

IN MEMORIAM ROLLO MAY

1909 - 1994

Rollo May died October 12th last year in his home in Tiburon outside San Francisco.

Rollo May was one of the originators of humanistic psychology about 30 years ago, together with Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and others. Working out a third position between a mechanical behaviorism and an orthodox psychoanalysis the humanistic movement focused on the entire being and on the potentialities of men and women. Rollo May introduced English readers to European existential thought in the book *"Existence - A new dimension to psychology and psychiatry"* (edited with Angel and Ellenberger. Basic Books, New York, 1958). He returned to this theme in his last book, which appeared two days before his death: *"The psychology of existence: An integrative, clinical approach"* (Schneider and May, McGraw Hill, New York, 1994).

May became critical towards much of the later developments of humanistic psychology, which particularly in California first became connected with the Hippie movement and later with the New Age religions. There arose a cult of happiness, neglecting existential anxiety and dread. There arose a naive belief in man as good, repressing the evil.

Therapy was for May also a research venue to the existential issues of contemporary life. In his books he integrated his knowledge of existential philosophy, classical literature and his experience from therapy to bear upon essential issues of the human condition in ways illuminating to lay and academic readers. The books include *"The meaning of anxiety"*, *"Love and will"*, *"Power and innocence"* and *"Freedom and destiny"*. *"The cry for myth"* from 1991, translated into the Scandinavian languages, treated the psychotherapy movement in this century as a reaction to the modern loss of encompassing myths, with therapists replacing pastors, where "Psychoanalysis is the sickness which its therapy purports to cure".

Rollo May had a theological background and served briefly as a minister before turning to psychology. He was deeply influenced by Paul Tillich and the writings of Kierkegaard. To a visitor from Denmark his persistent question concerned a Kierkegaard tradition of psychology in Denmark. The answer was disappointing, Kierkegaard's thought has hardly made any impact on Danish psychology.

Rollo May received many honorary doctorates, but never took a university position. He was a cofounder of Saybrook Institute in San Francisco, which has a doctorate program in human science based on existential, phenomenological and hermeneutical thought. Rollo May's teachings will be pursued at the Rollo May Center at the Saybrook Institute. While his open intellect did not foster any new dogmatic school of psychology, his writings and personal teaching in informal seminars have left a strong impact on a psychology of the human condition.