courage to her favorite son, that she did her best in taking care of a large family, and that, although she did not verbalize it, she took special pride in his achievements. The exercise ends upon Philip’s expression of gratitude toward his mother.

4. Little Philip (pp. 39-41):

Next, May encourages Philip to talk to “Little Philip” (as he appears in his photograph as a little boy) and allow the latter to talk back to him. Little Philip tells of “how frightening it was to exist day by day in that atmosphere in the house with two hysterical zombies. It was constant inconstancy, unpredictability, insecurity, and especially loneliness” (p. 39). Little Philip had to be constantly vigilant “for the times they’d get upset”. May encourages the adult Philip to view Little Philip as a guide, a friend, a comforting companion, and a protector; to perceive this part of himself as having not succumbed, but succeeded in the face of his problems. The adult Philip is thereafter grateful for this momentous reunion with his abandoned early self. His feelings of loneliness, emptiness, anxiety, and jealousy begin to subside. The adult Philip exhorts, “I’m not abandoned any more!” (p. 41). Accompanying this discovery is “the awareness of new possibilities”. This is the beginning of “accepting [radical] acceptance” and the movement toward freedom. “Although this does not alter the original lack of basic trust, it does surmount it in the literal meaning of that term” (p. 41).

5. Anger as a Path to Freedom (pp. 41-44):

Next, May addresses Philip’s repression of anger. He helps Philip learn the difference between unhealthy or pathological and healthy or integrative anger. Whereas unhealthy anger “curtails one’s freedom”, healthy anger “makes freedom possible”. May then focuses on an incident in the relational life between Philip and his girlfriend, Nicole. In this incident, Nicole is cruel toward Philip, but Philip is not feelingly responsive to her cruelty. Here is May’s response to this incident:
The reason you don’t feel it is you can’t admit your own cruelty – cruelty to yourself most of all. Today you are surprisingly like the little boy begging Maude [Philip’s sister] and Mother, “Slap me, beat me, anything you wish, so long as you let me keep on living here!” Yes, I know that back in that home you had to be deceitful to survive, you had to cover up what you really felt and thought. You surrendered your freedom. You always tried to foresee what the other person’s reaction would be before you spoke. You hid behind such laudable words as “responsibility”, “dutiful”, “noble son”, and so on. But you must have hated those roles with Maude and your mother.

Philip: Christ, yes! (May, 1981, p. 43)

Thereafter, May makes two additional links. He connects Philip’s repression of anger to his fear of losing control, as did his sister and his mother, thus becoming over-controlled. May also links Philip’s denial of his own feelings to his desire to take care of his sister and his mother. “You always prefer to be hurt rather than to take care of yourself even if it hurts someone else” (p. 44). These linkages, May tells Philip, carry over into his relationship with Nicole.

6. The Green-Blue Lad (pp. 45-48):

At this juncture in therapy, the green-blue lad, who seemed not to have a precise age, appeared in Philip’s fantasies. He personified Philip’s anger. This lad was energetic, honest, open, and spontaneous. He stimulated Philip’s sense of humor, for the lad was almost always on the verge of laughter. This inspired Philip to begin taking life more lightly, something he had not done throughout his life. He now was able to laugh at those times when he felt troubled and defeated. This orientation brought with it a sense of strength and self-efficacy. It opened up new possibilities. At the same time, Philip was getting in touch with his healthy feeling of integrative anger. Simultaneously, his feelings of abandonment and jealousy disappeared. When, “in therapy, he got angry at his mother in his fantasy, this led him, to his great surprise, to reveal how he secretly was appreciative of his mother’s care for him and her gifts to him” (p. 46). Philip was now able to anchor his anger in the objective conditions which precipitated the anger – his mother’s own difficult childhood and her having to take care of a large family without assistance, for examples.

Having confronted his destiny, Philip recovered his anger as a source of strength. “Passivity will not do” (p. 47). Philip is freed from perceiving himself as too “precious”. Philip’s newly found anger was freeing. Through its constructive expression, he gained important insights and was empowered to confront his destiny. “As Beethoven cried, ”I will seize fate by the throat!” And out came the fifth symphony” (p. 48).

7. Loneliness and Rebirth (pp. 48-51):

This section focuses on Philip’s last hour in therapy. In this final session, May asks Philip about his loneliness. Through a free associative response, Philip connects loneliness to honesty and the absence of mothering. May responds,

Isn’t that the loneliness we all experience at times, the kind that is inseparable from the human condition? If you dare to be honestly yourself, you will be lonely. At each
moment in our self-consciousness we are alone. No one else can genuinely come into our sanctum sanctorum. We die alone. No one escapes. This is destiny in the deepest sense. When we recognize this, then we can overcome the loneliness to some extent. We recognize that it is a human loneliness. It means we are all in the same boat, and we can then choose to, or not to, let others into our life. Lo and behold, we then have used the aloneness to be less lonely. (p. 49)

Suddenly Philip, for “some reason not clear at the time but obvious later”, interjects the following story:

Philip then told me about his three years at Robert College in Istanbul, where, on his graduation from college, he had gone to teach. The second year there he had felt painfully alone, due chiefly to the isolation in a foreign land where the English-speaking group was small and boring. And teaching English to Turkish boys was not that absorbing. Philip had followed his usual defense: he threw himself into his work with ever greater zeal. But the harder he worked, the more isolated he felt. Finally he collapsed and had to go to bed for a couple of weeks. This he called his “nervous break-down”. He had then changed his life style, he told me. He began to draw. He wandered around, drawing poppies in the fields and old mosques in Istanbul. He gave up his habit of rigidly planning his life and began to take the flow of energy as it came. But all without aim or sense of direction, isolated, feeling often like a nonentity since all his old ways of proving his worth no longer worked. (p. 49)

After being encouraged by May, by way of a fantasy exercise, to tenderly embrace himself as a young man, and having responded feelingly to this invitation, Philip continues his story.

By accident [that summer, while on vacation] I met a group of fifteen or sixteen artists traveling and doing art as a group, and I got a job with them as a sort of fancy handy man. I traveled and made sketches with them all through the villages along the Caspian Sea. This was the birth of my becoming an architect. (p. 50)

Philip goes on to describe that period “the best summer” he ever had, the summer where he fell in love and lost his virginity “with the greatest of joy.” May reflects that having surrendered “his rigid and compulsive” expectations of life, Philip was able to open himself to “unexpected possibilities” including being surprised by joy. May links the movement “from despair to joy” in this story to a similar movement in this last hour of therapy. May then concludes with his thoughts on the phenomenon of despair. Despair, he says, which can be viewed as an opportunity, can result in insight that in turn can lead to change. He “hoped that Philip would experience his despair constructively” for it can lead to the discovery of one’s hidden talents. Despair can eradicate our fear and open us up to new possibilities and a new freedom.

METHODOLOGICAL STEP TWO

The researcher distills the subject’s narrative into concise language.
May (M1) as Charles (S1)

S1 (May as Charles) is ambivalent about marrying: he wants and does not want to marry. S1 reflects upon his college and post-college years. He views himself as deeply religious. He focuses his energies on developing his character. S1 is ambivalent about sexuality: he wants to experience the pleasure of auto/heterosexuality, but he wants to avoid the consequential guilt. S1 focuses his energies on setting up rules and resolutions such as keeping his body in shape, giving attention only to what is right, controlling his will, and becoming more friendly – the latter to combat his loneliness. S1 discovers that the more and harder he tries to live up to his resolutions, the more he fails.

Again, upon graduating from college and becoming a missionary teacher, S1 focuses his energies on building his character. He wants to acquire Christ-like virtues. His aim is to cultivate the virtues of patience, sympathy, strength of purpose, moral strength, and devotion to the call of teaching. His belief in God is very important to him for he holds to the conviction that he is God’s “special representative” [May’s words]. In time of turmoil, he tenaciously clings to his religion. Yet again, S1 discovers that the more and harder he tried to develop his character, the more he failed. He comes to the realization that his emphasis on character development is defeating itself. Instead of feeling connected to others and feeling less lonely, he feels closed off from others. He comes to the conclusion that something is wrong: that he did not feel selfless, real, solid, and genuine.

Upon the realization that the meaning by which he has been living is collapsing, S1 suffers a nervous breakdown. He had thought that with hard work he could shore up his previous psychosocial pattern that he now labels as an authoritarian way of life where he tried to live by rules and principles external to himself. He now realizes that he had tried to find meaning in life by subjecting himself and his desires to an external structure of authority through the exertion of sheer will. He had believed that his life was mostly determined by forces outside himself. This old belief pattern provided him with a short-cut security at the cost of repressing his desire for affirmation of life, which included his erotic and other instinctual desires. For the sake of short-cut security he was attempting to squeeze all of life and living into a few rules and principles, for he was afraid of life itself. In the end, his soul became sick. He could not free himself from his ingrown prejudices and he could not transcend his self-centeredness which was lurking behind the façade of his seeming unselfishness.

S1 now viewed his moralism as a means of shoring up his prestige and as a way of pampering himself. He focused upon himself. He realizes that what he needed was to forget himself, to let himself go by letting his rigid rules go. He needed to set himself free by pursuing a spontaneous life. He calls this his romantic period. He approached his romantic relationships with courage and freedom. His orientation toward work changed. He ceased to take life too seriously. He worshiped experience. Walt Whitman’s writings became his bible.

Still S1 wanted to contribute to his fellow-man. He wanted to help others, whose religious beliefs had failed them, to acquire the courage to let themselves go in love. But he also started to doubt the applicability of his new vision to the resolution of larger issues such as conflict between nations. He came to the realization that his Whitmanesque view did not account for the
tragic elements of human experience. Consequently, his doubts regarding his new meaning or purpose in life intensified.

M1 (May as psychotherapist) interjects and reflects on the dialectic between past authoritarian lifestyle and present romanticist life-style. He assesses that as a result of his earlier partial psychotherapeutic treatment, S1 absorbed, reactively, the romantic self-expressive orientation to living without the corresponding structure to serve as a balance. M1 ruminates that structure provides the necessary complementary pole. Consequently, he was not able to acquire the leeway necessary for the play of opposites in order to achieve relative balance in his orientation to life. Just as he became more rigid in his authoritarian orientation as he felt it collapsing, he pushed ahead in his romantic way of life as it was collapsing. He lacked the creative courage to avail himself of either the structure of determinism or the freedom of spontaneous possibilities.

According to M1, when S1 was faced with a major life-decision – whether or not to marry and lacking this dynamic balance between freedom and determinism, he became frozen in a posture of ambivalence which he labeled as S1’s “weakness-strength dilemma”. While in the grip of his ambivalent stance toward Helen, he experienced a range of emotions that ran the gamut from passionate enthusiasm, to jealousy, to fear and flight. Because S1 was insecure (weak), himself, he could not tolerate his girl-friend’s weakness. He wanted Helen to embody the strength he lacked. He used his sense of idealism, specialness, and superiority to compensate for his own inferiority. His sense of idealistic striving toward perfection and his domineering attitude toward Helen was stimulated by Helen’s imperfection and seeming dependence. S1, as M1 sees it, could not accept and make creative use of the determining forces in his life – including the imperfections it bestowed upon him and consequently could not feel free. He thus enslaved himself by insisting on perfection. He wanted to look for the perfect woman or a woman he can make perfect. Additionally, M1 introspects, S1 engaged in two more self-deceptive and self-protective maneuvers in his approach to Helen and the question of marriage: 1. He hid behind the façade of selflessness or unselfishness to conceal his self-centeredness or selfishness; 2. He endeavored to settle his deeply emotional problems intellectually, which M1 says is a common error in Western culture. All this explains why S1 was ambivalent about this potentially life-transforming decision.

May (M2) as Philip (S2)

S2 (May as Philip) is in his fifties upon entering therapy. He is described by M2 (May as psychotherapist) as an idealistic man, whose idealism promises unlimited freedom, yet it is an idealism that is unintegrated with reality. S2’s presenting problem is that he is gripped with feelings of jealousy and betrayal by his girlfriend, Nicole. Additionally, S2 is paralyzed by a sense of inaction and passivity in his relationship to Nicole. Because of his need for security, M2 adds, S2 bends backwards to accept and accommodate Nicole’s intermittent infidelity. M2 traces the roots of S2’s jealousy, which has been his Achilles’ heel all his life, to the early years of his life.

M2 provides his reader with a summary of S2’s early life and upbringing. He describes S2’s early life project as that of being vigilant in relation to, standing by, and rescuing his mentally disordered mother and his sister. M2 reflects that part of S2’s early destiny was not to be free, for
As a child, S2 learned that his survival was contingent upon assuming responsibility for his mother and sister. M2 adds that S2 was to reenact the vigilance he acquired early in life in his relationship with Nicole. Nicole’s unpredictability, he tells us, repeated an old pattern established early in S2’s life. Similarly, S2 had reenacted the same life drama in his two previous marriages with women who “needed” him and for whom he assumed responsibility. M2 interjects that therapeutic movement occurred when S2 was able to transform his early, fateful, and destined roadblock to freedom, which surfaced in the present in the form of painful loneliness and painful psychosomatic symptoms, into an opportunity for achieving personal freedom.

M2 tells us that as a consequence of his early upbringing, S2 was unable to develop a basic trust in his world. In order to survive, S2 had to develop an interpersonal pattern of placating and pleasing others and an ability to remain detached from others when in danger and keeping his real thoughts secret. Paradoxically, M2 reflects, S2’s hypersensitivity to the desires and intentions of others became a “talent” that contributed to his choice of vocation and his becoming a likable person, especially in the eyes of women-lovers. The mental health cost came from the fact that whenever a relationship got beyond a certain depth, S2 experienced panic. M2 tells us that even in his fifties, S2 searched for a compensation for his early loss of secure attachment in the faces of mother-like women.

M2 set a therapeutic goal to help S2 realize the futility of the self-defeating search for the good mother to replace the bad mother of his early years. M2 wanted to help S2 confront and reconcile himself to his fate or destiny. By clinging to the fantasy of finding a good mother, S2 was to reenact a maladaptive relational pattern acquired early on in life for the purpose of survival. By hanging on to such a pattern, M2 tells us that even in his fifties, S2 searched for a compensation for his early loss of secure attachment in the faces of mother-like women.

M2 points out to S2 that his early wounding fate was at the same time the source of his talent which has led to a successful vocation. In spite of the emotional cost, it was the source of his creativity. M2 assisted S2 in accepting his fate not because it contributed to his creativity, but because it simply is his destiny.

Through M2’s therapeutic mediations and encouragements, S2 became in touch with the other side of his deep ambivalence toward his mother. S2 is enabled to resurrect not only his filial fright, but also his filial gratitude. He was now grateful for the courage his mother demonstrated and bequeathed upon him as a psychosocial inheritance; for doing her best as a mother under difficult circumstances; and for bestowing upon him the status of a special son of whom she was very proud.

Through M2’s further therapeutic interventions, S2 is enabled to uncover and get in touch with his very early self, a self that was abandoned early on in his life, an untainted self that became a guide, friend, protector, and a comforting companion. With the discovery of this part of himself, S2 becomes more radically accepting of his freedom and destiny, of his strengths and limitations, of opportunities and immovable barriers. He is more aware of new possibilities, feels less enslaved, and more enabled to surmount, but not alter, his original lack of basic trust.

M2, thereafter, addresses S2’s repressed anger and helps him learn the difference between unhealthy or pathological anger and healthy or integrative anger. Whereas disintegrative anger curtails one’s freedom, he tells S2, integrative anger opens up one’s freedom. M2 then links S2’s
repressed anger and the consequent surrendering of his freedom to his original fear of and responsibility for his mother. In assuming the early roles of a responsible rescuer and a dutiful and noble son, S2 had simultaneously repressed his rage and surrendered his freedom. Additionally, M2 links S2’s repression of anger to his fear of losing control, as his mother and sister had lost control, thus becoming over-controlled. Lastly, he links S2’s denial of his own feelings to his desire to take care of his mother and his sister instead of taking care of himself. This taking-care relational orientation is carried over into his relationship with Nicole.

Once more M2 succeeds in enabling S2 in getting in touch with his integrative anger, his healthily angry self, a self which is energetic, honest, open, and spontaneous. This healthily angry self stimulates S2’s natural propensity toward humor, laughter, and openness to new possibilities. This healthily angry self became a source of strength and self-efficacy. S2 began to take life more lightly, something he had not done throughout his life. In addition, his feelings of jealousy and abandonment began to significantly subside. And, once again, he became evermore appreciative of his mother’s care for him and her gifts to him. He was now able to see the objective conditions that contributed to his mother’s difficulties and thus modulated his original repressed anger. M2 comments at this juncture that having confronted his early destiny, S2 was able to recover his healthily integrative anger as a source of strength. He was no longer frozen in a passive posture. Passivity, as a life orientation, no longer sufficed. S2, in M2’s judgment, found freedom in confronting his destiny. By giving constructive expression to his healthily integrative anger, S2 not only gained important insights, but more importantly he felt freed and empowered.

In the last hour of therapy, M2 asks S2 about his loneliness. In response to S2’s free associative link of his loneliness to honesty and the absence of mothering, M2 points to the inseparability of loneliness from the human condition. To dare to be honestly oneself is to feel lonely. To be self-conscious is to be alone. No one can enter fully into our subjective world. No one can die for us. This, M2 tells S2, is our existential destiny. And if we recognize our human loneliness, which no one escapes, we can overcome it to some extent.

It is at this juncture that S2 narrates to M2 the story of his post-college years. He tells M2 about his three years at Robert College in Istanbul, Turkey. He had gone there to teach upon graduation from college. In the second year there he felt painfully lonely. He felt isolated in a foreign land. He felt alienated from the small English-speaking group that surrounded him. Moreover, teaching English to Turkish boys was not challenging enough. S2 fell back upon his familiar defensive strategy: he tried to work harder. But the harder he worked the more isolated he felt. Finally, he suffered a nervous breakdown.

Finding that his old ways of proving his worth were not longer working for him, S2 changed his style of life. He abandoned his old habit of rigidly planning for the future. Instead, he tried to live spontaneously. He did this, however, without a sense of direction. He still felt as a nonentity without a sense of direction. By sheer coincidence, that summer, he joined a group of traveling artists who employed him as a handy man. He began to draw, which prophesized the direction of his future vocation as an architect. It proved to be a most wonderful summer filled with joy and pleasurable sexual adventure.

Reflecting on this story, M2 states that having surrendered his rigid and obsessive expectations of life, S2 was able to open himself to unexpected possibilities and joyful surprises. M2 then links the movement from despair to joy in this story to a similar movement that had occurred in S2’s therapeutic journey in general and in the last hour of therapy in particular.
Despair, he tells S2, can be viewed as an opportunity which can yield insights that in turn can lead to therapeutic change, the discovery of hidden talents, the eradication of fear, and the openness to new possibilities and freedoms.

**METHODOLOGICAL STEP THREE**

The researcher embarks upon the transitional step of moving back-and-forth between the language of the subject, as distilled in Step 2, and a description of the subject’s life narrative through the language of dialectics. Here the researcher is attempting to be selectively attuned to and focused on those dialectically thematic tensions in the life narrative that the subject is struggling with and attempting to resolve. For example, the researcher tries to answer the question, “Are there polar needs or desires that the subject is attempting to resolve which at first appear as opposites and mutually exclusive, but, at a deeper level, prove to be complementary?”

**May (M1) as Charles (S1)**

M1 observes that S1, who is in his early thirties, is experiencing a deep ambivalence (a “yes” is opposed to a “no”) and an intense decisional anxiety regarding the question: “to marry or not to marry?” Upon reflecting on his college and post-college years, M1 sees more clearly that, as a younger S1, he experienced ambivalence regarding his sexuality. Looking back, he now perceives that there was a tension or split between his struggle to assert his morally resolute will (mind) and his untamable sexuality (body). Additionally, M1 sees that S1 was torn between being right versus being wrong and between being sociable and being lonely.

Again, gazing back, M1 now realizes that S1 experienced an intense tension between developing his character - by cultivating the virtues of patience, sympathy, strength of purpose, moral strength, and devotion to the call of his vocation, and thus attaining existential success, on the one hand, and failing in spite of trying hard to cultivate his character, on the other hand. In his aim to achieve true selfhood he ended up by feeling false: selfish as opposed to selfless; unreal as opposed to real; fragile as opposed to solid; fake as opposed to genuine; and ordinary as opposed to special.

M1 concludes that the reason he, as S1, finally suffered a mental collapse, a nervous breakdown, or a soul sickness, was because he was torn between two basic desires. On the one hand, he wanted to live up to or have control over, what he later discovered were, his rigid, authoritarian, externally-imposed rules, roles, responsibilities and principles (basic beliefs) by the sheer exertion of his will. On the other hand, he wanted to live freely. He felt caught between being self-conscious and self-forgetful; between being cautious and surrendering to his impulses; between taking life too seriously and taking life lightly; between living life the deliberate way and living life the spontaneous way. At that juncture in his life, after the emotional breakdown, S1 had, temporarily, swung from the authoritarian style of life to the romantic life-style for he knew not how to bridge these two basic and seemingly conflictual and contradictory desires.

The lingering sense of guilt over the tension experienced between his seemingly self-centered new orientation to life and his not-yet silenced desire to contribute to his fellow-man creates deep doubt in S1’s new meaning or purpose in life.
M1 ruminates on the reason why S1’s new orientation failed him. M1 concludes that S1 was unable to play with the polarities of his existence. S1 was unable to find a balance between his new self-expressive orientation and its corresponding complementary structure. S1 followed the same strategy for rescuing his new way of relating to the world that he used in his attempt to revive his old way of operating in the world. He pushed ahead in his romantic way of life as it was collapsing. He was unable to avail himself of a leeway that would allow him to straddle both worlds of structure and spontaneity for he lacked the courage and creativity to envision possibilities on both ends of the spectrum.

It is no wonder then, according to M1, that when S1 was faced with a major life-decision concerning marriage, he became frozen in a posture of ambivalence that M1 labeled as the “weakness-strength” dilemma. Under “strength”, he subsumed S1’s quest for idealistic perfection which promised to bestow upon him a sense of security, specialness, and superiority. Under “weakness”, he subsumed his inferiority-and- insecurity-triggering imperfection that would render him ordinary. It was this dynamic and unresolved tension that contributed to his frozen posture and inclined him to abhor Helen’s unpalatable imperfection and dependence. S1 entrapped himself in his own imperfection, which he projected upon and persecuted in Helen, by insisting on his quest for perfection. In his quest for perfection, S1 was unable to accept and make creative use of his limitations, including his imperfections. Additionally, M1 introspects, S1 hid his self-centeredness or selfishness behind the façade of selflessness or unselfishness as he endeavored to settle his deeply emotional problems intellectually. All this, according to M1, explains why S1 became frozen in his ambivalence posture and was thus rendered unfree.

May (M2) as Philip (S2)

S2 enters therapy in his middle fifties. According to M2, one reason why S2 is gripped with feelings of jealousy and betrayal by his girlfriend is that he is caught in the inaction/passive pole in the existential tension with the opposite, action/active pole. Moreover, from M2’s perspective, S2 is also caught in the idealism pole in the existential tension between idealism and reality. Additionally, he is trapped in the struggle-toward- freedom pole in the existential tension between this striving toward freedom and the acceptance of one’s limitation. In other words, because of S2’s inability to come to terms with these polarities of existence, he is frozen in an inactive and passive stance. M2 further traces this indecision-producing imbalance to S2’s original insecure relationship with significant others, especially his mother and older sister.

According to M2, S2’s early destiny, which constituted an intrinsic part of his early life’s limitations, was not to be free. This early destiny bestowed upon and burdened S2 with the original project of taking care of his unpredictable and disordered mother and older sister. Instead of being the recipient of care, S2 vigilantly assumed the prematurely responsible role of the protective and rescuing care-giver and care-taker. S2 was to repeat and reenact this dramatic relational pattern with his two former wives and his present girlfriend, Nicole.

Because of this early destiny, M2 reflects, S2 was unable to find a balance between trusting and cautiously mistrusting his world, between becoming securely attached and healthily detached from significant others in his world, between moving pleasingly toward others and moving discerningly away from others, and between moving pleasingly toward others and taking an assertive stance toward others. Still, paradoxically, in spite and because of the original loss (of
basic security and at-homeness in the world), S2 acquired a gain: the acquisition of the talent of intuiting and being attuned to the intentions and desires of others which rewarded him with acceptance, admiration, especially from women, a talent that contributed to his choice of and subsequent success in his future vocation. To help S2 in his therapeutic movement toward change, M2 guides S2 in achieving the dual task of accepting his fate and destiny, on the one hand, and initiating and embarking upon an alternative path to the old repetitive pattern established early in life, on the other hand.

M2 points out to S2 that he is to accept his early wounding fate not because it contributed to his creativity and success in his vocation, but because it simply is his destiny.

To further his acceptance of his mother, M2 helps S2 integrate his emotion-laden internalized images of her by assisting S2 in getting in touch not only with aspects of the bad mother, but also aspects of the good mother – her courage, her haunting painful past, and the special status she had bestowed upon him, for which S2 is now grateful.

To further his acceptance of himself, M2 assists S2 in integrating his earliest untainted self with the later, but still early tainted self. This allowed S2 to derive guidance, protection, comfort, and companionship from this earliest, pure part of himself. It permitted this pure, life-loving self to radiate light into the darker corners of the self. With this acceptance, and the acceptance of acceptance, S2 is enabled to become aware of new possibilities and to surmount, but not alter, the original loss.

M2 turns S2’s attention toward his anger – his original repressed rage and the resulting surrender of his sense of freedom in the face of his fear of his mother’s and his sister’s unpredictability and of his early burdensome responsibility toward taking care of his mother and his sister. M2 enables S2 to differentiate integrative from disintegrative anger, connecting the former to a sense of mastery and freedom and the latter to surrendering one’s feeling of freedom and one’s sense of control. Furthermore, M2 links S2’s preoccupation with being overly-controlled to his original fear of the unpredictability of his mother and his older sister.

M2 then assists S2 in balancing his over-controlled self with his spontaneous self – a self that is in touch with his integrative anger, a self that is energetic, honest, and open, a self that has a natural propensity toward humor, laughter, and openness to new possibilities, a self that is resilient and efficacious. Through the gradual achievement of this kind of balance, S2 is empowered to take life more lightly, become significantly less tormented by feelings of abandonment and jealousy, become more appreciative of his mother’s care for and gift of courage to him, and become more of an active modulator of, rather than a passive responder to, life’s happenings. In confronting his destiny, S2 is enabled to find his freedom. In facing his passivity, he finds the strength to become an initiator and active participant in the stream of life.

In the last hour of therapy, M2 helps S2 confront his loneliness. M2 points to the distinction between psychological and existential loneliness, the former of which is linked to the early absence of good-enough mothering and the latter of which is part of the human condition. To be self-conscious and honestly oneself is to be alone and lonely. That is our human destiny. Recognizing and accepting this enables us to overcome our existential loneliness to some extent. [It is at this juncture that S2 relates (in point of fact M2, under the guise of S2, repeats, though in a very abbreviated fashion) the story of his pivotal experiences subsequent to graduation from college. The story is very similar to the one related by M1 as S1. These experiences take place in Turkey, instead of Egypt. While away from teaching, instead of joining
a group of roving musicians, S2 joins a group of traveling artists. It was at this time that S2 envisions his future vocation as an architect. As in S1’s story, as related by M1, S2’s narrative moves from despair to joy.]

In reflecting on S2’s narrative in the last hour of therapy, M2 concludes that having surrendered his compulsive, driven, rigid, future-oriented planning style, S2 is able to open himself to joyful surprises and unexpected possibilities. Even despair, M2 tells S2, can be viewed as an opportunity which can yield insights that in turn can lead to therapeutic change - the discovery of hidden talents, the eradication of fear, and the openness to new possibilities and freedoms.

METHODOLOGICAL STEP FOUR

The researcher moves toward capturing essential life themes from a dialectical perspective. The researcher retells the life story of the subject in dialectical terms.

May as Charles (May, 1940)

At approximately the age of thirty-one, May is attempting to understand the person he was in a pivotal period of his life when he was in his early twenties. From the beginning, May constructs a dialogical relationship between himself as analyst, therapist and subject (the “I”) and himself as analysand, client, and object (the “me”). At the age of thirty-one, he is attempting to understand his present ambivalence toward marriage. He attributes it to a deeper and earlier, unresolved ambivalence. By pursuing its roots, he uncovers long-standing dialectical dilemmas: He could not reconcile the demands of his moral mind and the call of his conscience and religious-spiritual vocation with the demands of his sexuality and the requirements of socialization. He comes to the understanding that his frantically effortful attempt, as a younger self, to become a “good” person simply backfired and led to a so-called nervous breakdown. The younger May could not resolve the dialectical tension between being unselfish and selfless and being selfish and self-centered; between being genuine and true to oneself and being false and pretentious; between being special, as God’s representative, and being ordinary; between being spontaneous and free and being self-conscious and excessively cautious; between an externally-driven authoritarian way of living and internally-driven expressive-and-romantic way of life.

After the emotional breakdown, the younger May decides to pursue the expressive-romantic life style and leave behind the authoritarian style of life that had failed him. However, in spite of his best efforts, he experiences residual guilt-producing tension between his self-serving romanticism and his deep desire to serve his fellow human beings. The older May ruminates that one reason why this new romantic orientation toward living failed his younger self is because he had been unable to play with the polarities of existence. He was unable to avail himself of elbow room that would allow him to make creative use of both ends of the continuum and thus meeting simultaneously his needs for spontaneity, self-expression, and romanticism, on the one hand, and his needs for structure, order, and limits, on the other hand.

The older May provides another explanation as to why his new self-expressive life-style failed him in his early twenties. He labels it as the “weakness-strength” dilemma. Under seeming strength, he subsumes his early quest for idealistic perfection which promised the payoff of a
sense of security, specialness, and superiority. Under seeming weakness, he subsumes his "inferiority and insecurity triggering" imperfection which would render him ordinary. The universal tension with which May is struggling here is: specialness [when stripped from a sense of superiority] versus ordinariness [when stripped from a sense of inferiority].

Above and beyond these explanations, the thirty-something May concludes that an additional reason as to why the younger version of himself was unable to come to terms with the tension-producing polarities of his existence was that he endeavored to settle his deeply emotional problems intellectually. In other words, he had failed to achieve a balance between his intellectual and his emotional side. He had sided with the intellect. He had used his intellect as a means of rationalizing his skewed approach to understanding his relational existence. All these reasons, the older May now realizes, contributed to his frozen posture in facing the question of marriage.

**May as Philip (May, 1981)**

[The publication dates of these two case histories or self-analyses, do not necessarily reflect the actual dates of publications – 1940 and 1981 respectively. In the first self-analytic work May (Charles) is thirty-one years of age; in the second (Philip), he is in his middle fifties. There is a gap of forty-one years between the dates of publication. But there is approximately only a twenty-four year gap between the claimed ages of Charles and Philip.]

Although May is now supposedly in his middle fifties when he engages in his second self-analysis, he revisits the same pivotal period of his life and once again confronts repeated residual themes with which he struggled as a young man in his early thirties. His presenting problem is, once again, a decisional dilemma: to continue or discontinue his relationship with the emotionally important woman in his life.

The middle-aged May ties his confusion-producing indecision to his stickiness between wanting to be free and accepting his limiting destiny; between trying to live up to his ideals and needing to remain anchored in reality; and between trying to live up to his ideals and needing to remain anchored in reality; and between finding himself frustratingly frozen in a passive posture and desiring to assume an active stance by taking initiatives that will resolve his dilemmas. May traces his indecision-producing imbalance to his early insecure relationship to his mother and older sister.

May subsumes his early destiny – his early upbringing which shackles him with the fate of unfreedom, under “limitations”. Our psychosocial maturation requires of us to find a balance between being properly taken care of and acquiring the capacity to take care of others. Because as a child May was not taken care of properly, he was stuck in the premature position of assuming the role of a care-taker – first, taking care of his troubled mother and older sister and, later, taking care of the other important women in his life.

Because of this early destiny, May was not only unable to find a balance between being taken care of and caring for others, he also did not learn to be (securely) attached and also to be healthily separated from the important others in his life. Correlatively, he did not learn to negotiate the terrain of open-heartedly and trustingly moving toward others and cautiously assessing or judiciously moving away from others.

May also recognizes that from primary losses can emerge secondary gains and liabilities can be transformed into strengths. To rise above his original dialectical dilemmas – to be taken care
of or take care of; to trust or not to trust; to be attached or separated, the young May adopted the interpersonal strategy of pleasing others. He developed the talent of intuiting and being attuned to the intentions and desires of others, a talent which contributed to his acceptance, popularity – especially with women, and his choice of his future vocation, which opened the floodgates to his creativity and success.

May is in search of a new balance between acceptance and change for he had paid a heavy mental health cost for his secondary gains. In order to change and find an alternative path to the old repetitive patterns he had established early in life, May had to accept his early wounding fate simply because it was his destiny. He had to accept his mother as she was: bad and good. He needed to acknowledge her basic lack of presence and provision at the same time that he needed to affirm her strength and resilience, her courage with which he identified and which he internalized and the special son status she had bestowed upon him.

To facilitate further his radical acceptance, May turned the focus toward self-acceptance. Just as he had come to accept the good mother and the bad mother, he came to accept the good (spontaneous) self and the bad (skewed) self. Sensing that he had habitually tilted toward over-valuing his intellect and under-valuing his emotion, May shined a truth-disclosing beam of light on his deeply buried feeling of anger. By focusing on and comprehending his anger, May learned the distinction between empowering and disempowering anger. He learned that his disempowering anger was related to his fear and helplessness in the face of inadequate and unpredictable mothering. This un-repressed rage was now linked to his emotional and behavioral over-control and the skewing of the needed balance between freedom and spontaneity, on the one hand, and the need for modulated control and healthy surrender, on the other hand.

May was now able to use his empowering anger to make contact with his forgotten spontaneous self, a free and joyful self that had been there from the very beginning. From this true self May now derived comfort, companionship, energy, guidance, and protection. This authentic self, he discovered, was efficacious, honest, open, and resilient. It was a self that had a natural propensity toward humor, laughter, and openness to new possibilities that life had to offer. It was a self that was capable of taking life more lightly. It was a self that was an initiator, a participant, and a responder in the stream of life. It was a self that was more at home in the world.

May then applies his newly acquired sense of radical acceptance to his incessant and intermittent experience of loneliness. He comes to the recognition that there is a difference between intrapersonal and interpersonal loneliness. He traces the roots of his intrapersonal loneliness to the early absence of good-enough mothering. He attributes the origin of existential loneliness to our human condition. It is a byproduct of our self-consciousness and our search for authentic selfhood. This enables May to overcome his excruciating loneliness to some extent.

Thereafter, May reflects on his past way of being in relationship to how he lived time - his compulsive, driven and future oriented planning mode of living. By surrendering his desire to control the future, May is now able to become more present in the here-and-now and thus is open to the future’s surprises, joyful or otherwise. May concludes his self-analysis by juxtaposing his hope for and despair about the future. Even despair, he comes to realize, can be viewed as an opportunity which can yield insights that in turn can lead to change, a change that includes the discovery of hidden talents, the modulation of fear, and an openness to new possibilities and freedoms.
Discussion and Conclusion

What our EDP method yields is a portrait of Rollo May as a young man evolving into a middle-aged man struggling mightily, creatively, and courageously to perfect himself as a human being. We see him, simultaneously, as a serious and playful, childlike and adult-like, playing with polarities of existence in his pursuit of the endpoint of self-perfectibility, integration, and wholeness, while realizing that we can never be totally mature.

May’s rigorous reflections on his existential identity hover over his movement toward wholeness. We witness how May’s maturing identity is a byproduct of an acute perception and awareness of his own unconsciously accumulated skewed modes of being in the world with others. This delicate mental and emotional operation is entered into and embarked upon with humility and compassion. In spite of repeated slippages, May tries to minimize the projection of the negative elements of his identity onto emotionally important others. He is seemingly able to integrate his affect with his reason so as to un-skew himself and thus achieve a precarious balance in other domains of his relational life.

In the pivotal period of his life, May is jolted out of his unconscious habitual behaviors and biases. He discovers the hard way – by suffering a nervous breakdown, that the self he had constructed through hard work and adherence to rigid structure was nothing more than an egocentric identity. He further discovers that a mature identity cannot be gained through the loss of the identity of emotionally important others. Neither can it be attained by attempting to control others or by being overly controlling of oneself.

Through deep and intimate self-reflection, May does not shy away from confronting his own dark demons – including his dark dread of the void which discloses itself in the form of loneliness. Against this backdrop, he becomes aware of his radiant core. Through contacting this luminous core and through his efficacious use of anger, May overcomes his perplexing and paralyzing passivity. He becomes active, alive, and, more or less, integrated. He feels freer and true to himself. He is life-affirming and more intrapersonally and interpersonally open. Above all, he opens himself up, again and again, to the untapped opposites within himself.

May plays repeatedly with the Spontaneity versus Superego polarity. The superego he is burdened with is the weighty conscience of his early childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. Through this kind of repeated play, May restores his aliveness, his ability to be surprised by joy, by his love of life. Through play – playing with sensations, images, ideas, emotions, memories, in/action and relational tendencies, losses, life-narratives, and more, May is able to work through the stages of early adulthood and middle adulthood. Through play with opposites, May is exploring new identity elements and creating a new life narrative, which solidify his sense of self. Through such play, his early roles are comprehended, his past reinterpreted, and alternate future possibilities are anticipated. Through this kind of play, May is enabled to free himself of earlier restrictions that he imposed upon himself in the domains of intimacy and work. He is able to move more easily and freely within an acknowledged and affirmed set of limits that included his early destiny. Play gave him the leeway or elbow room to transform the seemingly mutually exclusive opposite elements in his identity into complementary polarities. Thus, modulated spontaneity can now go hand-in-hand with a lighter superego, a mature conscience. This gentler, kinder, and wiser superego becomes one’s best friend rather than one’s antagonistic inner executioner. This mature conscience is a life-affirming energizer.
Throughout his two self-analyses, May plays with the polarities of his existential identity, polarities such as freedom versus destiny, connectedness versus separation, and taking care of others versus being the recipient of care. Through this kind of serious play, which blurs the line of demarcation between work and play, he is able, relatively speaking, to bridge these polarities. By bridging these polarities he gives himself the clearance, elbow room, or leeway necessary for change. He is able to let go of old ways of thinking, emoting and doings things.

Through these playfully serious self–analyses, which themselves are a byproduct of a balanced achievement of the polarity, Playfulness versus Seriousness, May becomes acceptingly aware of his strengths and limitations. These polarities were at one time experienced as irreconcilable opposites: Strengths versus Limitations. He is able to ingeniously see the coherent continuous thread between the polarities that were central in the making of his own identity, in particular, and the polarities that typified American, western, and existential/universal identities, in general. He is able to view his own familial and cultural inheritance, retain valuable elements – such as his mother’s courage and his father’s desire to contribute to one’s fellow man, and discard harmful elements, such as weighted conscience and the American valuation of appearance and pretense and devaluation of emotion. At the same time, he comes to the realization that every human identity, regardless of the family and culture in which it is embedded, is condemned to a struggle that aimed at finding a balance between universal polarities of existence, such Freedom versus Destiny or Connectedness versus Separation.

Still, the task of creating or constructing an individual-familial-cultural-existential identity is a daunting, difficult, and never fully completed life-project. The visual metaphor that captures the precariousness of this life endeavor is that of the tight-rope walker. It is hard because it requires of May to understand his own unconscious self as he repeatedly reviewed his past, especially the pivotal period of his life, where he suffered a nervous collapse. However, he was helped and strengthened in his quest for a mature identity by learning from and identifying with mentors and friends such as Paul Tillich (May, 1973). Tillich became an existential exemplar for May.

May is able to free the better side of himself to do battle with his demons and doubts, realizing at the same time that this dark side was shared by all. He succeeded in creating helpful images and sign posts in his writings for all of us. May pushed himself to think in terms of a familial, cultural, historical relative view and at the same time take himself into a higher, universal view. He is able to see into himself and his situation simultaneously. Through his insightfulness and the use of his emotions, he is moved, like an archeologist, to excavate his own constructed identity in a decisive and disciplined manner, intuitively trusting what he feels is beautiful or ugly, good or bad, truthful or distorting. It is through such rigorous digging that he uncovers the unconscious underpinnings of his desire to control himself and his emotionally important others. It is through such painful excavation that he finds a relative balance to the dialectical dilemma of Control versus Surrender.

Through agonizing soul search, May comes to understand that we all have a lower self; that there is an irrational, lower, and self-serving essence in all of us. It is this emotion-laden insight that, at least in part, enables him to become accepting of himself and emotionally important others and affirming of his wider identity with its contradictions and paradoxes. Acceptance for May has a pervasive spread effect. He comes to radical acceptance. With the acceptance of acceptance comes the paradoxical capacity for change. Thus he achieves the relative resolution of the dialectical dilemma of Acceptance versus Change.
What contributes to the making of May such an incisively insightful self-analyst is that he is able to listen for negatives in his own thoughts, emotions, speech, and behavior, negatives that are repugnant. Such awareness then prepares him to change these negatives into positives. Ultimately, he wants to conduct himself in a manner that transcends what he labels as his egocentrism. By contributing to his own self-perfectibility, May is able to hold himself together, to attain a precariously balanced self. He is then able to transmit to others – his readers, existential principles of worthy living.

Through reflection, May leaves behind regrets and resentments and achieves acceptance and perspective that are a byproduct of knowing where he stood in existential space. This kind of knowing is not only passionate, but also aesthetic and ethical. It is a type of intimate reflection that provides him with a deep sense of resilience. It gives him the strength to confront the dialectical dilemma of Passivity versus Activity. It enables him to move from the regressive push of passive innocence to the growth-and-change-producing pull of active responsibility or responsible action, guided by his love, beauty, goodness, and truth – his love of life, thus overcoming the dichotomy of Yes versus No to Life. Like Beethoven in one of his latest compositions, May would affirm this resounding ending, uttered against the backdrop of attunement to still Presence: Affirming Life; Accepting Life’s Limits; and Changing through Acceptance.

The existential-dialectical-phenomenological (EDP) method has made it possible to analyze May’s two so-called case histories, which in reality are self-analyses, in a way that has enriched our understanding of the slippage of life into work and back into life again. The EDP method has served as a fitting instrument of illumination that has enlightened our grasp of the dialectical relationship between the life and work of Rollo May. Beyond that, the EDP method has proved to be not only an effective research instrument, but also a therapeutic tool that can assist us, as it did intuitively for May, in playing with the polarities of our own lives in our quest for authentic existence. It promises to potentially transform our ambivalence in the face of our intolerably conflictual contradictions into tolerable ambiguities and thrust us forward, as it did for May, into the realm of creativity.

References


