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The Curative Powers of Witchcraft:
A Concise Defense of Humanism in Psychotherapy

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Abstract

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By Christopher J. Barnett

Psychology has historically been divided between naturalism and humanism, a trend that continues today. Based on ideological differences about the character of valuable psychological investigation, naturalism favors strict causal explanations, while humanism is receptive to psychological explanations that derive more theoretically or insightfully but may not lend well to qualitative measurement. Rather than considering these competing ideologies merely abstractly, this work argues that contribution to mental healthcare should factor significantly in the perceived value of any psychological theory. From this perspective, I attempt to establish a greater appreciation for what should be a balance between naturalism and humanism in an age when naturalism is eclipsing humanism in academic and clinical psychological spheres. Such a balance should be based not on sheer ideology but also on pragmatic considerations about which approach treats particular psychological concerns best. To further this establishment, I first examine the most extreme outlook for naturalist psychology, namely the reduction of psychology to neuroscience. By illustrating the general deficiencies of that approach, I then turn to a discussion on the importance of including existential outlooks in certain therapeutic situations and the relative deficiency of naturalist approaches that ignore these outlooks. Focusing the discussion on existential concerns and the desirability of a humanistic therapeutic approach to them will hopefully function as an "existence proof" of humanism's importance for psychology overall.

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Introduction

Amidst our tremendous financial crisis, "in this new era of lengthening unemployment lines and shrinking university endowments," the humanities struggle disproportionately in a "complex and technologically driven world" (Cohen 2009, par. 2). With students and administrations alike prioritizing finances and practicality, the Association of American Colleges and Universities called for the humanities to "emphasize its practical and economic value" (Cohen 2009, par. 9). In principle this sounds like a horrible idea— what better way to ruin the beauty of a Shakespearean sonnet than to suggest its "practical applicability?" One might even go so far to suggest, as does Aristotle, that the highest good is highest precisely because it *is* useless as a practical mechanism, valuable instead only "for its own sake" (Aristotle 1963, 314). To search for some extrinsic value to such a good would actually lower it.

The humanities are indeed *good*. They teach us about what it means to be a human being and how to approach this understanding from a variety of perspectives. Yet indulgence in such humanistic wisdom is definitely a luxurious opportunity, and it is reasonable in difficult times for one to forego such an endeavor. Without food and shelter it is impossible to sustain one's self for the study of ethics or history. But rather than pandering the humanities' backdoor economic worth, perhaps it is better to maintain the humanities' purity by allowing its spotlight for those who are truly appreciative, a constituency that will hopefully enlarge upon better economic times.

Nevertheless, if a practical argument for the value of humanistic insight is at all necessary, there might be no greater need than for an appeal to the importance of

humanism in psychology and psychotherapy. Whereas the harmful effects of neglecting the humanities at large might be subtler, the potential for inadequate psychological understanding and healing is far more serious—a potential that is heightened in the absence of humanistic consideration.

Tracing back at least to Ancient Greece, psychology has been pulled between scientific and humanistic perspectives. Trying to understand depression, Hippocrates argued that it was "an organic dysfunction of the brain that should be treated with oral remedies," whereas Plato "insisted that it was a philosophical problem that needed to be addressed through dialogue" (Solomon 2008, 523). [1] This very same disagreement occurs today with some practitioners emphasizing neurochemical treatments compared to others who insist on talk therapy. What is unique to the past few decades, however, is the relative hegemony of the naturalistic psychological school. Earlier history may have been fraught with strong ideological differences between psychologists, but it was difficult to say that one threatened to eclipse the other. Only recently has humanistic psychology found itself "in a state of crisis and jeopardy" as it is losing influence in psychological circles overall (Wertz 1998, 65).

My purpose, therefore, is to consider the validity of this *political* circumstance. Rather than desiring to fuel the flames of an ideological battle, I want to uncover whether

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[1] Throughout this work I will be keeping in mind this tension, tending to refer to a "naturalist" or "scientific" approach compared to a "humanistic" approach or to "humanism" more widely. These terms have a range of interpretations, but for our purposes I keep a general delineation between the two categories overall akin to how Hippocrates and Plato represented them for psychology: The former category refers most vaguely to the strict demand for concrete causal explanations of mental relationships; whereas, the latter category underscores a receptiveness to psychological explanations that derive more theoretically or insightfully but may not lend well to qualitative measurement.

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there needs to be any hostility between the more naturalist schools of psychology and the

humanist schools at all. Certainly, there is no question that science has made fortunate

discoveries uncovering the biology of the brain and devising chemical treatments for

severe illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. But with a hurry to understand

the particularities of the mind/brain, and with the qualitative impressiveness of scientific

study on it, I fear that we may sacrifice healing overall for the sake of scientific

standards. While understanding is necessary for healing, we ought to prioritize the

practical success of healing methods even if they do not always accord to techniques we

fully understand.

Thus, I hope to establish a greater appreciation for what should be a balance

between naturalism and humanism. Such a balance should be based not on sheer

ideology but on pragmatic considerations about which approach treats particular

psychological concerns best. To further this establishment, I will first examine the most

extreme outlook for naturalist psychology. It is actually a reduction of psychology to

neuroscience and the elimination of our common sense, "folk psychological" notions

including propositional attitudes like "beliefs" and "desires." By illustrating the general

deficiencies of that approach, I then turn to a discussion on the importance of

propositional attitudes for existential outlooks in particular and on these outlooks'

potential psychological ramifications. Focusing the discussion on existential concerns

and the desirability of a humanistic therapeutic approach to them will hopefully function

as an "existence proof" of humanism's importance for psychology overall.

Chapter One

1.1 The nature of psychotherapy

"Therapy Is an Art, Not a Science," writes psychiatrist Willard Gaylin: "Therapy is not a science, certainly not yet and I suspect it will never be" (2001, 306-7). An experienced professor of medicine and psychotherapist, Dr. Gaylin qualifies his claim with the inconsistent success of psychological and psychiatric treatments. Therapy is a field wherein "even bad therapists get *some* good results," and even the best clinicians experience "a significant number of failures" (Gaylin 2001, 306). According to Gaylin, these inconsistencies are due to having "barely scratched the surface" of understanding "mental functioning" (2001, 307). Even with advances in psychotropic drugs and medical procedures, "profound problems" remain that require more than a focus on "brain" or "chemistry;" instead, sufficient approaches attend to "mind" and "soul" (Gaylin 2001, 307). Dr. Gaylin's characterization of psychological healing raises a key question: whether or not the notion that therapy is a uniquely valuable component of mental healing will stand the test of time, and, if it does, whether or not it will be also a necessarily artful practice. In other words, is an "artistic" component to psychotherapy an *inherent* necessity of a comprehensive psychology, or is it only *contingent* on the limited capacity of "concrete" scientific explanation?

Speculation surrounding this question will only truly end when no more mysteries about the human mind remain. Nevertheless, by exploring the progress of naturalist philosophy of mind and neuroscience, we will have a better understanding of our ability to reduce mind entirely to scientific categories. While I do not expect to present

conclusive insights to understanding the mind, I am interested in illustrating the implications that a radically reductionist theory would have on the treatment of mental illness. That is, I suggest that any understanding of mind that cannot account satisfactorily for mental healing is not a satisfactory understanding of mind. If a reductionist approach is limited in clinical application not merely due to a lack of progress but due to false premises, then it ought not to be adopted, at least not in full.

Yet if psychological treatment *is* ultimately reducible to hard science, a cut and dry approach, then the *clinician-as-artist* is actually a clinician improvising due to insufficient understanding. In that sense, to call therapy "art" would be accurate to a degree but would also be a polite way of calling it "lacking." Therapy will thus continue to observe inconsistent hitting and missing until science can finally qualify the biological components at work, allowing for decisive diagnosis and treatment.

1.2 The Procrustean bed of naturalistic psychology

From a naturalist perspective, how critical to be of therapy is relative to whether therapists resist gradual advances in science that may eventually choke out the validity of artful insight from therapy. Increasingly, neuroscientists argue that sufficient evidence exists to develop satisfactory mental health services with only scientific treatments and that arguments in favor of therapeutic insight are anachronistic. Psychotherapy has been somewhat resilient to this criticism historically because science was relatively incapable of devising any totalizing conception of the human mind.

But even historically people have suggested that science had finally "arrived" and could develop conclusive theories of mind. Sigmund Freud himself urged this sort of naturalist agenda, believing at least initially that he was in reach of creating a perfectly

scientific account of consciousness and mental treatment. Psychoanalysis began as a reductionist project with the "natural-scientific model" serving as its "metapsychology" (Wallwork 1991, 20-1). Although Freud may be interpreted as a humanist, those interpretations draw mostly on his eventual writings and results rather than on his initial intentions.

Freud originally wished to ground his general psychological explanations in science and not elsewhere. As a trained neurologist, he was predisposed to predict that all mental disorders are "physiologically caused" (Lilienfeld *et al*. 2009, 584). But his scientific accounts became increasingly unsatisfying to him. Although he may have admitted only "sheepishly" that his psychological interpretations read like short stories that lack the "stamp of science," Freud became progressively convinced that the "nature of the subject," psychology, required more than science could offer at the time (Wallwork 1991, 25). Indeed, Freud was forced to incorporate into his metatheory "speculative" insights that contextualized the mind in ways that he could approach clinically, for otherwise he would have to wait indefinitely to serve as a physician (Wallwork 1991, 22-5). To supplement his scientific footing, Freud "peppered" his writing with what he perceived to be humanistic wisdom from sources ranging Sophocles, Goethe, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and the Bible (Wallwork 1991, 26). He believed that these contributions "captured both the essence of human experience and its depth-psychological explanation far better than most academic psychologists" (Wallwork 1991, 26). Thus, although Freud's project was not strictly scientific, neither a humanistic nor scientific ideology sufficed at the time because both ideologies on their own seemed to lack critical explanations of human psychology.

Sigmund Freud's project is a significant instance in which a scientific revisionist believed he was forced to balance his project as both scientific and humanistic. Admittedly, that is not spectacular because cognitive science was really very limited at the time. But its extreme limitation is an observation from hindsight, just as we may reflect decades from now on our limitations today. During Freud's time, for Freud to resist clinging stubbornly to his scientific ideology was a pragmatic effort that pioneered therapy as it has existed since.

Harvard psychiatrist David Brendel praises Freud for abandoning "ivory-tower theorizing about the mind and its pathologies" to create a balance that allowed Freud to be "continuously engaged in clinical work with his patients" (Brendel 2006, 103). Freud's pragmatic wisdom has lasted even recently, for it has been difficult to justify excluding science in total favor of humanistic psychology or vice versa. To denounce scientific advancements in cases where they have enhanced the efficacy of mental healthcare would prove counterproductive. Many people have appreciated psychotropic drugs' ability to ameliorate depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and a host of other psychological disorders that interact neurochemically. Nevertheless, science has progressively developed psychological understanding, but it is one that is ever incomplete as particularly evident when it is overvalued.

For instance, behaviorists in the early to mid 20th century such as John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner advocated that psychology hold strict to the scientific method and only wanted to evaluate measurable psychological phenomena. They were "growing impatient" with the "touchy-feely nature of their discipline," frustrated that psychoanalysts and others had strayed too far from legitimate science (Lilienfeld *et al.*

2009, 11). To reign in psychology, behaviorists reduced mental concepts such as emotions and beliefs, believing that they do not actually refer to any inner phenomena at all but, rather, are concepts derived from observing "patterns of *behavior*" (PM Churchland 1988, 23). Their zealous over-reliance on science was unsatisfying, however. It is not that behaviorist theory was not scientific or that it did not allow for reasonable discovery, but behaviorism ignored substantial psychological categories. By considering only behavior and stimulus response, behaviorists established a "black box" psychology that relegated any question of mentality to pseudoscience. It particularly ignored the internal sensations, or "*qualia*," that are now considered essential to psychology but were unaccountable by science at the time (PM Churchland 1988, 24).

While behaviorists such as Skinner might not have agreed with their critics, behaviorism nevertheless failed to become a lasting theory. The resistance and ultimate disintegration of strict behaviorism arguably occurred because behaviorists insisted on an ideological unwavering from their scientific method. One might respond by asking, however, whether behaviorism's demise was from a failure of science or from the replacement of one scientific theory with another. I suggest that it was a bit of both. While behaviorism's failure does not prove that science cannot eventually encompass psychology, its prior failures do illustrate the importance that a theory not be too insistent that the world conform to its presuppositions. Both behaviorists and early Freud thought that science could explain the world, and they thought science ought to be very "hard." But to Freud's redeeming realization and to behaviorism's demise, demanding that science be too "hard" made it procrustean, abdicating essential humanistic counterparts. Thus, the balance has been to stipulate, as we have seen, concepts like "mind," which

may be scientifically empty but do not exclude criteria that careful examination holds to be crucial components of experience.

1.3 On the Churchlands' eliminative materialism

Nonetheless, although Gaylin asserts "mind" and "soul" as key characteristics of humans that have been inaccessible to science, whether his characterization of human psychology is accurate to begin with is questionable. Perhaps they serve a pragmatic purpose but seem extra-scientific because they are truly false. The same may be said for humanistic concepts at large. While prior attempts to demonstrate the explanatory power of a pure scientific approach may have failed, the question remains whether continual scientific advancements may ultimately eclipse the value of humanism's place in psychology, making all psychological explanations "reducible"[2] to neuroscience. If reducible, the postulation of ontologically distinct components like mind or soul is unnecessary because these concepts are vacuous. So too is the belief in a necessary humanistic component to therapy.

But can we prove this claim? To explore that question, I will look to arguments by Paul and Patricia Churchland who "challenge so many prevailing doctrines concerning the character of knowledge, science, language, and mind" (McCauley 1996, 1). In this way, they present the most "cutting edge" arguments in favor of scientific reduction of mind. Unlike other radical theorists, the Churchlands are unique in their "*constructive*

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[2] That is, what is thought to be a *unique* science of psychology may actually be completely understood by, or "reduced" to the more general neuroscience without sacrificing any phenomena unexplained. For psychology to be reducible to neuroscience would mean that neuroscience is not only *necessary* for psychological explanation, but that it is also *sufficient* to account for those explanations itself. Yet, if psychology has unique explanatory qualities that neuroscience cannot sufficiently account for, then psychology is not reducible.

successes," for "no one's work more clearly exemplifies the advantages and

accomplishments of naturalism within philosophy" (McCauley 1996, 1). This suggestion

underscores the relevance of investigating the Churchlands' work.[3] Whereas the

discussion between naturalism and humanism is long-lived and may be stale to some, the

Churchlands' new scientific predictions justify a renewed vigor to this debate. Moreover,

as I will illustrate momentarily, theirs is not only an *exclusively* naturalistic

conceptualization of mind; it is one that is rather striking in appearance as

counterintuitive.

The Churchlands may be most notoriously known for their arguments against the

validity of "folk psychology" (FP), or "our common-sense conceptual framework for

mental phenomena" that includes such notions as beliefs and desires (PM Churchland

1981, 68). Specifically, in "Eliminative Materialism and the Propositional Attitudes,"[4]

Paul Churchland[5] argues that FP is not only a theory, but also a "fundamentally

defective" one that eliminative materialism (EM) will "displace" via "completed

neuroscience" (1981, 67). That is, FP is not merely a descriptive tool, but is "*obviously*"

theoretical, as it can be expressed propositionally to show that it attempts to make

predictions (PMC 1981, 70-1). For instance, common parlance relating a fear to a desire

can be expressed as:

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[3] Paul and Patricia Churchland are often conflated in discussions of their work. I will be careful to distinguish their arguments based on their independent publications.

[4] Although this paper is written solely by Paul Churchland, it references specific contributions by Patricia Churchland, so I think it is reasonable to consider this article as a good representation of what is meant by "the Churchlands'" argument for eliminative materialism.

[5] Henceforth, cited parenthetically as "PMC"

(*x*) (*p*) [(*x* fears that *p*) ⊃ (*x* desires that ~*p*)]

If '*x*' fears that '*p*,' then '*x*' desires that '*not p*' (PMC 1981, 71).

Or relating hopes to pleasantries:

(*x*) (*p*) [(*x* hopes that *p*) & (*x* discovers that *p*)) ⊃ (*x* is pleased that *p*)]

If '*x*' hopes that '*p*,' and '*x*' discovers that '*p*,' then '*x*' is pleased that '*p*' (PMC

1981, 71).

These propositional constructions and an array of similar folk-psychological

propositional constructions demonstrate, according to Churchland, the "lawlike relations"

implicit within FP, making it a *theory* (1981, 71).

After claiming *folk psychology-as-theory*, Churchland questions its theoretical

adequacy, asking whether the "ontology of one theory (folk psychology) is, or is not,

going to be related to the ontology of another theory (completed neuroscience)" (1981,

72). Churchland argues that, like many prior theories, FP will not hold up amidst

scientific progress. Alas, it is but an admirable effort to make sense of the world akin to

caloric heat theory, phlogiston theory, Aristotelian cosmology, and alchemy. While all

were once serious considerations, none have stood the test of time.

Rather than a satisfactory description and predictor of human mental phenomena,

FP is a hollow explanatory shell that, despite its use in common parlance, provides no

actual insight into how the mind works. Just as we once literally believed that "the wind

could know anger, the moon jealousy, the river generosity, the sea fury" etc., these

characterizations today only suffice as *metaphors* for reality (PMC 1981, 74). We might

describe an intense wind as "angry," but we do not believe that the wind is intense

because it is angry anymore than we think clouds emit actual cats and dogs when it is "raining cats and dogs." The Churchlands apply this same reasoning to compare FP of humans to FP of the wind, moon, river, and sea, putting it entirely at odds with progressive science. Not only has FP retained with very little alteration the same "stagnant" categories "for at least twenty-five centuries," but its categories are "incommensurable with or orthogonal to" categories of physical science (e.g. physics and chemistry), "whose long-term claim to explain human behavior seems undeniable" (PMC 1981, 76).

The Churchlands cite particular neuroscientific progress as a promising replacement for "intuitive" FP. So before advancing any further to discuss the conclusions of their approach, I want to put this discussion into perspective by briefly outlining the Churchlands' theory of how the mind works. An understanding of where they are "coming from" will help to frame the overall questions about FP better. Nevertheless, I do not intend to delve into the various empirical arguments for and against their theory, nor do I intend for my account of their theory to be exhaustive. Obviously, concerns about the objectivity of their neuroscientific breakdown of the mind are important, but they miss the broader significance: Empirical mitigation of the Churchlands' particular neuroscientific theory would not be cause for rejection of their philosophical hypothesis that FP can be eliminated; it would only force them to return to the drawing board to develop a better eliminativist account.

For the sake of argument then, I will not try to dispute their particular neuroscientific conceptualization of the mind with alternative neuroscience. Instead, we should consider whether the assumptions their account necessitates are philosophically

satisfying, since we may be able to question their conclusions philosophically regardless

of their scientific premises. For instance, the Churchlands may be coincidentally correct

about the vacuity of FP even if their basis for that reasoning is incorrect or if their

conceptualization of the mind is incorrect. The most powerful objections then to their

argument may arise from demonstrating that, even if their theory of mind is true, the

degree of its truth may be questionable if it contradicts certain philosophical prerequisites

for understanding mind. On that note, let us consider their neuroscientific perspective.

1.4 Connectionism

The Churchlands advocate a *connectionist* theory of mind, according to which all

cognitive phenomena are mental *representations*[6] composed by the consolidation of

mental input within the interconnections of the brain's neurons by its synapses. Human

brains have roughly 100 trillion of these synaptic connections, and each connection can

be "strong, or weak, or anything in between" (PMC 1995, 4). In the sense of being

measured on a continuum of strength, neural connections are "weighted." Individual

connection weights collectively determine relative "activations" on mental maps that, in

turn, determine representations of information from the outside world.[7] The mind's

connective "accuracy" or "knowledge" depends, therefore, on the weights that

collectively filter its neuronal firings. Whereas the weights of inexperienced brains may

be inaccurate, prolonged exposure to experience will "train" neural networks to provide

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[6] Our perception of the world is filtered through input sensors and re-constituted as a byproduct of mental processing.

[7] When reproduced artificially, connectionist networks use numerical weights typically ranging from -1 to 1, where the absolute value is a connection's strength and the sign causes the subsequent activation to be either excitatory (+), or inhibitory (-).

more accurate mental representations (PMC 1995, 322).

Thus, the Churchlands argue that mind is explained best as a performance of experientially trained neural networks whose outputs can be represented as coordinates in neural activation space, i.e., multi-dimensional axes that encompass the various extremes of possible mental representations (PMC 1995, 322). The brain takes patterns of sensory data as inputs and filters them through increasingly consolidated matrices of synaptic connections. Each synaptic connection makes its own "elementary computation" resulting in billions of partial calculations of the input's influence on subsequent layers of the network. These resulting activations are then "coded" onto activation space that ultimately transforms initially baffling sensory stimuli into meaningful information and experience (PMC 1995, 8-15).

Taste is a simple example to illustrate, as its sensory components are divisible into a four-dimensional activation space of "sweet, sour, salty, and bitter" according to the tongue's design. To use Paul Churchland's example, a peach will disproportionably activate cells that detect sweetness, while activating low levels of cells that detect sourness, saltiness, and bitterness. These four unique activation levels would then map onto a point in a four-dimensional space for "peach," providing knowledge of how a peach tastes. Peach would be placed close to the coordinates for "apricot" but quite far from the coordinates for "lasagna" or "coffee" (PMC 1995, 21-3).

Connectionism may play at least *some* role in explaining mind. But the Churchlands do not suggest that connectionism merely accounts for the "underlying wheels and gears" of mentality (Churchland and Churchland 1996, 226). Instead, connectionist networks and vectors of activation levels are the *extent* of cognition (PMC

1995, 182). They become more complex than that of taste, of course, ultimately composing highly multi-dimensional activation spaces and networks that supposedly explain mentality as a whole without relying on "sententially expressible states" or "rule-governed inference" (PMC 1995, 182). Due then to the perceived explanatory power of connectionism and the conclusion that it need not incorporate linguistic or rule-based structure, the Churchlands conclude that their model "suitably" competes with FP (Churchland and Churchland 1996, 230).

1.5 Objections to EM and further considerations

Based on their conception of the mind and the apparent explanatory latitude of neuroscience, the Churchlands have attempted to reduce explanations of what are typically considered psychological phenomena to the scope of neuroscience. They argue that neuroscientific theories explain mentality more concretely and simply.

There have been various objections to the notion that psychological theories, and in particular FP, can be eliminatively reduced to neuroscientific theories.[8] Some have claimed that the theoretical nature of FP does not hamper its credibility, for it is a rather adequate and self-sustaining predictive tool. Steven Pinker puts it nicely when he writes that "even if neuroscientists someday decode the entire wiring diagram of the brain, human behavior makes the most sense when it is explained in terms of beliefs and desires, not in terms of volts and grams" (2009, 314). Robert McCauley illustrates that psychological theories are not likely reducible to neuroscience due to the evolutionary nature of cross-scientific relations (1996). Specifically, he argues that throughout the

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[8] Of the many academic contributions that evaluate the theoretical capacity of FP, I have included those that I find most relevant to the analysis at hand.

"history of science" there have been no examples of "interlevel theory elimination" wherein a theory exclusive to a particular science is reduced completely to a more general scientific field across the vertical relationship of sciences (McCauley 1996, 32). Instead, theory elimination occurs "horizontally," contained within its specific scientific realm. So if FP is a theory that ever can be eliminated, it will be replaced with an alternative *psychological* theory, not a neuroscientific theory.

Another approach to FP is Dan Dennett's suggestion that the components of FP are not ontologically "real" but are useful abstractions nonetheless (1991). He writes that we *create* the notions of FP and are able to rely on them as "*good* abstract[ions]" because of their "enormous predictive leverage" of human behavioral patterns (1991, 29). FP is thus such an instrumental fiction that it makes sense to rely on it, similar to the conventional but useful idea that there are centers of gravity (1991, 27). Dennett argues that if any EM is going to persuade us to abandon FP, it will have to provide an equally convenient predictive tool for everyday use, which it likely will not (1991, 51).

A rather general response the Churchlands make to these various arguments is that we cannot make *a priori* judgments about the sustainability of FP as a theory or about the limits of neuroscience. Instead, they consider this question to be ultimately an empirical one that neuroscience will probably answer (PS Churchland 2005)[9]. This promise is not an unreasonable suggestion, but it is nearly impossible to falsify. Even our most strongly held scientific explanations are still called "theories," not because they are likely tentative, but because there is always the *possibility* for their revision. However, I

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[9] Henceforth, cited parenthetically as "PSC"

want to focus on an alternative argument that I think gets to the heart of why the

Churchlands' EM cannot ultimately eliminate at least the components of FP, an argument

that does not depend on the success of FP as a predictor. Rather than focusing on the

predictive failure or success of FP as a theory, we should question whether EM is capable

in principle of eliminating certain aspects that seem intrinsic to mentality, such as the

phenomena of the beliefs and desires themselves that underlie FP.

Patricia Churchland, in her essay "Do We Propose to Eliminate Consciousness"

(1996), provides an important clarification, though, about the implications of EM. As she

describes it, the eliminativist claim is that "as science advances, certain 'natural'

categories that figured in an earlier theory turn out to have no role and no place in the

replacing theory" (PSC 1996, 297). The world "is as it is," rather, so "theory

modification" does not result in the "nature of the world" being "modified *ipso facto*"

(PSC 1996, 297). Churchland suggests that, rather than getting the "heebie-jeebies" from

contemplating theory revision, we should instead realize that we have no "theory-neutral

access to the world," not to mention to our "own mind-brains" (PSC 1996, 298). Thus, to

replace a theory will result in a "set of different categories" about the phenomenon in

question, but it does not deny that there "is any phenomenon there to be explained" (PSC

1996, 298).

In the context of her particular essay, Churchland argues that EM cannot possibly

eliminate the phenomenon of *consciousness* as we know it because the phenomenon itself

is simply a matter of fact. Instead, particular theories about consciousness will be

revised, allowing for a more enlightened understanding of the consciousness that we

experience. In a phenomenological sense, when we "bracket" theoretical questions about

consciousness, consciousness is still apparent; therefore its existence is not a matter of theoretical support. Hence, Churchland's notion that the world "is as it is" is insightful, for it suggests that our *entire* access to the world is not theory-dependent but that certain phenomena can be neutrally *experienced* independent from theoretical interpretation.

Theories then do not have control over the bare existence of certain phenomena, which are vulnerable not to theoretical elimination, but at most to theoretical re-understanding. A necessary project for naturalists, therefore, and particularly eliminative materialists, is to determine foremost what phenomena are and are not neutrally self-evident.[10] To forget this step would make EM too hasty, for it would beg the question whether the object of elimination is in itself eliminable (Gallagher and Zahavi 2007, 6-9).[11]

It is, therefore, important to be cautious in the field of theory modification. For it is true that theories are a bridge between ourselves and the world; they guide the way we

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[10] I shall refer to such knowledge of "self-evident" phenomena as knowledge of "pre-theoretical" phenomena. Whereas theoretical knowledge is ultimately hypothetical, I distinguish pre-theoretical knowledge as not needing any hypothetical support. For instance, PS Churchland's claim that consciousness simply *is* suggests that it is a non-hypothetical certainty and therefore a pre-theoretical certainty. This distinction may also be understood as a distinction about inference. According to Bertrand Russell, one arrives at certain knowledge about phenomena from being "directly acquainted" with those phenomena. These acquaintances result in a sort of "first" knowledge upon which inferences can be based but which itself is not a result of inference (Fumerton 2009). Nevertheless, I will hold to naming the distinction as between "theoretical" and "pre-theoretical" since so much of the Churchlands' arguments about the eliminable-ness of FP rest on it being a theory and on "theory revision."

[11] One might argue contrariwise that it begs the question to suggest that a phenomenon is not eliminable because it is pre-theoretical. Surely it is feasible that a phenomenon thought to be pre-theoretical is not, but with careful analysis we may hopefully come to familiarize ourselves with what phenomena are likeliest to exist pre-theoretically. For if it is *really* begging the question whenever one makes this type of argument, then even consciousness could not be claimed to exist pre-theoretically. That the Churchlands are willing to agree that consciousness *does* might be an existence proof that arguments of pre-theoreticability are not inherently fallacious. Perhaps then their contrariwise argument may be a placeholder for attempts at explaining phenomena away that have been so far unfruitful.

approach and engage with the world by helping us to understand the world before us. To modify a theory can even at times *revolutionize* worldly understandings entirely. Of course, theoretical reshaping is reasonable when it is controlled, limiting scientific paradigm shifts to very credible instances such as the Copernican Revolution or to Darwinian evolution. For while science rests on falsifying theories rather than proving them outright, probabilistically we are willing to bet that naturalism has made some actual inroads into epistemic success. This is why the Flat Earth Society is not taken seriously by anyone serious.[12]

There is, however, a difference between merely fearing change of our theoretical outlooks and fearing the proliferation of a flawed theory. Many people certainly resisted the Copernican Revolution, but it is fair to say today that to fear that the Earth is not at the center of the universe is simply naïve self-centeredness. The Churchlands would certainly argue that, similar to fearing the Copernican Revolution, to fear a revolution in our understanding of the mind is a failure to face reality.

Folk psychology, specifically, is implicated in this respect. The Churchlands argue that their theory modification may prove that folk-psychological aspects of mentality are *vacuous*, and, therefore, *should no longer exist even in appearance* following eliminativism. As Paul Churchland writes, "we must be prepared to contemplate revolutions in our conception of what *we* are, just as we have successfully

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[12] Nevertheless, theory modification can also arbitrarily alter one's conception of notions that are not so obvious from observation alone, such as the existence of other minds, free will, material reality, cause-and-effect, Truth, God, soul etc. There must ultimately be a more fundamental answer to the reality of each of these notions, but our capacity to access those answers has been epistemically limited and has depended instead on personal leanings. For more on this, see Chapter 3.

navigated repeated revolutions in our conception of the universe that embeds us" (1988, 6). But while it is good to *contemplate* revolutions in self-understanding, if the implications of revising such attitudes are potentially negative, and if the reason for revision itself is not credible, then we should certainly get the "heebie-jeebies" at the thought of such a revolution.

Such may be the case with Churchlandian neuroscience, for it is unclear whether their scientific formulations are evidence that folk-psychological components such as beliefs and desires are worthless. It is unconvincing that simply because we sometimes rely on the notions of beliefs and desires as explanations and predictions of other peoples' behavior that they are not pre-theoretical phenomena when experienced in the first-person. Individuals experience their beliefs and desires outright as phenomena of their own consciousness; therefore, it is the belief and the desire as *phenomena* that need to be *explained* rather than *explained away*. If the conscious experience of beliefs and desires is inherent to healthily functioning human mentality, as I will argue it is, then these concepts of FP exist pre-theoretically and cannot be eliminated.[13]

Bennett and Hacker (2003) contend along these lines that folk-psychological concepts are not themselves "concepts of imperceptible entities, like genes or viruses, or concepts of theoretical entities, like mesons or quarks" (370). Moreover, "Our concepts

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[13] In this sense I diverge from Dennett's view that FP is ontologically fictitious. Whereas the notion of Earth's "equator," for instance, may be fictitious and yet is hard to ignore once one learns of it, FP is not taught. We might examine whether infants and young children *understand* their beliefs and desires, but I would not go so far as to say that they do not have them before they learn of the idea or are able to articulate them linguistically. Also, research indicates that children as young as 3-years-old and adults "share a fundamentally similar construal of human action in terms of beliefs and desires, even false beliefs" (Bartsch and Wellman 1989, 946).

of beliefs, thoughts, hopes, fears, expectations, etc. are not concepts of kinds of things, but abstractions from believings, thinkings, hopings, fearings, and expectings" (Bennett and Hacker 2003, 370). This reasoning may sound circular, but I posit that it is impossible from a phenomenological perspective to experience mentality without experiencing the phenomena of FP. That is not to say that FP as a theoretical predictor is always successful, but simply that the existences of folk-psychological phenomena do not depend on their theoriticity.

In response, one might suggest that this apparent "phenomenological, pre-theoretical experience" of our individual beliefs and desires is itself a confabulation of some more determinative, subliminal, explanation for our own mentality and behavior. In that sense, we would be applying FP as a theoretical explanation of our thoughts or actions, but it would be an incorrect explanation (PSC 1989, 192 and 228). Patricia Churchland points to blindness denial: Individuals with Anton's syndrome are physically blind but still believe they can see. They confabulate illusory explanations for why they trip over furniture rather than realizing their own blindness (1989, 228). Another example is people who act ridiculously after post-hypnotic suggestion: Many subjects confabulate explanations for why they were quacking like ducks after emerging from hypnosis (Lilienfeld *et al*. 2009, 589). Additionally, sometimes throughout the course of mental life people have beliefs and desires that they may be uncertain about. So I agree that occasionally people confabulate; yet it is a stretch to assume that these examples indicate that *all* talk of personal beliefs, desires, etc. is confabulation. That we can confabulate phony beliefs and desires does not mean that the phenomena of believing and desiring are themselves phony. Sometimes then it is a matter of discovering what are our

true beliefs and desires, but it is never a matter of discovering an alternative eliminative explanation for the mental experiences themselves.

Hence, the FP of beliefs and desires differs from the folk concepts of other scientific domains that the Churchlands criticize. Whereas "phlogiston" and "caloric" were themselves parts of theories to explain the phenomena of combustion and heat respectively, beliefs and desires are themselves the phenomena that require explanation. And just as we have and always will speak of combustion and heat, I take it we will always speak of beliefs and desires. Additionally, to stress that FP fails to apply to wind or the moon is not a good argument. The Churchlands have merely shown that anthropomorphizing is unwise, not that the human characteristics that we base the analogy on are themselves false: Just because a "violent" wind is not actually angry does not mean that violent people typically are not either.

The question then is not how to explain all of mentality via neuroscience, but rather to understand the development of psychological "emergent properties" from the nervous system; properties that "'arise' out of more fundamental entities and yet are 'novel' or 'irreducible' with respect to them" (O'Connor and Wong 2009, 1). For, as Bennett and Hacker also argue, there can be no bridge principles allowing for the reduction of psychological states because "literally *identifying* neural states and configurations with psychological attributes" makes no sense (2003, 362). They write:

> …If believing were a neural configuration, it would make sense to say 'I am in a state of believing that it will rain, which is actually a state of my brain, and my state is trustworthy, so I trust it', or 'I believe it will rain, and since my brain states are reliable, I suppose it will rain' (2003, 362).

To understand conclusively, however, the novelty of psychological emergent properties is outside the scope of this work, since I am only trying to show their novel existence in and of itself. But explanations of their emergence are certainly of interest and may likely be accounted for via evolution (see particularly Byrne and Whiten 1989).

1.6 Against a premature rejection of folk psychology

Considering then the various ways in which the Churchlands' eliminative materialism could be flawed, it would be imprudent to reject FP outright. The Churchlands would probably agree insofar as conclusive eliminative evidence is lacking now, but they nevertheless urge that it is forthcoming. Even as of 2007, Paul Churchland writes that the "integrity of folk psychology" is "in doubt" (2007, 23). And with the confidence of various other connectionist illustrations under their belts, they are very critical of alternative approaches to psychology. Paul Churchland lambastes Freud in particular for having been "dubious in the extreme" to resort to the "intuitive appeal" of explaining mental causality in terms of "beliefs, desires, and fears" (1995, 182).

Now, surely Freud misfired here and there, but it is not only Freud who utilized the investigation of beliefs desires and fears for practical therapeutic effect. Cognitive behavioral therapy, rational emotive behavior therapy, psychodynamic psychotherapy, couples therapy, various other types of analysis, etc. *all* consider folk psychology relevant. Yet, although Churchland writes that he is not suggesting the "wholesale replacement of talk therapies with chemical, surgical, and genetic therapies," it is hard to see an alternative wherein the Churchlands advocacy is adopted wide-scale and talk therapy remains in its current forms (PMC 1995, 183). Whereas Churchland admits there will "always be a central place for systematic conversation and role playing" to reverse

"defective *socialization*," and that "we cannot socialize people just be administering drugs," he seems to limit the extent of psychotherapy to drugs and the re-tuning of mental connection weights (PMC 1995, 183).

But socialization and drugs are only therapeutic extremes. The Churchlands sacrifice the concerns of everyone in the middle—the "worried well"—who suffer not necessarily from faulty neurons or neurotransmitters but from humanistic demons such as concerns about life, death, love, friendship, desire, you name it; each of which can create spirals of anxiety and depression. It is the treatment of these sorts of concerns that Gaylin calls an art. Individual explanations for causes of "worried wellness" range, with some being more isolatable than others, but the *process* of therapy is one in which therapists help others to climb out from debilitating conditions, and therapists must adapt to their patients' individual personalities and characteristics.

It may be impossible to rule out whether science will *ever* quantify the approach of what seems to be such a necessarily flexible and intuitive practice, but history has illustrated the consequences of over-zealous efforts thus far. Regardless of the scientific school, science does not seem capable of identifying definitive causes or treatments of every single type of mental difficulty, some of which vary as particularly as do individuals. Hence, the problem is not that science might one-day reign entirely over therapy, but that, in attempting to expedite the possibility, it is willing to dismiss questions outside of its explanatory range. Such thorny questions once dealt with qualia; now they deal with beliefs and desires. Ultimately, there need not be any battle between science and humanism. Instead, we must understand what humanistic categories necessarily need to be retained if science is to own therapy satisfactorily. But rather than

expecting to delineate *all* of these categories here and now, let us focus our attention on

one important genre of psychological humanism, namely beliefs and desires of an

existential nature.

Chapter Two

> **Alvy at 9**: Well, the universe is everything, and if it's
> expanding, someday it will break apart and that would be the
> end of everything!
> **Alvy's Mom**: What is that your business?
> [*she turns back to the doctor*]
> **Alvy's Mom**: He stopped doing his homework!
> **Alvy at 9**: What's the point?
>   -*Annie Hall*

2.1 Allen's meaningless universe

For Woody Allen, "to live is to suffer" (Yabroff 2008). That miserable of an outlook

might seem unlikely to those who imagine such fame and fortune, but deeper concerns

haunt the artist. Rather than losing sleep contemplating utility bills or movie premiers,

Allen "lies awake at night, terrified of the void" (Yabroff 2008). He is a recognizable

illustration of the struggle to grapple with difficult concerns like why we exist and what

happens afterwards. Science has no adequate answers to these questions, yet their

consequent pain can be qualitative: Allen portrays himself as someone who makes

movies for no other reason than to "take his mind off the existential horror of being alive"

(Yabroff 2008).

  Certainly Allen is a unique case, but his story is relevant because literally anyone

could be in the same boat—perhaps not as funny, but equally terrified. Our caricaturized

version of him and his perspectives on life raise important philosophical questions that

can have immense psychological effects on those who ask them. Indeed, perspectives on

the nature of existence itself take the form of beliefs and desires, the specifics of which

may mean the difference between contentedness and dread. Although the psychological

symptoms resulting from existential questioning appear tantamount to generic mood

disorders, traditional scientific solutions cannot entirely quell them, forcing a unique therapeutic approach.

2.2 The chilly wind of human finitude

Death is a very difficult topic, and in our day-to-day lives most people do not dwell on it. We construct cliché phrases such as "live every day like it's your last" to remind people precisely not to take their lives for granted, since they are fragile and unpredictable. Yet it is often the ability to ignore death that allows us to sleep soundly without fearing "the void." Surely it is preferable not to become paralyzed by anticipatory anxiety of the inevitable, and in some ways we are fortunate that death is rather ignorable these days— average life spans are longer and our society lives relatively comfortably. But there is a paradox: while our own deaths often seem remote, topics like global catastrophe, war, extinction, and even ghost stories are fascinating to many people in general. Any glance at a TV guide will show that even "academic" television like the History Channel broadcasts little else than "Nostradamus Effect" and "Life After People" because these shows are good for ratings. In fact, fears of existence have had distinct tones more recently than ever throughout history. As William Barrett writes in reference to last century's technological advances, "the bomb reveals the dreadful and total contingency of human existence" (1958, 65). Unlike any other time in human evolution, our minds were forced to contemplate the brink of extinction and were not prepared to. Our today, as Andrew Mitchell puts it, is the "time of terrorism" and carries with it its own implications on our self-reflection and ontological self-understanding (2005, 181).

Yet there is still the other side of this paradox: Why are not more people like Woody Allen? What does it require to create explicit awareness of one's personal

finitude? A literary example is particularly apt here as Jean-Paul Sartre illustrates these concerns in his short story "The Wall" (1948). Sartre depicts three rebel prisoners during the Spanish Civil War who await execution. Their sentencing is arbitrary but final, and each is told they will be shot in the morning. One character reflects, "I'd never thought about death because I never had any reason to, but now the reason was here and there was nothing to do but think about it" (Sartre 1948, 13). His contemplation results in a "pathological state of terror" amidst which he feels "indifference" towards everything else (Sartre 1948, 17). Another prisoner is so preoccupied with fear he unknowingly wets himself.

Sartre's story elicits more than just sorrow for its characters. "The Wall" is an allegorical microcosm of life itself, forcing its readers to question how different their own lives are from the lives of the prisoners. How significant is the relative difference of one day versus years or even decades when the stake is death? Once made to stare directly into death's face, the prisoner Pablo thinks to himself, "several hours or several years of waiting is all the same when you have lost the illusion of being eternal" (1948, 27-8). Yet that death is inevitable should come as no surprise to anyone. We see it all the time, all around us, but Sartre's story is powerful precisely for those who do not spend most of their time fearing it.

This theme of human finitude "pervades" existential philosophy like a "chilly wind," according to Barrett (1958, 36). At times it might even seem tiring… But rather than criticizing existentialism for imposing a dreary worldview that corrupts an otherwise optimistic human nature, Barrett is also correct to note that existentialism did not manufacture the "tensions" that its perspectives invoke; rather, it gave "philosophic

expression" to conflicts "already at work" in modern humanity (1958, 26). Thus, if my observations seem trite, I suspect to a degree that they are far more discomforting than actually stale, for existentialism raises unpleasant questions that we may try to resist psychologically.

2.3 Clinical approaches to existential concerns

I do not want to retrace the story of humanity's confrontation with these issues; I simply want to point at their existence in philosophical and artistic forms historically. While historical narratives that do trace this history help to provide legitimacy to its significance, I plan to do as much by focusing instead on contemporary analysis of human psychology. Ultimately, our scenario as humans stuck within an uncertain existence has not changed, and the philosophic and artistic expression of these considerations is merely a budding explicit awareness of an implicit human familiarity. For the purpose of this psychological investigation then, it is foremost a matter *that* humans are susceptible to existential awareness, from which it is a matter of understanding *why*. Indeed, from a therapist's perspective, focus on the more pedestrian formations of these contemplations will often be relevant: Pablo did not actually have to *be* Sartre or to have read Heidegger to struggle with his finitude, nor does anyone else.

Viktor Frankl considered it a "meta-clinical problem" that:

> More and more, a psychiatrist is approached today by patients who confront him with human problems rather than neurotic symptoms. Some of the people who nowadays call on a psychiatrist would have seen a pastor, priest or rabbi in former days. Now they often refuse to be handed over to a clergyman and instead confront the doctor with questions such

as, "What is the meaning in my life?" (Frankl 2006, 116)

Later we will consider whether a clinician is ultimately an appropriate outlet for such questions. But in the mid-20th century Frankl was already noticing that "existential frustration" to find meaning in one's life, especially amidst suffering and uncertainty, presented in symptoms of psychogenic neurosis. What clinicians might consider products of abnormal psychology had their origin "not in the psychological but rather in the 'noölogical' (from the Greek *noös* meaning mind) dimension of human existence" (Frankl 2006, 101). By "noölogical," Frankl means "anything pertaining to the specifically human dimension" (2006, 101). In this sense, Frankl suggests that "existential frustration is in itself neither pathological nor pathogenic" but part of "growth and development" (2006, 102). To forget this type of condition may "motivate a doctor to bury his patient's existential despair under a heap of tranquilizing drugs" (Frankl 2006, 103).

Today, the medical psychotherapeutic model is concerned precisely with "abnormal psychology:" psychology that "differ[s] markedly from a society's ideas about proper functioning" (Comer 2010, 3). A model for how the mind "ought" to function serves for comparison against the mentally ill. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition* (*DSM-IV*) outlines criteria for diagnoses of mental conditions ranging from severe psychosis to obsessive compulsiveness to eating disorders, etc. Focus on these disorders and others is necessary and should be acute but should not monopolize the extent of clinical attention. To focus solely on abnormal "functioning" creates an unnecessarily reductive clinical model, for it considers mental disorders as only curable through "surgery, medicine, or rehabilitation techniques"

(Weiner, Freedheim, Graham, & Naglieri 2003, 495). Although it presumes a less reductive understanding of the mind than does eliminative materialism, it may still rely too heavily on identifying the causes of *all* mental distress as originating in the brain's hard wiring. The contemporary clinical model is very effective for a wide variety of patients, and I am not suggesting its dismissal, but it may be ineffective at quelling existential frustrations in particular.

In many instances, depressive mood disorders and anxiety may easily be products of genetic and environmental factors. Each can cause abnormal mental functioning in the form of neurochemical imbalances and habitual, irrational thoughts. In these cases, chemical imbalance affects one's perception of existence—in a sense, it "colors" how one interprets life—and environmental factors may compound the problem depending on how a person internalizes them. Child abuse, for example, may habituate a child to believe that he or she is pathetic and unlovable, and a child with a neurochemical imbalance might be even more at risk of these thoughts due to a predisposition to reflect in that way. Conversely, environmental factors could actually instigate neurochemical imbalance themselves. But either way, the medical model assumes exclusively that "symptoms are developed due to external pathogens; heritable vulnerabilities that are biologically determined; or structural, anatomical, or physiological dysfunctions and abnormalities" (Weiner *et al.* 2003, 495).[14]

In these forms, medication or cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) may be

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[14] By this, the medical model might be sympathetic to EM insofar as EM still presumes to explain the mind within these limits, but from a practical perspective, the efficacy of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) may itself demonstrate the fault of extreme EM, as CBT successfully navigates abnormal *beliefs and desires* to alleviate mental pain.

especially appropriate for treating mood disorders and anxiety. Medications such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) help to rebalance neurochemicals, while CBT rests on altering the ways people rationalize. Rather than allowing people to live in unreasonable hopelessness or fear, CBT teaches people to alter their own mental habits so that they are less susceptible to clinical depression or anxiety (Burns 2007, 61). It is telling that CBT is "the most extensively researched form of psychotherapy ever developed and is now the most widely practiced form of therapy in the United States" (Burns 2007, 61). Research illustrates the effectiveness of CBT, for in certain instances it is at least as effective as medication at treating depression and is certainly "more effective than no treatment or placebo treatment" (Lilienfeld *et al*. 2009, 689).[15]

In relation to death-anxiety, CBT expects it to correspond with other conditions such as hypochondriasis, general anxiety, or with physical health issues (Furer & Walker 2008). When death anxiety does correlate with these other conditions, it is typically in the form of fearing the *instance* of death itself, rather than fearing death because of its existential import. That is, these patients are more prone to irrational checking of their pulse rates, blood pressure, weight changes, etc. and may frequently seek reassurance from others that they are not dying. Other patients might be phobic of perceived risks, like flying. (Furer & Walker 2008). For such patients, CBT can be effective by exposing them to circumstances they fear and by coaching "cognitive reappraisal" so that they develop "more balanced views" about life and death (Furer & Walker 2008, 176-8).

Although both have their merits, within the models of CBT and pharmacotherapy

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[15] For direct evidence, see Elkin 1994; Bowers and Clum 1988; Smith, Glass, and Miller 1980.

we can go further in realizing the limits of reductionism. Both of these approaches reduce notions of mental concerns to "abnormal" mentality. Yet if worries about death and meaning are in any way a part of some "human condition," then that suggests that there is something universal about confronting these worries, at least when they are limited to rational thinking. For instance, when it comes to a case like Allen, I am willing to stipulate that no further understanding of how his mind operates will, in principle, be able to help him. Perhaps abnormal chemical imbalances might enhance one's susceptibility to fret over ideas like death and meaning to life, but pharmacotherapy in itself cannot eliminate the prospect of death, nor can it create life's meaning. Moreover, and perhaps most important, the thought patterns that create existential angst are not irrational, making talk therapy particularly difficult. Therapists trained to find "cognitive distortions" in patients' thinking about life will be frustrated by some patients' rational emphasis on the fact that existence provides no objective justification for itself. Patients might run analytic circles around their therapists' best efforts to quell their concerns.

Here then we can draw a distinction similar to Frankl's between *existential* and *abnormal* depression and anxiety wherein the latter concerns how the mind works and the former concerns the situation of humanness in general as a catalyst for mental pain. From this perspective, focus is not on what exists within the mind, but on what scenario the mind itself exists *within* and how this placement of the mind can be upsetting enough. Regardless of the mind's structure—be it connectionist, computational, what have you— approaching the treatment of existential concerns from the inside of the mind will not suffice. Instead, it is simply the mind's self-evident cognitive capacity overall that makes it susceptible to these concerns, and it is our environment that imposes them. A similar

situation is one's suffering from prejudice and discrimination. Whenever anyone has been subjected to the pain of societal racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. their pain is not contained entirely within the way they *are* physically because they do not feel pain regardless of their external situation. Instead, it is their *awareness* of such abominable circumstance that causes pain. Likewise, if the human mind were not in such a metaphysically uncertain world there would be less existential difficulty.

2.4 Terror management

I have stipulated, therefore, that there might be something unavoidable about grappling with finitude and life's meaning. An obvious retort, though, would be that not everyone seems so dampened by these ideas even when they *are* explicitly made aware of them. I realize that most people would take my writings here to be unnecessarily intense, and if I am right about the inherent difficulty people must have with these problems, then I wonder myself how I am able to write about them without becoming distracted by their paralyzing qualities. I am not sure exactly how to reconcile this dilemma in theory, and in some ways it returns us to our earlier paradox. Yet, for my purposes, establishing the reality of a *global human disturbance* premised on universal existential anxiety is extra credit. Rather, even if very few people suffer from this type of anxiety or depression, it is still relevant to clinical psychology. If Woody Allen were the only person on Earth worried about human finitude, he would still deserve a caring listener. Thus, it is unnecessary for me to demonstrate absolutely the universality of existential concerns, but empirical evidence might actually do just that.

Terror Management Theory (TMT) proposes that much of human behavior is understandable within a broad conceptual framework of avoiding mortality salience,

awareness of one's own death (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski 1991).[16] According

to Pyszczynski *et al*. (2004):

> TMT starts with the proposition that the juxtaposition of a biologically rooted
>
> desire for life with the awareness of the inevitability of death (which resulted
>
> from the evolution of sophisticated cognitive abilities unique to humankind) gives
>
> rise to the potential for paralyzing terror. (436)

Specifically, humans and other animals have evolved a survival instinct, yet humans are

distinguished psychologically from other animals according to three cognitive abilities:

"the ability to conceptualize reality in terms of causality, the ability to conceive of future

events, and the ability to reflect upon ourselves" (Solomon *et al*. 1991, 95).[17] Although

these capacities help our species to survive, they also burden us with inevitable and

uncomfortable recognitions regarding "aspects of existence that we simply cannot

control," which form a "perpetual source of potential anxiety" (Solomon *et al*. 1991, 95-

6).

Various studies demonstrate that when individuals are directed in experiments to

think about their own mortality, as by ruminating about death for several minutes, they

create a "cultural anxiety-buffer" of an established "worldview" and "self-esteem"

(Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Simon, & Breus 1994, 627). According to TMT,

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[16] TMT is inspired largely by cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker (e.g. *The Denial of Death*, 1973) who "synthesized ideas from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities" to create a general science of humanity (Pyszczynski *et al.* 2004, 436).

[17] Rather than as "unique" capacities, I think these capacities might be better understood as differences in degree from other animals that become differences in kind when they pass a threshold of existential awareness.

worldview is necessary to give life a sense of "order, meaning, and permanence," while self-esteem is the comfort of knowing that "one is living up to the standards of value prescribed in that cultural worldview" (Greenberg *et al.* 1994, 627).

In response to threats of mortality salience, people typically deploy "distinct defensive tactics" to preserve this worldview and self-esteem (Greenberg, Arndt, Simon, Pyszcznski, & Solomon 2000, 91). Greenberg *et al.* (2000) measure a "dual-process theory" of "proximal" and "distal" defense relating to conscious and unconscious awareness of death, respectively (91). When individuals are consciously aware of the problem of death, "proximal" defense entails "rational defensive maneuvers" that include either "distracting oneself from death-related thought" or mental efforts to "push the problem into the distant future by denying one's vulnerability" (Greenberg *et al.* 2000, 92). Distal defense is measured after subjects have been distracted from the death stimuli, allowing it to fade from conscious awareness. Subjects tend to "increase their positive reactions to those who uphold their worldview and negative reactions to those who implicitly or explicitly challenge their worldview" (Greenberg *et al.* 2000, 97).

Yet not only do these studies illustrate strong reactions to death-related stimuli, comparisons of these responses to those of other "potentially threatening conditions" such as failing an exam, public speaking, or dental pain "indicate that these effects are unique to thoughts of mortality" (Greenberg *et al.* 2000, 92). Considering the broad empirical support for TMT, it becomes even more difficult to deny the significance of humanistic concerns to mental health. Although science may not be able to provide a reductive understanding of TMT, it has measured the effects of mortality-salience on people's worldview and their mental efforts to suppress it.

Kirkpatrick and Navarrete (2006) argue, however, that TMT is flawed from an evolutionary perspective. Kirkpatrick and Navarette write that *all* theories of human nature must be consistent with evolution because "the fundamental design of human psychological architecture, like that of all other living species, are the result of evolutionary processes" (2006, 288). TMT attempts to ground itself evolutionarily by stipulating an evolved survival instinct, but by some accounts such an instinct would be "*maladaptive* for many species with diverse reproductive systems" (Kirkpatrick & Navarrete 2006, 289). Accordingly:

> Salmon would not fight their way upstream to breed, ants and bees would not live in colonies characterized by specialized castes, and parents across taxa would not readily sacrifice their personal safety and resources for the benefit of their offspring. (Kirkpatrick & Navarrete 2006, 289)

Although TMT does not need to demonstrate a specifically evolved capacity of fear of death for their theory to be valid, Kirkpatrick and Navarrete are skeptical that such thoughts at all would be particularly "paralyzing or incapacitating" to anyone (2006, 290).

Ultimately, though, Kirkpatrick and Navarrete still must account for the documented evidence correlating mortality-salience with worldview defense. To reconcile the apparent contradiction between contemporary research and evolutionary theory, they propose that TMT be "modified" to argue that strategies of worldview defense and self-esteem enhancement are "relatively modern solutions invented by people or cultures rather than by natural selection" (2006, 292). Their alternative explanation upholds the fundamental aspects of TMT, making it no less "important or

interesting" (2006, 292). The original terror management research can be understood "by a system of adaptive mechanisms" that encourage "pro-normative orientation in order to enhance the maintenance and formation of alliances" since such alliances are helpful in times of need (2006, 294).

While these various approaches to TMT differ in their explanations of the *origin* of terror management overall, it does not seem arguable that it exists. Moreover, these differences about origin are ultimately similar insofar as they agree on the significance of death anxiety as a catalyst for worldview defense. Whereas terror management theorists ground their hypothesis in an evolutionary survival instinct, other evolutionary theorists consider terror management to be a relatively new evolutionary *by-product*. Others still might take the contemporary TMT evidence at face value, not presupposing that *all* human emotions, actions, etc. need to be traced to evolution.

2.5 Depressive realism and the need for phenomenology

How is it though that if there seems to be a natural reflex *against* thoughts of death and a natural reflex to *buffer* existential anxiety, that other people can somehow lack these responses? It seems that while most are able instinctively to formulate an awareness of meaning through cultural worldviews and a sense of self-esteem, others are more sensitive to existential awareness itself and are less able to, for lack of a better term, "trick" themselves out of it. To understand this though from a clinical perspective requires the revival of such approaches as Victor Frankl's wherein the perspective of the patient is considered primary rather than the patients underlying biological formulations. For these patients, biological accounts may be secondarily relevant, but the primary impetus for depression or anxiety itself is one of personal outlook. The interpretive *way*

that one's existence within the world is given to consciousness becomes central.

An additional model of cognitive depression may explain this question better. The "depressive realism" (DR) model, which "many clinicians are unaware of," helps to account for some of the disparity between people's amounts of existential concern (Ghaemi 2007, 126). Just as CBT considers "irrational" outlook as being a cause of mood disorders, depression based instead on a "rational" outlook corresponds better with the DR model. Rather than being cognitively distorted, patients fitting the DR model are actually "more realistic than their completely nondepressed counterparts" (Ghaemi 2007, 126). For example, Abramson and Alloy (1979) presented subjects with tests that varied in their degree of controllability. They found that depressed individuals gauged more accurately the uncontrollability of tests than did nondepressed individuals. Considering these results, it may be that "normal nondepressed persons have some lacunae of insight, some psychological blindspots, which are necessary for emotional functioning" (Ghaemi 2007, 126). It becomes difficult, therefore, to treat a depressed or anxious patient without understanding a patient's perspective. For to universalize CBT, per se, would only be helpful for those whose symptoms stem from cognitive distortions.

Hence, psychiatric researcher Nassir Ghaemi calls for psychiatry to "take phenomenology seriously," something at which he says United States psychiatry has never been very "advanced" (2007, 122). Drawing from Karl Jaspers and Ludwig Binswanger, Ghaemi suggests that "phenomenology needs to precede diagnosis and treatment" so that therapists understand patients' "subjective experiences" (2007, 122). Contemporary psychiatry instead, he observes, "jump[s] rapidly to diagnosis with attention primarily to only *DSM-IV*-defined criteria, followed by treatment" (2007, 123).

Not only does he corroborate our earlier discussion about the inadequacy of the *DSM* at considering patients' subjectivity, especially in relation to existential concerns, Ghaemi further implicates "managed care insurance and pharmaceutical industries" for encouraging hasty "med checks" of superficial assessment (2007, 122).

Mood disorders in particular may be understood inadequately without a phenomenological approach, particularly in relation to what Ghaemi calls "existential despair" (2007, 125). By existential "despair," he means the same concerns of "hopelessness," "low self-esteem," and "a loss of meaning in life" (2007, 125). For bipolar disorder especially, patients are mostly treated with "antidepressants and mood stabilizers" to treat biological components of depression. But studies have demonstrated that bipolar individuals with milder depression are "associated with more insight" predisposing them to depressive realism and despair (Ghaemi 2007, 127). There is "no simple pharmacological answer" to despair's depression; yet as people are treated with medication, their symptoms linger as "residual depressive presentations" (Ghaemi 2007, 126). To be effective, therapists must recognize their patients' perspectives as "realistic about life" instead of as "illusions" (Ghaemi 2007, 127).

2.6 Rethinking reductionism

Regardless of the theoretical success we have achieved in understanding the makeup of the mind itself, our first priority must be to consider the *person* that encompasses the mind, and to work to understand *him* or *her*. Thus, Chapter One suggested leaving open the possibility for "humanistic categories" within our approach to human mentality. This term is obviously a placeholder for understandings of psychology that seem relatively intuitive or simply wisdom-derived and which are not absolutely grounded in

neuroscience. While there might be a broad amount of such humanistic contributions to psychology, I think the existential concerns we have discussed are particularly significant. Much of the criticism concerning "humanistic" psychology is that it tries to replace substantive components of scientific psychology willy-nilly both in theory and practice. What existential disturbances indicate, however, is not a *competitive* psychological theory, but rather a complementary observation about the varieties of depression and anxiety and the limits of approaches that do not consider them. Nonetheless, the amount of laboratory data supporting the psychological premises of my existential arguments hopefully takes the political edge off this science/humanism divide. According to our current extent of scientific knowledge, there is just not a satisfying neural argument to replace the more phenomenological understanding of people's worries about death and life's meaning.

Furthermore, the prevailing medical-psychological model and CBT, both which attempt to be theoretically normative and scientifically systematic are shown to be insufficient as treatments for existential concerns. Not only then is *further* reduction a bad idea for treatment, but also *current* methods may equally fail. The only solution to this dilemma, then, is to reevaluate the psychological treatment of existential "anguish," "dread," "angst," etc. without insisting on a scientifically reductive approach. If we arrive at one, fine, but it is possible for our results to be scientific only insofar as they are statistically more successful than medical methods.

Chapter Three

3.1 Revisiting logotherapy

Based on the potential severity of existential anguish about life and death, it would seem

that its treatment would be a high-priority issue for psychologists of all kinds; except that

the majority of people manage to stave off contemplating the objects of such anguish in

the first place. Even brushing off such a patient's concerns as neurochemical byproducts

or as irrational thinking seems like a way for clinicians to avoid the existential import of

these concerns themselves. How else could a clinician be satisfied with providing such

superficial care? Their patients somehow bypassed the human proclivity to shield one's

self from existential "terror," and it is *this* reality that must become a concern for more

clinical psychologists and psychiatrists so that they do not misdiagnose. Thus, when

existential uncertainty about meaning results in psychological distress, it is important to

understand more about the underlying nature of this distress and its solutions—about

what "meaning" means and what sorts of beliefs in particular are helpful to recognize it.

By providing a concrete sense of what it means to believe in meaning, I hope to

substantiate my former existential considerations while also providing a particular

context in which psychotherapy necessitates a humanistic approach. In particular, Victor

Frankl's logotherapy is a concrete method for alleviating certain types of existentially

relevant psychological concerns. By extending his method to include metaphysical

considerations, I hope to derive a contemporary psychotherapeutic realm suitable for the

most difficult of such concerns, like that of fearing death.

   Much of the literature on the importance of meaning-formation for people's

psyches discusses it quite vaguely. There is not much understanding of what meaning

actually is or how we derive it. The onus tends to be on the suffering individual to be

willing to look for some sort of general "meaning," from which a particularized definition

of it will hopefully show itself. Nevertheless, there is a certain necessity to this approach.

As Frankl notes, life's meaning "differ[s]" from person to person and from "moment to

moment," which makes it "impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way"

(2006, 77). For, "Every situation is distinguished by its uniqueness, and there is always

only one right answer to the problem posed by the situation at hand" (Frankl 2006, 77).

Providing examples of people's various situations, Frankl's logotherapeutic anecdotes

range from helping people manage divorce, to "Sunday neurosis," to job dissatisfaction,

to The Holocaust. In each instance, Frankl illuminates a balance between coming to

terms with the reality of one's situation and also realizing one's ability to alter it and its

characterization. Some instances understandably prove more difficult to heal than others,

yet there must also be a certain generality to his psychotherapeutic approach, or else

Frankl would not be able to describe it, as he says, "in a nutshell" (2006, 97).

Frankl approaches questions about existence with a pessimistic realism, easily

justified by his own experiences in particular. He challenges others to find meaning in

their lives in spite of what he calls the "tragic triad" of pain, guilt, and death (2006, 137).

Confronted by this triad, Frankl poses the need for a "tragic optimism" that allows one to

"say yes to life" and to "allow life to maintain its meaning" despite its "tragic aspects"

(2006, 137). Logotherapy teaches "three main avenues" on which to do this, each of

which seem to involve personally making something out of what life is (2006, 145). The

ways are (1) "creating a work or doing a deed;" (2) "experiencing something or

encouraging someone;" and (3) "the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering" (Frankl 2006, 111). Each of these avenues requires individual effort—one has to *choose* to go down them and to pursue meaningful projects, love, purpose, etc. Hence, individuals are *responsible* to give life meaning, as it does not merely uncover itself passively but instead emerges through an active change in perspective. Rather than asking some Other "what the meaning of life is," individuals must realize that it is *they* who are asked and that only they as individuals have the capacity to choose an orientation of their own lives (Frankl 2006, 109).

By working to illuminate for people the range of possible meanings a life can have; by showing that meaninglessness is merely a perspective, Frankl brings a humanistic insight to the science of psychology. We are not *just* something neurochemically, for instance. We are not necessarily *made* depressed; sometimes how we choose to view the world plays just as much a role in our psychological makeup. Indeed, the sheer "teaching of [humanity's] 'nothingbutness,' the theory that [humanity] is nothing but the result of biological, psychological and sociological conditions, or the product of heredity and environment" in itself creates a sense of helplessness. It reinforces damaging beliefs that one is the "pawn and victim of outer influences and inner circumstances" (Frankl 2006, 130).[18]

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[18] Of course, psychic determinists will counter that to stipulate the importance of "choice" begs the question of whether we have freedom to make choices at all. This free-will debate, however, is problematic due to our lack of psychic causal understanding. Although some might contend that there has been a progressive deepening of our knowledge of psychic causality, there is still no way to ground hard-determinism other than to infer it. It is not conclusively telling that further mental investigation uncovers deeper layers of a "causal chain," for no one will ever uncover *less* causality. We will never discover a "free-will" neuron. Instead, deeper levels of causality are sometimes uncovered, but they appear more as an infinite regression of dividing something in half indefinitely. Rather than as a conclusive answer to the

To help people escape or avoid a feeling of helplessness and meaninglessness, Frankl does not suggest "teaching" or "preaching" some "moral exhortation" (2006, 110). Instead, he writes that, "to put it figuratively":

> The role played by a logotherapist is that of an eye specialist rather than that of a painter. A painter tries to convey to us a picture of the world as he sees it; an ophthalmologist tries to enable us to see the world as it really is. The logotherapist's role consists of widening and broadening the visual field of the patient so that the whole spectrum of potential meaning becomes conscious and visible to him. (2006, 110)

The individual is understood for seeing the world negatively and not judged for reacting self-destructively, since it is indeed "tragic." But by enabling the individual to realize more opportunities for *how* to see and engage the world, and by illustrating the non-necessity of the self-destructive views that drove the individual to therapy initially, logotherapy facilitates an individual's search for meaning without indoctrinating meaning. Instead, it seems that in order to find *true* meaning, it must come from the individual's own search and would be ultimately unsuccessful if imposed. It is as though the process and ultimate uniqueness of painting one's own canvas is most valuable, and Frankl just ensures that one's palette has all the colors from which to choose.

Fankl's technique is not very different from Nassir Ghaemi's contemporary

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question at hand, an ultimate uncertainty about the nature of our sense of freedom still remains. Regardless, though, I think the most powerful argument for allowing a belief in some extent of free-will is that the alternative is not *livable*. Even if freedom really is an "illusion," it is an illusion that is impossible to see beyond, for we even experience the act of agreeing with determinism as a personal decision, and it is a belief that has to be ignored as soon as one returns their focus back to living.

discussion of "existential psychotherapy" (2006). Based on his empirical evidence for

depressive realism that we reviewed in Chapter Two, Ghaemi suggests a revision of

typical therapeutic practices when encountering those who may have lost sight of

meaning or purpose in a world they see as cruel and meaningless. Because there are "no

cognitive distortions to remove . . . all that is left to do is to accept the patient, to

acknowledge the valid portrayal of the (depressing) realities of existence that the patients

experience, and to move ahead from there" (Ghaemi 2007, 127). Ghaemi's approach

seems more like a "coming to terms," as he says that therapists must "meet patients

where they are, completely and wholeheartedly, without any further agenda, a pure

encounter of two souls in the travails of life, rather than a treatment of a sick person by a

healthy one" (2007, 127). But the similarities between Ghaemi and Frankl end after the

initial approach, for while Ghaemi provides a good and necessary critique of

psychotherapy, his solution lacks a method for moving forward. Instead, if Frankl is

correct, then it is not necessary simply to *cope* with a tragic environment since there is

the possibility to discover its meaning.

3.2 A contained search for meaning

Victor Frankl's anecdotes about life and his patients show the breadth of potential

"existential concerns" beyond that of fearing death. Nevertheless, considerations about

mortality salience are a particularly poignant example of the various manifestations of

existential crises and thus are a key area for investigation. Additionally, they are

uniquely substantive considerations because they raise metaphysical questions about the

ultimate nature of both life and death. This metaphysical context is the broadest umbrella

under which we can understand ourselves and thus influences our contextualization of all

terrestrial circumstances, including our understanding of existence itself and the search for meaning itself.[19]

Perhaps to allow his therapy the widest applicability, however, Frankl essentially brackets metaphysical reality as a "super-meaning" that "surpasses the finite intellectual capacities" of humans (2006, 118). He suggests that psychotherapists who enter the realm of super-meaning in their journey to understand life will "sooner or later" be "embarrassed" by their patients (2006, 118). To stipulate some sort of religious belief, for instance, may cause the same sort of response that Frankl says he got from his six-year-old daughter who asked, "Why do we speak of the *good* Lord?" Frankl replied, "Some weeks ago you were suffering from measles, and then the *good* Lord sent you full recovery." Yet his clever daughter was not satisfied and pressed, "Well, but please, Daddy, do not forget: in the first place, he had sent me the measles" (2006, 119). To keep from encountering similar interactions with his patients, Frankl presupposes a secular approach to existence unless a patient already "stands on the firm ground of religious belief" whereby he can draw upon his patient's "spiritual resources" (2006,

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[19] I consider "metaphysics" here in a narrowly cosmological sense. I am being purposely vague and somewhat arbitrary to give a general intuitive idea of what it means to consider the universe's context and peoples' place within it. To be any more specific would risk excluding any of the vast array of perspectives on this question. Thus, metaphysical considerations, for our purposes, regard the ultimate meaning and nature of us and the universe to an extent that surpasses scientific understanding. Metaphysical orientations constitute a personal belief or "faith" that ultimately lends to an interpretation about whether the universe is meaningful or meaningless.

I do not say "religious" in place of "metaphysical" because I consider religious orientations to be metaphysical orientations, but I do not consider all metaphysical orientations to be religious, e.g. agnosticism or atheism. We may take religion, as William James puts it in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, to mean "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual [humans] in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine;" wherein, "divine" is interpreted "very broadly, as denoting any object that is god*like*, whether it be a concrete deity or not" (2005, 114 [italics removed]).

119). Otherwise, even questions of life's "transitoriness" are kept within his patients'

initial metaphysical perspective.

This approach is very effective to a degree, for even without any metaphysical

assumptions we can differentiate between a "pessimistic" or "activistic" approach to our

finite earthly existence (2006, 121). By way of illustration, Frankl compares two views

of the passing days on a daily calendar:

> The pessimist . . . observes with fear and sadness that his wall calendar, from
>
> which he daily tears a sheet, grows thinner with each passing day. On the other
>
> hand, the person who attacks the problems of life actively . . . removes each
>
> successive leaf from his calendar and files it neatly and carefully with its
>
> predecessors, after first having jotted down a few diary notes on the back. (2006,
>
> 121)

The proactive individual values good memories and proud sufferings and would never

relinquish them merely for the sake of youth. The inevitability of death is seen as exactly

that, an inevitability, and the only control we have over it is to qualify the life we do

have.

Such Nietzschean and Spinozist affirmation of the past is powerful and uplifting.

And, when undertaken by a strong constitution, perhaps unconditional reverence for life

in its totality can make the question of death irrelevant. In general, however, I suspect

that living proactively can only soften the thought of death by creating a resigned

acceptance of it. One may possessively hoard their past but may still be sad or frightened

about the idea that, eventually, no more memories can accumulate.   For this person,

Frankl's method is a coping mechanism, but a limited one. The question then is whether

it is the only option, or whether there is a larger sense of optimism that can responsibly be facilitated by a psychotherapist.

3.3 James and broadening the logotherapeutic method

In the same way that Frankl suggests a full spectrum of perspective on average-everyday meaning, it is surprising that he does not apply the same concept to an interpretation of whether there is some sort of metaphysical meaning overall. The process of such a discovery would be different but would still retain the fundamental philosophy of logotherapy. Just as the basis for logotherapy as Frankl pioneered it is "far removed from logical reasoning," there is a disjunction between our capacity for reason and an understanding of objective metaphysical truth. In the same way that we must subjectively interpret scenarios in life that lack an external import of meaning, our notion of the cosmos is an even larger blank canvas that forces an existential contextualization of it.

William James advances a similar argument in his lecture "The Will to Believe," originally published in 1896. By his account, the search for truth is always directed by a passional tension between the desires to "gain truth" and to "avoid dupery" (James 2007, 185). For the vast majority of epistemic questions, answers should be sought with a thirst for accuracy. Because the "option between losing truth and gaining it" is not usually "momentous," we can typically "save ourselves from any chance of *believing falsehood*, by not making up our minds at all until objective evidence has come" (2007, 185). Such is "almost always the case" "in scientific questions" and "in human affairs in general" due to the purpose for which we pursue knowledge (2007, 185). Science, for instance, and other "dealings with objective nature," do not purport to be "makers" of truth; instead

they are "recorders" of it (2007, 185). As such, it would be "wholly out of place" for them to make epistemic judgments on any grounds that extend beyond empirical investigation (2007, 185).

Yet James objects to the situational preference for certainty becoming raised to an unconditional epistemological demand that *all* truth must be "technically verified" (2007, 186). Such a standard for truth is founded on an intellectually stifling "nervousness" that is less concerned with truth overall than it is concerned with adhering to its own investigative rules (2007, 186). For occasionally there is a "genuine [epistemic] option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds," which forces us, even implicitly, to "*decide* an option between propositions" (James 2007, 180 [my italics]). Religion is, for him, one such option because there is no objective knowledge on which to rely regarding ultimate metaphysical questions. And because we are inherently confronted with them, our answers to these questions tell more about us than they do about metaphysics. Even to "'leave the question open,' [i.e. agnosticism] is itself a passional decision," James writes (2007, 180).

Although some might still refrain from judgment in the absence of certainty, James suggests that, while "objective evidence and certitude are doubtless very fine ideals to play with," they are not found anywhere on our "moonlit and dream-visited planet" (2007, 182). There are indeed opinions that can "grow more true" by "experiencing and thinking over our experience," but there is not a single opinion "about concrete reality" that "never could be reinterpretable or corrigible" (2007, 182). While, strictly speaking, the inability to be absolutely certain about even the most seemingly obvious realities may force us to be philosophically agnostic about them, it is usually

reasonable to operate along degrees of certainty since absolute certainty is too high a

demand. Rather than losing sleep over the thought that my entire world might be an

illusion, for instance, I shrug off the possibility as unlikely but as an inevitable

incertitude.

Other types of facts, however, are not merely matters of discovery but are also

imbued with a "moral" quality "whose solution[s] cannot wait for sensible proof" (James

2007, 187). Such is the case whenever belief formation does not only concern whether

something "sensibly exists" but also of "what is good, or would be good if it did exist"

(James 2007, 187). If science "lays it down that that the infinite ascertainment of fact and

correction of false beliefs are the supreme goods" for humanity, then that is a moral

argument decided by the will (James 2007, 187). So is a judgment on whether to have

moral beliefs at all.

In the same way that normative facts require an act of will as a prerequisite to

their substantiation as an individual belief, certain "questions concerning personal

relations" require an act of will to become facts at all (James 2007, 188). As the dreams

go to the dreamers, James asks, "Who gains promotions, boons, appointments, but the

man in whose life they are seen to play the part of a live hypothesis, who discounts them,

sacrifices other things for their sake before they have come, and takes risks for them in

advance?" (2007, 188). By having faith in the outcome, the person's faith creates the

allowance for its own purpose and "creates its own verification" (James 2007, 188).

Thus, James concludes:

> There are, then, cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary
>
> faith exists in its coming. *And where faith in a fact can help create the*

fact, that would be an insane logic which should say that faith running ahead of scientific evidence is the "lowest kind of immorality" into which a thinking being can fall. (2007, 188-9)

The "religious hypothesis" then is such a fact, but it is not another of the "childish and human cases" that have "nothing to do with great cosmic matters" (James 2007, 189). Instead, religion is a "*momentous*" and "*forced*" option in that by its belief we may gain a "certain vital good" of coming to know "the more eternal things," and that we necessarily lose this potential by remaining skeptical (James 2007, 189). In light of this opportunity, then, skepticism is "not avoidance of option; it is option of a certain particular kind of risk. *Better risk loss of truth than chance of error*" (James 2007, 189). Because there is an inherent inability of our intellect to question the objectivity of religious belief, both the believer and the skeptic are potential dupes, and there is no reason to think "dupery through hope is so much worse than dupery through fear" (James 2007, 190).[20]

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[20] Richard Dawkins (2006) criticizes the idea that, because theism is not falsifiable, it is as reasonable as atheism. He argues that, although he is technically forced to be agnostic about the reality of theistic beliefs, in practice atheism is most justified. In the same way that he cannot disprove the tooth fairy or the flying spaghetti monster, "nobody thinks the hypothesis of their existence is on an even footing with the hypothesis of their non-existence" (Dawkins 2006, 53). This type of argumentation is justified, but I think it is important to note a few things about it. First, it is only by an arbitrary standard that anyone can gauge the probability of whether the cosmos is ultimately arbitrary and meaningless or not. Second, the consideration of probability and theism's "burden of proof" is just the passional reasoning that James notes. If the prioritization of probabilistic reasoning works for some then that is fine, but there is no a-priori reason to impose it on others concerning metaphysical matters. Moreover, probability's significance is mostly a practical issue, helping us to determine the viability of outcomes and to act accordingly. But in determining our orientation to available actions, we also have to consider the pragmatic advantages and disadvantages of each action in light of its possible outcome and *weight* the probabilities accordingly. The probability, for example, that a Divine entity exists is not zero, meaning that it is rational to keep hope and belief in it as a live hypothesis. Depending on the individual, there may be many various reasons for why a belief in this context, no matter how potentially "improbable," is far more valuable both in immediate effect (e.g. the pragmatic benefits of *living out* belief) and in eventual payoff (e.g. Pascal's "wager") that it outweighs any reason to be skeptical.

In relation to logotherapy, I think this Jamesian perspective on metaphysical belief could be very handy. As it stands, Frankl's therapeutic approach only attempts to influence people's feelings about life within the context of their prior metaphysical formulations. Even within this context, logotherapy is valuable, for it should tend to create a net-improvement in people's happiness regardless of their overall beliefs. After realizing that earthly perspectives are a matter of choice, it becomes difficult for even the most hardened absurdist to think that the world just *is* objectively miserable. One might still believe that the world is miserable, but it would be in bad faith not to realize the subjective character of such a belief.

Likewise, as Frankl works at "widening and broadening the visual field of the patient so that the whole spectrum of potential meaning becomes conscious and visible," is not James's approach to illuminate the reasonable, wider and broader visual field of the available metaphysical spectrum (Frankl 2006, 110)? As a logotherapeutic extension, metaphysical discussion would be in no way a means of indoctrination; it would be a responsible effort to educate the patient that his or her seemingly "necessary" pessimism or debilitating uncertainty about the universe is not actually necessary. Thus, in contrast to what Frankl seems to impart, individuals would not have to approach meaning formation from the perspective of Sisyphus; instead, they could ask whether they must be Sisyphus at all.

Metaphysical discussion would not be necessary for every patient, of course. There must first be the desire to work through it, and some existential issues might be resolved without it. Yet in the steepest existential crises, like that of fearing mortality, metaphysical discussion might be very appropriate. Rather than merely affirming aging

as preferable to youth, death itself could be approached with a hope once absent. Such a hope might be ultimately misguided, but as James concludes, "If death ends all, we cannot meet death better" (2007, 193).

3.4 Post-Durkheimian urgency

The need for this type of discussion might be particularly acute even as evidenced by Frankl's observation (noted in Chapter Two) that questions about life's meaning are often presented to therapists rather than religious counselors these days (Frankl 2006, 116). Why is that exactly? Perhaps people think that, since psychotherapy is supposed to quell psychological discomfort in general, that it can scientifically confront anguish over the meaning of life. While we have illustrated the inaccuracy of this assumption, it is also worth asking why individuals think they *need* science to address existential turmoil, as this is a rather new phenomenon compared to when religion would be the presumptive forum for such issues.

According to philosopher Charles Taylor, the "postwar" era that Frankl observed was characterized primarily by a new sense of "self-understandings" within a "steady spread" of the "culture of 'authenticity'" (2002, 83). From this new culture of authenticity was a desire amongst both "intellectuals" and "society in general" for "realizing one's own humanity" without "surrendering to conformity with a model imposed from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority" (Taylor 2002, 83-4).

Taylor envisions this change as a transition across "Durkheimian" eras with each transition having a distinct effect on people's relationship to religion. The first major shift was from "the paleo-Durkheimian dispensation" of "belonging to a church, in

principle coextensive with society" to the "neo-Durkheimian dispensation" of denominational "choice" connected to a "broader, more elusive 'church,'" and to a "political entity with a providential role to play" (Taylor 2002, 93). With the introduction of the postwar emphasis on authentic individuality, however, came the "post-Durkheimian dispensation" of separating the "sacred" from "political allegiance" (Taylor 2002, 96). Many suddenly found that spirituality was "no longer intrinsically related to society" and its religion (2002, 101-2). Instead, they found it "absurd" to adhere to a religion that did not "present itself" as an individually inspiring path (2002, 101-2).

These days, society continues to fit the post-Durkheimian classification. Taylor observes that, "For many people today, to set aside their own path in order to conform to some external authority just doesn't seem comprehensible as a form of spiritual life" (2002, 101). Nevertheless, there is a growing divide between those who pursue their own spirituality and others who disavow themselves of religion and spirituality altogether. There are "fewer declaring belief in a personal God while more hold to something like an impersonal force," and there is "a rise in the number of those who state themselves to be atheists, agnostics, or to have no religion" (Taylor 2002, 106-7). Interestingly, both dimensions stem from the same Durkheimian breakdown. The growing latitude for religious and spiritual individuality occurs within a destabilizing postwar age that has been "explosively expelling people" into a "fractured world," wherein for many it has been difficult to find any spiritual direction at all (2002, 106).

My speculation is that, within our post-Durkheimian age, it has become increasingly difficult for many to put *content* to religious belief. Absent some type of formal Durkheimian dispensation, particular religious contents may seem too arbitrary to

constitute true belief systems. Because many lack more nuanced epistemic perspectives

that may even value the paradox of religious belief, many may close themselves off

prematurely to spirituality altogether.

3.5 The calm of faith

James Fowler's (1981) theory of faith development may help to inform this

consideration. He introduces an empirical analysis, based on hundreds of interviews, of

faith's progressive transformation in people's lives, from which he derives a general

theory of faith development.[21] Fowler argues that faith development occurs (regardless

of content) within every individual, and that it follows six linearly ordered and hierarchal

stages. While everyone experiences these stages in order insofar as they cannot be

skipped, not everyone reaches every level (in fact most do not).

Without going into too much detail about the nature of each stage, I want to focus

instead on the way that individuals perceive authority, for, through the majority of faith's

development, faith of whatever sort is seen authoritatively. At stage 3, called Synthetic-

Conventional,[22] "a person has an 'ideology,' a more or less consistent clustering of

values and beliefs, but he or she has not objectified it for examination and in a sense is

unaware of having it" (Fowler 1981, 173). Rather than perceiving faith as a personal

decision and understanding autonomy, Stage 3 locates authority "externally to the self"

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[21] Fowler was largely inspired by the stage models of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg on *moral* development. For a review of secondary research on Fowler's model in particular, see Streib (2003). Although Fowler's model has been criticized along various lines, i.e. that it should include more room for "relational" perspectives and that it has some cross-cultural limitations, it seems that it is still useful at least as a basic structure for understanding faith development. Since my application of Fowler's model is only as a very general analytical tool, I think it is helpful here.

[22] I am skipping stages 1 and 2 since they mostly encompass very young children.

"in the interpersonally available 'they' or in the certified incumbents of leadership roles in institutions" (1981, 154).

Stage 4 Individuative-Reflective faith results from a breakdown in the Synthetic-Conventional. It begins to "reflect" and distance from one's "previous assumptive value system" (1981, 179). At Stage 4, one begins to "take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes" (1981, 182). Suddenly "self-fulfillment or self-actualization" becomes a "primary concern versus service to and being for others" (1981, 182). As a result, one looks objectively at faith once taken for granted. With this objectivity comes the "demythologization" of symbols and rituals, seeing them only as meaning systems. While this "breaking open" of symbolism allows meanings that were once "tacitly held" to become "explicit," there is also a certain "naïve reliance" that is lost at Stage 4. As Fowler writes, "A symbol recognized as a symbol is a broken symbol," as the pure spiritual experience contained within the *symbol-as-real* is lost (1981, 180-1).

For post-Durkheimian individuals, transitions surrounding Stage 4 may explain, at least partially, metaphysical existential difficulty. In prior stages, religious and non-religious individuals alike are secure within a non-reflective ideology justified by a belief in an external authoritative presence. Atheists have not yet considered the existential implications of non-belief; whereas theists have not yet questioned the validity of their then-dogmatic considerations. The Stage 4 individual, however, still reconciles these tensions indirectly, perhaps not even overtly realizing their significance. Although the symbols become demythologized, they are then re-constituted by a sort of "second narcissism" into a worldview that "overassimilates 'reality' and the perspectives of

others" (1981, 182-3). Stage 4, therefore, teeters on a destabilization into existential angst instigated by the forces that drove it from Stage 3 but ultimately saves itself. It is not until the breaking point of Stage 4 overall that one encounters "what may feel like anarchic and disturbing inner voices"—"elements from a childish past, images and energies from a deeper self, a gnawing sense of the sterility and flatness of the meanings one serves," etc. (1981, 183).

Whereas the same realizations at the end of Stage 4 might have occurred for some people in neo- or paleo-Durkheimian societies, the inherently reflective character of the post-Durkheimian dispensation must have the effect of *accelerating* one's arrival and *intensifying* one's reflections at the end of Stage 4 while also expanding the amount of people overall who develop to the end of that stage. Of course, this is difficult to test because all of Fowler's observations began well after the start of the postwar era. But I think it is intuitive to suggest that in contrasting societies where religion is fundamentally expected and adhered to Stage 4 does not have as much of a presence or personal significance.[23]

Understanding the significance of religious *confusion* on psychological well-being substantiates prior psychological studies about the general relationship between religiosity and mental distress. Research has shown a correlation between religion and psychological comfort (e.g. Stark *et al*. 1983), but Ross (1990) found that psychological well-being is actually rather equal amongst both ardent theists *and* ardent atheists. Ross's

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[23] Nonetheless, while longitudinal case studies examining the changes in faith development across one society's transition from a neo- to post-Durkheimian dispensation would be difficult, perhaps studies could simply evaluate for comparison the prevalence of Stage 4 development in contemporary society's that are characteristic of paleo- or neo-Durkheimian dispensations.

study measured the correlation between strength of religious belief and "depression and anxiety" (Ross 1990, 238). According to her results:

> Those who believed strongly in their religion had lower distress levels than did those who professed a weak belief. Those who rejected all religious belief also had low distress levels. The latter group are probably not indifferent; instead, they have likely rejected religion and have commitments to other, non-religious beliefs. The highest distress levels were found among those who have not made a commitment, who belong to a religion not out of choice but out of indifference. (1990, 243)

Synthesizing with Ross's analysis, we can suggest that this "indifference" may be precipitated by the "disillusionment with one's compromises and recognition that life is more complex than Stage 4's logic of clear distinctions and abstract concepts can comprehend" (Fowler 1981, 183).

Only upon reaching Stages 5 (Conjunctive Faith) and 6 (Universalizing Faith) does faith acquire a new, more complex and less tumultuous meaning. Conjunctive Faith, in particular, disavows Stage 4's "dichotomizing logic" for what Fowler terms "dialogical knowing" instead (1981, 185). Dialogical knowing lets the "multiplex structure of the world" "disclose itself" within an "I-Thou relationship" where "the knower seeks to accommodate her or his knowing to the structure of that which is being known before imposing her or his own categories upon it" (1981, 185). Fowler admits that this sort of thinking is abstract, so much so that he fears he "cannot communicate the features of this stage clearly" (1981, 184). But the theory is clear enough: By developing what Paul Ricoeur terms an *intentional* "second naïveté" as opposed to a self-certain

worldview, Stage 5 re-affirms faith's "symbolic power" as it is "reunited with conceptual meanings" (1981, 197). Rather than necessitating the assimilation of worldview, Stage 5 is "alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions," and "strives to unify opposites in mind and experience" (1981, 198).

Thus, we can at least partially understand existential angst about metaphysical issues as being a product of the breakdown of prior metaphysical resolutions. In a post-Durkheimian society, individuals seeking existential comfort and reformulation could be expected to seek therapists as outlets if their spiritual/religious beliefs do not accord with a broader spiritual community. That is, psychotherapy is a very individualistic enterprise too, and it is not unreasonable to seek a mental healer in light of existential anguish. Although typical medical/pharmacotherapeutic models would ultimately be a waste of time for spiritual seekers, a more humanistic/existential approach could help individuals to continue their cognitive spiritual development into more complex, calming stages. Of course, religion is not simply a tool to fight existential anguish, but, as some extent of faith development seems to be natural, our metaphysical perspective can help us to understand our suffering just as much as our terrestrial perspective can. Hence, when the time is right, an "authentic individualist" engaging in a logotherapeutic discourse about faith could achieve revolutionary personal insight. Based particularly on a Jamesian acknowledgement of the subjectivity of metaphysical reasoning, patients could achieve calmness in Stage 5 and beyond.

Conclusion

Despite this sunny optimism of humanistic indulgence, it is still difficult to compete with naturalist promises that there will be no more mysteries about the mind. Dusty armchairs and pensive introspections do not woo like stainless steel laboratories and magnetic resonance imaging. But it is not just an aesthetic appeal that raises science to the pinnacle of common confidence, for science's contributions to psychology and neuroscience, (not to mention medicine writ large), speak for themselves as they alleviate suffering and improve happiness. Particularly, understandings of abnormal psychology and neurochemistry make certain treatments relatively clean-cut and automatic, providing a pill where once was bafflement.

It would be nice if *all* psychological pains could be so quantifiable and their resolutions so methodical, but they are not. Regardless of whether an ontologically materialist notion of the mind suggests that we *should* be able to know psychology as such, we do not yet know whether this is a feasible possibility. Even arguments as technical and informed as the Churchlands' culminate finally in hope that empirics will come to resemble their neurophilosophy, but they do not culminate in proof. Their well-meaning conclusions and genuine optimism are encouraging, but the Churchlands cannot justifiably abdicate the likes of talk therapy on a mere prediction. Calling for the end of talk therapy and introspective approaches to psychological understanding is not only theoretically hasty, but it also leaves us without workable solutions to a variety of psychological concerns that range from cognitive distortions to existential paralyses.

In fact, based on the evidence we have reviewed, there is probably more empirical support for the occasional *necessity* of talk therapy and introspection rather than against it. Along the most humanistic lines, especially, some psychological concerns can be understood best as the uncovering of existential implications within life itself, and their alleviations necessitate philosophical reorientation towards that which is troubling. While tranquilizers and SSRIs might temporarily offset the severity of such concerns, a newly renewed existential therapy would do far more.

Thus, Gaylin is right to suggest that understanding patients as unique individuals makes therapy artful. Every therapeutic session becomes tailor-made and is a unique crafting of the therapeutic mold. But we can also go further than Gaylin by recognizing that the statistical validity behind various psychotherapies makes them *scientifically* preferable. The "artistic" methods of Frankl might not be strictly measurable, but he made such strict standards secondary every time he prevented a suicide that would have otherwise been imminent. It may be, then, that for certain psychological issues the most scientific treatment is that which is least scientific in appearance, namely a proven humanistic method.

Realizing this ideological détente is essential, for every theorist and clinician contributes to the overall conventional trends in *actual treatments* that affect those who seek psychological help. Rather than taking these norms for granted and simply practicing that which is "taught" or denigrating that which is not popular, it is only responsible to reflect on the general validity of such trends themselves. Hence, this discussion aims to be more than just a theoretical or philosophical contribution. The sheer practice of continuous inquiry into our ideological leanings enhances their quality,

either re-substantiating them or illustrating areas for their improvement. While the specifics of this work may have been narrow in focus, their grander hope is to illuminate wider discussion and inquiry about psychology and its unveiling that balances scientific rigor and humanistic reflection. By that balance a new approach may develop: We can be ever unsatisfied with our uncertainties about the mind while having the confidence to *allow its mysteries to be mysteries* and to engage them with grace. With this attitude, we may come closer to an ideal clinical setting suitable for anyone.

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