



Psychology and the Human Dilemma

Rollo May

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Whether reflecting on war, psychology, or the ideas of existentialist thinkers such as Sartre and Kierkegaard, Dr. May everywhere enlarges our outlook on how people can develop creatively within the human predicament.

Psychology and the Human Dilemma Details

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Matt says

I love May. This book in particular was brilliant. He manages to discuss contemporary things (the book was published in 1980) that still are incredibly contemporary. A wonderful book that transcends the date of publication with ease and aplomb.

Jackson says

This is less of a psychology/psychotherapy text than it is a collection of essays on the human condition by a very well-read practitioner. May is just as likely to draw his observations from Kierkegaard and Sartre as he is from Freud, Rogers et. al., and as such the best parts of the book read like a summation of intellectual history in an effort to grapple with the 'human dilemma' of the title.

In essence, the dilemma stems from the fact that man perceives himself simultaneously as both object and subject. That is, an active subject capable of making rational decisions and choices in order to lead the life they want, but also the hapless victim of external forces beyond control. The book is a series of essays that intend to illustrate how existential psychology might allow us to reconcile ourselves with this dilemma.

There are no real 'suggestions' as to how one deals with the human dilemma - naturally this isn't a self-help book - but there are many insightful observations as to the nature of anxiety in the latter half of the 20th century, most of which retain and often have added relevance in the 21st. Two that stood out:

1. The American public's resistance to 'existential' treatments - and existential thinking in general - is in large part due to America being only a few hundred years removed from its pioneer past. For American settlers, living physically taxing and often isolated lives in a relatively new land, spending a great deal of time thinking deeply about one's own existence was absolutely *not* conducive to survival. May suggests that this attitude persists through the 20th century. I cannot comment as to whether or not this still holds true in the 21st century USA, but it most certainly does in Australia - to an even greater degree I would argue.
2. Much modern anxiety stems also from the paradox that in order to gain significance, one must renounce their significance in some degree. Living 'successfully' in most cases necessitates conformity, being a team player etc. The "organization man" is the term given here to the person who trades in a part of their personal identity in order to meet the demands of daily living. Where psychotherapy once aimed to guide clients back into the fold of conformity so that they could rejoin the functional ranks of society, its job now is to increasingly support the millions of disillusioned persons already *within that fold*.

Highly recommended for philosophy as well as psych buffs, and anyone interested in "the science of man".

Danijel Brestovac says

MAY, Rollo. Psihologija i ljudska dvojba. Zagreb: naprijed. 1980. ISBN

Str. 35: ?ovjek je sam trska, najslabašnija u prirodi, ali ova trska MISLI..... Sve se naše dostojanstvo sastoji dakle u mišljenju. (Blaise Pascal, pensees)

Jayalexn says

Insightful, and just as relevant today as it was when first published over 30 years ago.
