Giving The Void Its Colours:
The art of living in existential paradox

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Abstract

The scholarship of many existential thinkers has been dedicated to how humans can live with an awareness of existential paradox without attempts at denial or reconciliation that may lead to destructive behaviour. This thesis continues this inquiry and explores the art of living with this condition without attempts at reconciliation. More specifically, it consists of five paper-based chapters each offering possibilities for the continued development of an art of living in existential paradox.

The first paper explores how Schneider's awe-based life philosophy, when combined with Buber's *I-Thou* philosophy and hermeneutic inquiry, may mitigate the potential negative consequences of existential paradox. The second paper examines the potential link between reactions to existential givens of existence and adult attachment styles, which may help explain why some individuals live more readily with the absurdity of the human condition. In the third paper, the oeuvres of Camus and Becker are examined with respect to how *absurd creation* may be used as a practice that facilitates lucid awareness and acceptance of existential paradox. The fourth paper is an exploration that combines Epicurean and existential philosophy to imagine how an expanded view of human motivation might lead to new ways of living with existential paradox. The final paper explores the practice of purposefully leaning into existential paradox to trigger aesthetic experiences of awe, which may help to positively reframe one's experience of existential realities.

The last chapter explores how the gleanings from each of the papers may be applied and contribute to the field of counselling and psychotherapy, which would form an integral part of an art of living in existential paradox.

Keywords: Absurdity; Existential Counselling; Existential Paradox; Existential Givens; Human Motivation

For Yoona,

Who makes the void and this life beautiful

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

For millennia, humans have reflected on their condition and place in the cosmos with the ultimate goal of discerning how to achieve the boundless fullness to life that we are only able to imagine (Svendsen, 2005). Yet, the sheer number of philosophies, religions, and other metaphysical systems speaks to the confounding, mysterious, and sometimes infuriating nature of our existence. In fact, Tarnas (1990) argues in *The Passion of the Western Mind* that the endeavour of all Western thought has been the human reunification with the ground or source of our being. The hope seems to be that somehow finding this ground will provide us the answers to life and the fullness we seek. That somehow the ground of being will provide us with an absolute and perfect meaning system that will solve, once and for all, the problem of death and tell us how to live the best life.

Yet, after thousands of years of metaphysical exploration and scholarship, we seem to be no closer to figuring out the ground of our own being. We are caught in a double bind, being able to imagine and speculate about that perfect meaning and a comforting answer to death, but without any assurances that they are achievable. This is the existential paradox that is the "worm at the core" of the human condition and the one that several existential theorists consider to be the key phenomenon influencing both creative and destructive human behaviour (Becker, 1997/1973; James 1994, p. 121).

This is why Camus (2000/1942) concluded that whether or not life is worth living at the dizzying crest of humanity's absurd situation (existential paradox) amounted to the most important philosophical question facing humans. However, he did not believe that suicide was the proper response for those who felt human life was absurd. Instead, he thought that humans could live with and even flourish in full awareness of the existential paradox and thus dedicated much of his writings to exploring ways of achieving this. He concluded that humans will go to great lengths to reconcile what he described as a

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divorce between humans and the world, but that this often leads to destructive behaviour at a personal and societal level. Subsequently, this dissertation is a continuation of this inquiry into how humans can flourish despite full awareness of this existential paradox.

1.1. Existential Paradox

Existential paradox is a broad concept that perhaps most fundamentally can be described as the limitedness of human nature juxtaposed with our ability to imagine limitless possibilities (Hoffman, Yang, Kaklauskas, & Chan, 2009). Becker (1975) concludes,

> The tragedy of evolution is that it created a limited animal with unlimited horizons. Man is the only animal that is not armed with the natural instinctive mechanisms or programing for shrinking his world down to a size he can automatically act on (p. 153).

This is also the conclusion of Kierkegaard (1994/1849) who proposed that the human imagination gives us the ability to rise above our immediate situation to ponder a reality entirely different from the limited one in which we find ourselves without having the ability to fully reach that vision. Thus, psychologically, existential paradox can be defined as a form of cognitive dissonance that results in psychological and emotional tension which humans instinctively attempt to reduce, avoid, or deny (Bagger, 2007).

While human experience is full of these limitations, existential philosophers and psychologists most often focus on the fact that many humans seem to have the desire to live forever, but we know that we must die like all other animals (Becker, 1997/1973, 1975; Yalom, 1980). Alternatively, others focus on the aspect of existential paradox wherein we are meaning-seeking creatures that are, at the same time, unable to access any ultimate or cosmic meaning (Camus, 2000/1942, 1991/1951 Frankl, 2007). This differentiates existential paradox from other forms of cognitive dissonance. Specifically, existential paradox is the cognitive dissonance related to the unrequited desire for the reconciliation of the existential givens of existence, namely, the unrequited desire for absolute meaning, immortality, and freedom that we think will lead to the boundless fullness of life (Svendsen, 2005; Yalom, 1980). This gap between reality and what we

can imagine is a cognitive dissonance that is often called the existential void. Thus, the common phrase "filling the void" in existential theory and reconciling existential paradox may be the same phenomenon.

For the present exploration, the most important aspect of this situation is not that this existential paradox exists, but that humans seem to have a drive to either deny its existence or strive to reconcile it. According to Camus (2000/1942; 1991/1951) and Becker (1997/1973), this is often achieved through absolute meaning systems such as organized religion, which provide assurances of eternal life and bliss, or sometimes through of mental illness. Thus, this project is animated by the hope that the destructive potentiality of reconciling existential paradox can be mitigated.

1.2. Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore an art of living in existential paradox that not only will continue the inquiry of existential theorists who came before me in a general sense, but also will contribute to the development of a therapeutic modality for those who may be suffering from mental illness related to existential paradox. This is particularly important because the constant struggle with existential paradox is considered by many existentially inclined theorists to be one of the main underlying drivers of human behaviour and mental illness (Becker, 1997/1973, 1975; Camus, 2000/1942; Kierkegaard, 2004/1849; Yalom, 1980). Likewise, Tarnas (1990) compares human cosmological estrangement to Bateson's double bind wherein an impossibly problematic situation in which mutually contradictory demands eventually lead to mental illness. This echoes May (2011) who argues that much of the mental health issues people experience in the modern age are related to the 'bankruptcy' of the guiding myths of absolute meaning systems. What these meanings systems really supply is a soothing answer to the limitedness of the human condition (Hoffman, Yang, Kaklauskas, & Chan, 2009). Meanwhile, Becker (1975) argues in *Escape from Evil* that these meaning systems may actually also cause much of what he calls 'evil' and destructive behaviour. Similarly, Camus (1991/1951) argues in *The Rebel* that the need for an absolute meaning system leads to the proclivity for revolution, which he describes as the annihilation of meaning

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systems that conflict with one's own. Thus, I see a need to contemplate an art of living with this existential paradox lucidly that mitigates these negative effects and promotes mental wellbeing. Additionally, because there are relatively few authors besides the ones that appear in this dissertation that address the relationship between existential paradox and counselling, there is a need to further contribute to the field. This is also made more urgent as Yalom (2009) laments the fact that counsellor education programs and public institutions promote so-called evidence based practices over more depth counselling approaches, which has had a "so far all negative [affect] on the field of psychotherapy" (p. 222). For example, evidence based practices may lead to a more generalized approach to therapy that does not value the uniqueness of the counsellor or client. While Yalom's assertion is bold, I see a need to carry the torch and continue to research, write, and publish in the field of existentially focused counselling.

In addition to contributing to the field of existential counselling, this dissertation is also part of my on-going education as an existentially influenced counsellor. Yalom (1980) argues that the best counsellors and therapists are those who are not only well versed in psychotherapeutic theory and techniques, but also in the depths, diversity, and mystery of the human condition and context. Accordingly, this dissertation is also aimed at expanding my knowledge of the human condition and context so to improve my own counselling practice. Overall, this dissertation is aimed at wondering about an art of living wherein we can "picture ourselves happy" despite the awareness of existential paradox.

1.3. Personal Interest

I have always been interested in the drama of the human experience and it started from a very young age. As a 10-year old boy, I use to lay awake at night and try to picture nothingness. I would close my eyes in the darkness and ask myself: If there were nothing, what would there be? I did not know it at the time, but this was my first brush with what would become a lifelong inquiry into human existence and the human condition.

In high school, I was an agnostic, but I was very interested in religion and spirituality. I wondered why humans seemed to need concrete and absolute answers to metaphysical questions. Then in English 12, our class read Camus' *The Outsider*. This text was my first formal introduction to existential theory. I remember how Meursault shooed away the priest who wanted to give him spiritual comfort while he sat in prison waiting for his death. "He's like me," I thought; "he doesn't fall for the illusions." It seems I was always looking for a 'lucid' answer, that is, one that did not fall for the regular cultural illusions.

Even though I was brought up by atheist parents, I always wondered in amazement at our profound context, of how impossible the universe seemed. So even though I wanted to engage with questions regarding human existence and profound context, I eschewed most religions and spirituality. This desire to examine the human situation without the spiritual answers led me to existential philosophy and psychology. Accordingly, much of this work is grounded in the scholarship of Becker, Camus, and Yalom.

In my counselling program, I dedicated many of my assignments to searching out, researching, and writing about the links between existentialism, mental health, and counselling, culminating in my thesis being focused on meaning-centred counselling. However, I realized by the end of the counselling program that a counselling approach focused on meaning was too narrow an understanding of the human experience. There was something gnawing at me that told me that meaning was not the only part of the story of the human experience and that there was something more fundamental that was at the core of our condition. This dissertation represents a continuation of my exploration of existential philosophy but also a deepening and an expanding beyond existential philosophy.

Even though I know cognitively that there is no absolute answer to be found here, I am driven to keep exploring. I am engrossed, enthralled, and enlivened by the search. Thus, this project is my own way of "giv[ing] the void its colours" (Camus, 2000/1942, p. 83).

1.4. Methodology

One of the primary aims of philosophy and philosophical inquiry is the construction of arguments, ideas, and worldviews (Ndofirepi & Shumba, 2012; Sheffield, 2004). Thus, given its compatibility and relevance to my task, this dissertation is a philosophical inquiry that includes the exploration, analysis, and construction of various concepts with the purpose of proposing different approaches for living with existential paradox. Bridges (1997) points out that philosophical inquiry is "a source for what will eventually come to be empirically established beliefs and empirical observation and experience to provide the stimulus to what are eventually put forward as philosophically established" (p. 184). At the same time, Seshadri (2008) argues that philosophical inquiry, in relation to education, is "a disciplined, systematic way of thinking about a problem leading to the illumination of conceptual meaning and understanding and appraisal of educational policy and practice" (p. 4). Therefore, philosophical inquiry is the method by which my intention of exploring and constructing ways of living with existential paradox is developed.

While awe and wonder are essential of any philosophical inquiry, it is also necessary for the resulting new concepts to be validated (Heschel, 1955). Accordingly, Stubley (1992) states that common tests for the validation of philosophical inquiry are empirical tests, pragmatic tests, and tests of logic. While empirical and pragmatic tests may follow from this research, I have focused on logical analysis to validate my proposals. Specifically, I largely employ analogical and inductive reasoning to support my concept analysis and creation. Analogical reasoning is a form of inductive reasoning wherein researchers attempt to understand the world and make decisions based on observing similarities between concepts and proposing other similarities. Following from these observations, I also employ deductive logic based on philosophical and psychological discourse to substantiate my analysis (Ndofirepi & Shumba, 2012).

1.5. Structure

This dissertation is a philosophical inquiry into existential paradox consisting of five manuscripts, or papers. Rather than developing a single focus, the five manuscripts are discrete explorations of some aspect of living in existential paradox.

A manuscript or paper-based thesis is a collection of scholarly papers that a student has authored or co-authored related to a specific theme. In this case, I will present scholarly papers contributing to an art of living in existential paradox. I have chosen this structure because it allows for the coverage of a more diverse range of topics pertaining to existential paradox. This is important because the insights gleaned in each exploration are meant to contribute to the development of a counselling modality, which requires a wider breadth. Also, because my topic of inquiry is a broad concept that affects many aspects of the human experience, focusing solely on one aspect of it, Camus's paradox of the absurd for example, would severely limit the scope and applicability of my conclusions.

At the same time, inspired by Bai (2006), who describes philosophers as artists who engage in "philosophic arts," and as "conceptual artists who specialize in concept invention," I view each of these discrete manuscripts as poetic and creative forays, or explorations into different aspects of living in existential paradox (p. 11). In other words, they are my own interpretation, synthesis, and expression of concepts related to existential paradox. As such, they offer possibilities rather than absolutes and are meant to inspire further inquiry.

While there are several ways these papers could have been ordered, I have decided to sequence them according to when they were written. In this way, they follow the development, deepening, and expansion of my inquiry. Meanwhile, even though they are discrete papers, the reader will no doubt notice repeated themes and threads as well as how they spin off from each other. As a consequence, there are times when themes and quotations are repeated albeit in different contexts and for different purposes. Thus, they each contain reiteration, but also expansion and deepening.

Chapter 2 (manuscript 1) examines how Schneider's (2004, 2008, 2009) awe-based life philosophy, which is characterized by purposely engaging in the awe and mystery of our metaphysical context, when combined with hermeneutic inquiry and Buber's *I-Thou* attitude, may be efficacious for living in existential paradox. Chapter 3 (manuscript 2) is born from the observation that some people seem to have few problems living with existential paradox. In this vein, I explore how an individual's attachment typology may influence how they react to the existential givens of existence. Chapter 4 (manuscript 3) explores how absurd creation may be used as a means for acclimatizing an individual and helping her or him to become more comfortable with existential paradox. Chapter 5 (manuscript 4) expands existential paradox beyond humanity's desire for immortality and an absolute meaning system and discusses the possibility of absolute tranquility as humanity's most fundamental desire. From this assumption, I examine how Epicurean axiology may contribute to living in existential paradox. Chapter 6 (manuscript 5) continues this examination by exploring how experiences of existential paradox often lead to aesthetic experiences of awe that are pleasurable. In turn, I examine how these experiences may be used to become more comfortable with living in existential paradox.

The conclusion of this dissertation (Chapter 7) is a synthesis and application of the ideas explored in the manuscripts for the creation of a therapeutic modality that can be used across counselling contexts and not confined to those suffering directly as a result of existential paradox. This consideration is important because even though existentially inclined counsellors may focus on how a person's reactions to existential realities affect their mental health, in this conclusion I offer not only an expanded view of existential paradox, but also explore new counselling techniques that might help individuals in their struggles. Additionally, even though this counselling modality is grounded in existential philosophy, I do not limit myself to that field. In this way, what I offer in the final chapter is my unique and interdisciplinary lens through which to view the problems in a person's life.

1.6. Limitations and Caveats

Shortcomings and omissions are inevitable in this kind of undertaking. While an exploration of this sort will leave many things unsaid and paths unexplored, I will briefly mention some of the more salient ones. Inevitably, focusing on how existential paradox may be related to counselling leaves out many other possible applications of the insights to other aspects of human experience. One of these areas is the ways an art of living in existential paradox might be applied to international relations, especially since many of the theorists herein were engaged in political and international issues. However, my hope is that applying the ideas to counselling and therapy might cause a 'ripple' affect across other aspects of human experience.

Another one of these areas of omission is that of schooling. While at first it might seem like an odd omission given that this dissertation is part of a doctoral program in the philosophy of education department, I consider this program to be concerned with education *writ large* and thus concerned with what knowledge and experience humans should have to live well rather than solely practicing in the brick-and-mortar establishment of the public education system. Nevertheless, an art of living in existential paradox could certainly contribute to the field of schooling.

Every author and researcher starts with fundamental assumptions about their topic and I am no different. Most notably for this dissertation, existential philosophy and psychology form the basis of my understanding and inquiry into existential paradox. Inherent in this decision is a leaning toward Western, and perhaps more individualistic modes of thought largely to the omission of others.

Additionally, a dissertation focusing on our existence and place in the cosmos inevitably runs into epistemological and ontological problems. Most notably is my assumption throughout this exploration that spiritual beliefs are largely a reaction to our existential situation rather than metaphysical truths. While this is also a foundational belief of many of the authors who play a part in this research, I, and most of the authors herein do not deny the possibility that there is an ultimate metaphysical truth, instead that

our access to such a truth is either limited or altogether unachievable. Thus, in this work I acknowledge the potential for cultural critiques.

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Chapter 2.

Existential Paradox, Relationship, and Awe

2.1. Abstract

This paper proposes a preliminary sketch of a practice that may be used as the foundation for Schneider's awe based life philosophy and that may contribute to an art of living in existential paradox. I suggest that because Schneider defines awe as our fundamental relationship to the mystery and inscrutability of existence, and that the increasing distance of this relationship has led to much suffering in the world, that relationship between humans and between humans and beings other than human by which we may reconnect with this mystery, should form the basis of this practice. As such, I draw upon the work of Buber and Gadamerian hermeneutic inquiry, which are both concerned with our fundamental conviviality and relationship with all phenomena, to imagine a practice of awe.

Keywords: Awe; Awe-based Life Philosophy; Buber; Hermeneutics; Hermeneutic Inquiry; I-Thou; Schneider

2.2. Introduction

A long line of existential thinkers has concluded that many of humanity's problems can be attributed to the aspect of existential paradox wherein humans have a need for an absolute meaning system in a world and universe that does not provide such certainties (Camus, 2000/1942; Schneider, 2014). This unrequited desire for a certain cosmic meaning that provides coherence to life has become acute as much of humanity no longer believes in the grand narratives of the past. This absence has led not only to increasing fundamentalist proclivities, but also to some of the most destructive social and political movements of the past century, all in the name of finding certainty (Becker, 1975). For example, Fromm (1969/1941) claims that the rise and destructiveness of the National Socialist Germany Worker's Party (NAZI) was a least partially a result of many individuals attempting to escape their freedom for the certainty of a relatively absolute meaning system. Meanwhile, May (2011) suggests that destructive cults are often filled with individuals who are seeking a reconciliation of this existential paradox.

Furthermore, this existential paradox affects individuals' mental health as well. May (2011) explains that the absence of what he calls a guiding myth (meaning system) with personal metaphysical corroboration leads to a myriad of mental health concerns such as drug addiction, depression, and anxiety. Yet, the same striving for certainty may lead to the same issues. Consequently, May suggests that humanity needs a new guiding myth for contemporary times that would provide some cosmic certainly without the accompanying potential for mental illness and destruction.

In this vein, Schneider (2003) suggests that what humanity needs is a new myth of being that resists the dogma of traditional religions and other spiritual meaning systems, nihilism, and the cacophony of postmodern relativism characterized by many competing and often conflicting meaning systems. Suggesting that we need to find certainty in uncertainty, Schneider puts forth an awe-based life philosophy wherein one has 'faith' in the inscrutable mystery of existence. While Schneider explores many aspects of his awe-based life philosophy, he does not fully develop practices that may assist an individual in living this philosophy. However, because much of his scholarship is based on the human

relationship to this mystery of existence, I suggest that relational praxis may offer the beginning of a practice that may act as a foundation for his awe-based life philosophy. With this in mind, I explore how two relationally based philosophies, Buber's *I-Thou* philosophy and Gadamerian hermeneutics, may contribute to Schneider's goal of living an awe-based life. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to establish relational praxis, both human-to-human and human to those other than human, as foundation for Schneider's awe-based life philosophy that, in turn, may assist individuals with flourishing in existential paradox. The first section of this exploration will outline the fundamental aspects of Schneider's awe-based philosophy before imagining how the Buber's *I-Thou* theory and hermeneutic inquiry may inform a relationally based practice.

2.3. Schneider's Awe-Based Life Philosophy

Schneider's scholarship, like Kierkegaard, Camus, and Becker's, upon which he bases much of his work, is an attempt to find a way of living with existential paradox while mitigating the possibility of mental illness and destruction (*ex*. violence and suicide). In fact, Schneider (2004) writes "that to fully accept awe in our lives is to fully accept the paradox, ambiguity, and absurdity of our condition" (p. xv). Accordingly, much of his awe-based life philosophy is focused on accomplishing this. Schneider's (2008) awe-based life philosophy is formed by three overlapping concepts: *enchanted agnosticism, the fluid center,* and faith in the inscrutable.

2.3.1. Enchanted Agnosticism.

Enchanted agnosticism is a disposition towards existence characterized by what Schneider (2004, describes as "a bedazzled uncertainty, exhilarated discernment, and enraptured curiosity; it is the openness and scepticism of science wedded to the zeal and exaltation of religion; and it is the veneration of mystery wedded to the solemnity of responsibility" (p. 175). He insists that enchanted agnosticism trumps nihilism, dogma, and purposelessness. And perhaps most poetically, he concludes "it is a view that basks not in particular things, but in the amazement and astonishment of things" (p. 175). Schneider formally defines enchanted agnosticism via three suppositions:

That the source of the universe is unknown; that this unknown is amazing and awe-inspiring, as well as daunting and overwhelming; and that people need to respond to and take responsibility for rather than react against this paradoxical condition (p. 176).

2.3.2. The Fluid Centre

Schneider's (2004) concept of the fluid centre is his view of optimal human functioning given the existential paradox at the core of the human condition. According to Kierkegaard (1954) and Schneider (1990), the fact that humans are animals who want to be gods, or finite beings who want to be infinite results in the deepest paradox of human existence and is the basis of Kierkegaard's existential paradox and Schneider's *paradoxical self*. According to these theorists, this paradox is the fundamental driver of human behaviour. Specifically, they both conclude that living too much in either the finite, (what Schneider calls the restrictive pole), or the infinite (Schneider's' expansive pole) can lead to mental illness for both individual and society. For example, Schneider (1990) contends that obsessive-compulsiveness, which is extreme focalizing and ritualizing, may be a result of living too much in the finite. Alternatively, Schneider concludes that mania may be linked to living too much in the infinite.

Optimal human functioning for both these thinkers requires a holding together of both aspects. For Kierkegaard, it is the synthesis of the finite and the infinite. Kierkegaard (1941) posits, "a genuine human being, as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, finds his reality in holding these two factors together" (p 268). Similarly, Schneider (2003) believes that the fluid centre is humanity's capacity to be expansive, flexible, and versatile and also to be centred and constrained when need be. It is the synthesis of the expansive and the constrictive. However, the fluid centre is not a "golden mean," instead, it is a conscious awareness of both of the potentialities of humanity at any given moment and knowing when each is needed. For example, an individual recognizes that she or he needs to eat and sleep just like any other animal, but also that she or he needs meaning and purpose. However, the fluid center is not just a construct of the human self, but a way of viewing all phenomena in existence. As such, Schneider (2003) formally defines the fluid center as:

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> Any sphere of human consciousness which has as its concern the widest possible relationships to existence, or put another way, it is structured inclusiveness—the richest possible range of experience within the most suitable parameters of support…the fluid center begins and unfolds with awe (p. 10).

Thus, the fluid centre is Schneider's view of the ideal form of human consciousness that would allow an individual to flourish in existential paradox.

2.3.3. Awe

Throughout his work, Schneider attempts to define awe in several ways and I will draw from several of his works to elucidate this concept. Schneider (2008) defines awe as our fundamental experience of the mystery of existence that consists of the "humility and wonder, thrill and anxiety of living—and the capacity to be moved" (p. 68). He continues that awe is the full acceptance of the paradox, ambiguity, and absurdity of the human condition combined while keeping in mind our place within cosmic mystery. He suggests this heightens consciousness by helping humans realize the profound context in which consciousness resides and by "placing a priority on that profound context, a priority on the consciousness of infinity which suffuses every instance of living" (p. 149). Still, in another instance, Schneider (2009) defines awe as,

> The God beyond God, the origin and the destination, the ever-expanding question and the ever-expanding answer. It is our humility and our wonder before creation. Awe is neither the bliss-filled light nor the despair-riddled dark…awe connects us with creation, but not the creation of commandments; the creation of amazement, vastness. Awe is our fundamental connection to mystery…the power is in the paradox: terror yet wonder, uncertainties yet majesties. Our task is to mine the terrors and wonders, uncertainties and majesties—to question with reverence, and to revere our questions (p.4).

Schneider also draws on other authors who write about awe. For example, Becker (1997/1973), drawing on Rudolf Otto, writes,

Otto talked about the terror of the world, the feeling of overwhelming awe, wonder, and fear in the face of creation—the miracle of it, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum* of each single thing, of the fact that there are things at all. What Otto did was to get descriptively at {humanity's} natural feeling of inferiority in the face of the massive transcendence of creation; {our} real creature feeling before the crushing and negating miracle of being (p. 49).

Becker speaks to an enchantment with the cosmic mystery coupled with the acceptance of the futility of the human condition to transcend mortality and meaninglessness. Put differently, awe is an "absolute faith that says *Yes* to being (mystery) without seeing anything concrete which could conquer the nonbeing in fate and death" (Tillich, 1952, p. 189). The goal of an awe-based life philosophy is "the initiation into the mystery of being" without settling upon quickly reified meanings (Tillich, 1963, p. 249). Thus, this life philosophy requires not only an awareness and acceptance of existential paradox, but also an attitude and practice that may lead to awe. While there are negative aspects of awe that are important to explore, such as the terror mentioned previously, this exploration focuses on the positive potential as a basis for integration Schneider's awe-based philosophy, Buber's *I-Thou* philosophy, and Gadamerian hermeneutics.

2.4. Awe-based Practice

Schneider's (2003) awe-based life practice would involve the cultivation of the fluid centre enchanted agnosticism, and awe in an individual's life. To achieve this, he suggests that individuals would need to cultivate deepest existential sensitivities and the ability to contend with those sensitivities. Put differently, Schneider's vision for awe-based life is one in which individuals would grapple with the nature and mystery of the human condition and the varied reactions to it. Finally, Schneider (2004) concludes that to "fully accept awe in our lives is to fully accept the paradox, ambiguity, and absurdity of our condition" (p. xv). Thus, part of an awe-based practice would require consciousness raising about the paradox and absurdity of the human condition while providing the resilience and security to enter the space of ontological flux, the uncertainty and impermanence of any meaning system one may rely on (Noddings 2005; Green & Gary, 2016).

While Schneider's vision for an awe-based life is bold and inspiring, the execution of such philosophy needs a corresponding practice to bring about the desired result of an increasingly awe-based life and society. While Schneider (2003) never explicitly writes about such a practice, he alludes to it throughout his work and in his definition of awe itself. He writes that "awe is our fundamental relationship to mystery" but that much of humanity no longer participates in this relationship (2009, p.7). Thus, if the goal of awe-based life philosophy is to rediscover awe, then an awe-based practice should start cultivating this relationship.

2.4.1. Relationship and Awe

The following section will examine how the philosophy of Martin Buber and Gadamerian hermeneutic inquiry may contribute to a practice that may help to forge this relationship. While Martin Buber's work is grounded is Judaism, which may seem incongruous with a life philosophy that eschews the certainties of traditional religions, it may offer insight for cultivating a certain attitude toward our profound context. This is because Schneider (2003, 2004) understands and equates the idea of "God" (as well as other spiritual concepts) with the ineffable mystery of our profound context. Meanwhile, Gadamerian hermeneutic inquiry is the practice of interpreting the world via an ongoing dialogical engagement between an individual and phenomenon (Gadamer, 1989). Thus, hermeneutics is a relational practice that may also offer insights for establishing an awe-based life practice.

2.5. Martin Buber and the Primacy of Relationship

For Buber, relationship with God and each other is the ultimate purpose of life (Friedman, 1956). Buber writes of three types of relationships that humans can have with the phenomena of the world. The *I – It* relationship is one of objectification wherein the subject *I* narrows *it* to a specific purpose for *I*. The uniqueness of the *It* is either severely limited or reduced to a single focus or purpose for the *I*. This type of relationship is one-sided, but Buber (1970) acknowledges that this type of relationship is needed to live in the world. Likewise, Scott (2011), whose work is focused on Buber's philosophy, argues

that there are times when, understandably and acceptably, individuals have instrumental relationships with others, but instrumental relationships or, more importantly, an instrumental approach need not and should not dominate our lives.

The *I – Thou* relationship, on the other hand, is between two people (or phenomena) who are open to each other in their fundamental uniqueness. According to Freidman (1956) an individual with an *I – Thou* attitude enters into a world of relation characterized by mutuality, directness, presentness, intensity, and ineffability. Further, Buber (1970) claims that the *I – Thou* relationship exists outside of time and space in the "actual and fulfilled present" (p. 3). Moreover, whereas *I* and the *It* in the *I – It* relationship are separate entities, the *I* of the *I – Thou* relationship is a mutual construction in between. Yalom (1980) explains the *I – Thou* relationship as a wholly mutual relationship involving the full experiencing of the other and that the *I* of the *I – thou* relationship is shaped in the "betweenness" of the relationship.

Finally, the *I – eternal Thou* relationship is an individual's interaction with, in Buber's words, God. It is Buber's proposition that the *I - Thou* relationship between two people intimately reflects the *I – Thou* relationship that people have with God—the *eternal Thou*, and that any genuine relationship with any *Thou* shows glimpses of the *eternal Thou* (Ventimigia, 2008). Further, Buber believes that in the *I - Thou* relationship there is a moment of insight and revelation when the individual becomes conscious and, in this consciousness, is in relationship with God through His temporal immanence (Blenkinsop, 2005).

2.5.1. *I – Thou* and Those Other than Human

While Buber (1970) focuses on the relationships between humans, it is clear that humans are in relation not only with other humans, but also with animals, plants, substances, and even ideas. Whether it is on a social, ecological, or quantum level, the idea that everything is connected to and affects everything else seems evident (Meyer, 2014). Thus, an *I –Thou* attitude is not only an ideal for relations with humans, but also for beings other than human. Buber himself lamented not having spent more time

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investigating the human relationship to those other than human (Blenkinsop, 2005). Yet, even though he did not focus his scholarship on relationship with those other than human, Blenkinsop highlights instances when Buber experiences *I – Thou* encounters with these others. The first instance is the stroking of a horse in his grandparent's barn at age 11:

> [I] felt the life beneath my hand, it was as though the element of vitality itself bordered on my skin, something that was not I, was certainly not akin to me, palpably the other, not just another, really the Other itself; and yet it let me approach, confided itself to me, placed itself elementally in the relation of Thou and Thou with me (Buber as cited in Blenkinsop, 2005, p. 287).

Blenkinsop (2005) takes this example as evidence that human relationships with those other than human have the same potential for *I – Thou* encounters as human-to-human relationships. In fact, not only do humans have the ability to connect with these others, they have a responsibility to do so (Blenkinsop, 2005, p. 287). In another instance, Buber does just that:

> On a gloomy morning I walked upon the highway, saw a piece of mica lying, lifted it up and looked at it for a long time; the day was no longer gloomy, so much light was caught in the stone. And suddenly as I raised my eyes from it, I realized that while I looked I had not been conscious of 'object' and 'subject'; in my looking the mica and 'I' had been one; in looking I had tasted unity…I looked at it [the mica] again, the unity did not return. But there it burned in me as though to create. I closed my eyes, I gathered my strength, I bound myself with my object, I raised the mica into the kingdom of the existing. And there, . . . I first was I. (Buber, 1964, p. 140)

Both these instances describe not only an *I – Thou* encounter, but a corresponding encounter with the *eternal Thou*. In addition to humans, animals, plants and other "substances" such as Buber's mica, Blenkinsop (2005) also suggests that the *I – Thou* can also be experienced with art, literature, and even ideas. Thus, since according to Buber, everything contains a divine spark, humans have the potential to experience the *eternal Thou* with any phenomenon.

Accordingly and drawing from Schneider's (2003, 2004) assumptions that experiences of the divine are commensurate with awe, Buber's insights into the human relationship with the *eternal Thou* may be applied to an awe-based life practice.

2.6. Buber as the Foundation of Awe-Based Practice

2.6.1. *I – Thou* and the Fluid Centre

Schneider's (1990, 2014) ideal of the fluid centre refers to an individual's ability to be aware of both the expansive and restrictive aspects of human consciousness at any given time. Additionally, Schneider conceives of the fluid center as being a consciousness of all the potentialities coupled with deliberate choice. That is, even though an individual may be aware of many potentialities of any given situation, she or he must respond more expansively or restrictively depending on the circumstances. For example, a discussion of the meaning of love may require a more expansive attitude whereas a suicide intervention would require a very restrictive focus.

This idea of awareness and choice in relationship to 'others' is like Buber's (1970) theory of relationship. Buber writes of the *I – Thou* and *I – It* as polarities that one must choose. He concludes that one should strive for the *I – Thou,* but that to function in the world a person must partake of both types of relationships depending on the situation. In the same vein, Schneider argues that humans cannot spend all their time in any one mode but fluidly move back and forth as circumstances necessitate. Subsequently, striving for the *I – Thou* in as much of life as possible, but realizing that optimal living is achieved through fluidity of an individual's relationship to any given phenomenon may not only lay groundwork for Schneider's fluid centre, but is the deepest level of consciousness that an individual can strive to make fluid.

A possible tension between Buber's (1970) theory of relationship and Schneider's (1990, 2014) fluid center is the fact that Buber advocates for striving for the *I-thou* relationship, while Schneider does not promote one aspect of the fluid centre over the other. Instead, he promotes that awareness of both at any given time as ideal. However, the fluidity of Schneider's ideal human consciousness does lead to a certain attitude toward existence that is like Buber's *I – Thou* insofar as both result in an unfolding uniqueness and mystery of the "other." For Buber, this unfolding subjectivity of the other is purpose while for Schneider this expansive subjectivity is a horizon of possibilities

from which we must choose. Thus, even though on the surface Schneider's fluid centre and Buber's *I – Thou/I – It* polarities seem to have different goals, the attitude and focus of one's consciousness for both is one of expansive subjectivity.

2.6.2. *I – Thou* and Enchanted Agnosticism

The *I – Thou* attitude, which is one that seeks to encounter all phenomena in existence in their unfolding uniqueness, is similar to the disposition to existence Schneider (2003) terms enchanted agnosticism wherein an individual approaches phenomena with a "bedazzled uncertainty" (p.175). Both of these concepts suggest not only openness to the mystery and uniqueness of the other, but also a keen interest in experiencing the other. Like Schneider (2004) instructs, both stances to relationship "bask not in particular things, but in the amazement and astonishment of things" (p. 175). That is, one does not objectify certain aspects of a phenomenon over others but is in awe of multiple aspects. Accordingly, taking an *I – eternal Thou* attitude toward humans and those other than human would be an integral part of an awe-based life practice.

2.6.3. *I – Thou* and Awe

Awe is the experiential outcome of an enchanted agnostic disposition to the world (Schneider, 2003, 2004). Schneider claims that behind every bounded faith, whether it is the monotheism of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, or in Eastern mysticism, there resides an expanding indecipherable cosmic mystery that manifests as awe. He continues that this inscrutable mystery and awe is beyond every truth and belief and cannot be specified. Instead, it must be lived with and revelled in by way of an enchanted agnostic disposition that is bolstered by living in the fluid centre. I suggest here that the experience that Schneider calls awe is the same as the experiential encounter of the *I* with the *eternal Thou* (Buber, 1970).

Buber (1970) argues that everyone is part of a covenant and contains a divine spark that in relationship reveals a holy presence. As such, individuals (and those other

than human) are united in their divinity. Similarly, Schneider (2003) suggests that if we begin with a sense of awe this sense,

> Infuses everything that we do, feel and think, and it affects all our relations with the world. If creation is amazing and incomprehensible, then everything that partakes in creation must be seen as equally amazing and incomprehensible. It follows moreover, that everything must be treated, to the extent possible, as amazing and incomprehensible (p. 145).

Given the similarity in description of the experience of awe and the *I – eternal Thou* encounter, it is not farfetched to suggest that these experiences may be one in the same. As such, I suggest that the *I – eternal Thou* encounter with humans and those other than human should be the foundational attitude of awe-based life practice.

2.7. Awe, *I – Thou*, and Hermeneutics

In the previous sections I have attempted to establish that Schneider's awe-based life philosophy, which is predicated on his three interlocking concepts of the fluid centre, enchanted agnosticism, and faith in the inscrutable, would be enhanced by envisioning Buber's work on relation as a foundation attitude for an awe-based practice since both concepts' goals and processes bare as striking resemblance to each other. In this final section I will attempt to fold in a final ingredient—Gadamerian hermeneutic inquiry.

Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics is largely based on Gadamer's (1989) *Truth and Method* as well as other scholars who work within this tradition (ex. Smith, Kinsella, Jardine). This approach to hermeneutics focuses on understanding and interpretation of experience as well as the expansions of one's horizons via dialogue between a researcher and the phenomenon they are engaged with. The purpose of this type of hermeneutics is not to arrive at a particular meaning of or to objectify any phenomenon but the knowledge that understanding is an ever-unfolding process and that fixed meanings are always under threat. In other words, understanding a phenomenon can never be completed since the phenomenon that we seek to understand will always lie beyond our capabilities. As such, any claim as to what is true or universal can never be validated.

Thus, this type of hermeneutics is well suited to the present task since the goal of Schneider's awe based philosophy is to experience the mystery and inscrutability of existence. That is, the goal is not to pin the mystery of existence down but to experience it through the process of living. Accordingly, I suggest that Gadamerian hermeneutics has a lot to offer an awe-based practice and while this section cannot exhaust all the possibilities of this marriage, I will suggest a few salient aspects of this relationship.

2.7.1. Becoming an Enchanted Agnostic

While experiences of awe or the *eternal Thou* can be experienced spontaneously (for Buber via grace), Schneider (1990, 2003, 2004) argues that they are more likely if one has an enchanted agnostic attitude and fluidity to one's consciousness. However, both Buber (1970) and Schneider argue that a person cannot always engage in the disposition toward existence that leads to awe or *I – eternal Thou*. In fact, this is precisely what Schneider's fluid centre implies. The question then might become when and with which phenomena should we engage in an enchanted agnostic or *I – Thou* disposition? Hermeneutics offers a response to this question. Gadamer (1989) writes that:

> Simple things sometimes strike us, catch our fancy, address us, speak to us, call for a response, elicit or provoke something in us, ask something of us, hit us, bowl us over, stop us in our tracks, make us catch our breath. "over and above our wanting and doing" things sometimes "happen to us" (p. xxviii).

Likewise, from a depth psychology perspective, Hillman (2006) writes, "things speak; they show the shape they are in. They announce themselves, bear witness to their presence: 'Look, here we are.' They regard us beyond how we may regard them, our perspectives, what we intend with them" (p.33). I propose that this might be way to cultivate not only an *I – Thou* and enchanted agnostic disposition towards the phenomenon being explored, but also to facilitate a person's ability to form such relationships with a wider range of phenomena. That is, with every awe-based encounter an individual strengthens her or his hermeneutic muscle so to speak and vice versa. In fact, Seidel and Jardine (2014) emphasize that with the continued practice of hermeneutics "the building of the world and its ways flutters open and its

interdependencies become more and more experienceable," leading to an increased susceptibility and vulnerability in one's ability to experience the fabrics and texture of the world (p. 154). Thus, I suggest that hermeneutic inquiry offers a way into becoming an enchanted agnostic in ever-increasing spheres of life.

Moreover, Smith (in Jardine, 2012, p 120) writes that a hermeneutics requires, "living in the belly of a paradox wherein a genuine life together is made possible only in the context of an ongoing conversation which never ends yet must be sustained for life together to go on at all." This description bares an uncanny resemblance to Schneider's (2004) description of an enchanted agnostic who must "fully accept the paradox, ambiguity, and absurdity of our condition" (p. xv). Thus, the tentativeness of the meanings gleaned through hermeneutic inquiry may help acclimatize an individual to existential paradox since certainty must be held in abeyance.

2.7.2. Hermeneutics and Awe

While the experience of awe is not usually cited as the goal of hermeneutics, Seidel and Jardine (2014, p. 168) suggest that coming to experience all phenomena as deities or radiant beings facilitates the experience of conviviality and multifariousness. They write, "in cultivating this hermeneutic experience wherein we picture every phenomena as a deity at the centre of a mandala, radiating lines of dependent co-arising venture can be sensed shimmering around every phenomena akin to a halo of illumination." In this way, the experience of hermeneutic inquiry seems to evoke the same experience as Schneider's (2003, 2004) awe.

Further, in writing about hermeneutic practice, Heidegger (1977, p. 234) writes "even here at the stove, in that ordinary place where everything and every condition, each deed and thought is intimate and commonplace, even here the gods themselves are present." Seidel and Jardine (p. 154) conclude that "even here, not even suspected, the very tiniest and meagre of things, with experience and practice can come to be experienced in beautiful repose." Thus, not only do these authors link spirituality (awe) and hermeneutics, they echo Buber (1970) who instructs us to see the "divine spark" in

all phenomena, and Schneider (2003, 2004, 2008, 2009) who implores people to see the mystery and awe of existence in all things.

2.7.3. Hermeneutics and the Fluid Centre

In this section I will explore the complex and symbiotic relationship between Gadamerian hermeneutics and Schneider's (2004) fluid centre. Seidel and Jardine (2014) write that one of the dangers of a hermeneutic inquiry is the propensity to get carried away. They describe it as the possibility of an increasing expansion and getting caught up in an on-rush that seems impossible to stop. For example, it may be desirable to inquire into the multifarious and convivial nature of a tree for ecoliteracy; however, because the horizon of interpretation is ongoing, an individual may get carried away and belie their original purpose. This is akin to Schneider's idea of hyper-expansiveness and is a "sickness" of too much possibility. This is why Schneider advocates for the fluid centre wherein an individual, while conscious of many of the possibilities, constrictive and expansive, that are possible at any given moment with any given phenomenon, must also choose a particular mode of consciousness depending on the circumstances. Thus, in theory, an individual would be able to "rein in" a hermeneutic inquiry when needed and let it "run wild" when desirable.

Hermeneutic inquiry also promotes the development of a fluid center because such an inquiry facilitates an individual's experience of the multifarious and convivial nature of a phenomenon (Jardine, 2012). Such an experience can be a never-ending unfolding of a phenomenon's being if it is not "reined in." The more an individual inquires hermeneutically into an object, the more she or he is able to develop the expansive and restrictive capabilities.

Kinsella's (2006) description of the hermeneutic circle is similar to the fluid centre. She writes that coming to understand a whole text (phenomenon) and coming to understand its parts are interdependent activities and construing the meaning of the whole means making sense of the parts. Similarly, Bontekoe (1996) describes the hermeneutic circle:

> The circle has what might be called two poles—on the one hand, the object of comprehension understood as a whole, and, on the other, the various parts of which the object of comprehension is composed. The object of comprehension, taken as a whole, is understood in terms of its parts, and … this understanding involves the recognition of how these parts are *integrated* into the whole (p. 3).

Thus, the two poles of the hermeneutic circle are therefore bound together in a relationship of mutual clarification. As such, viewing a phenomenon as both its whole and its parts (or possibilities) is similar to having both a constrictive and expansive, or fluid view of it. Additionally, the object of inquiry also expands the horizon of the consciousness of the individual, leading to a continuously expanded view of self in relation to the world. Consequently, hermeneutically inquiring into phenomena may promote not only the experience of phenomena from a fluid centre of consciousness, but also the expansion of one's own consciousness of their multifariousness and conviviality.

2.8. Conclusion

Drawing from the idea that awe is our fundamental relationship to the mystery of existence and that the deliberate development of this relationship may help people thrive in existential paradox, this paper has attempted to establish a preliminary conceptualization of a practice that could be the foundation for Schneider's awe-based life philosophy that seeks to elucidate this relationship and help individuals flourish in existential paradox. This practice combines Schneider's awe-based philosophy, Buber's *I – Thou* and *I – eternal Thou* encounter, and hermeneutic inquiry to facilitate this relationship since these philosophies are all concerned with one's fundamental interconnectedness and relationship with the phenomena of the world. Further, Buber's *I – Thou*, hermeneutic inquiry, and the three components of Schneider's awe-based life philosophy not only bare a striking resemblance to each other, but also each reinforce and cultivate the others. Finally, both philosophies suggest that all phenomena have within them a "divine" spark, *eternal Thou*, or awe that is discoverable through relationship. Thus, the triangulation of these three philosophies provides the conceptual basis on which to build an awe-based life practice that may help individuals live in existential paradox.

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Chapter 3.

Existential Paradox and Attachment Theory

We are challenged with an unprecedented task, and the task is to develop an art, to develop an art to living with permanent uncertainty (Bauman, 2012).

3.1. Abstract

This paper explores a link between adult attachment style and reactions to the existential givens of existence theorized by philosopher Soren Kierkegaard and psychiatrist, Irvin Yalom. Subsequently, this link is used to inform an art of living in existential paradox characterized by ontological security and well-being despite these existential givens. I argue based on this link that not only are securely attached individuals better equipped to abide in a state of ontological flux and uncertainty that may be required for living in existential paradox, but also that insecurely attached individuals will react in predicable ways to existential paradox. Accordingly, I propose that therapeutic methods used to promote secure attachment for those with maladaptive attachment styles can be applied to promote the ontological security required for an art of living in existential paradox

3.2. Introduction

According to Frankl (2007), humans' fundamental drive besides survival itself is the seeking and making of meaning that he named the *will to meaning*. Yet, our desire for certainty of meaning goes unrequited by the "silence of the world" (Camus, 2000/1942, p. 22). In other words, our constant struggle to reconcile this existential paradox is considered by many existentially inclined theorists to be one of the main underlying drivers of human behaviour (e.g., Kierkegaard, 2004/1849; Camus, 2000/1942; Becker, 1973, 1975). While fixed meanings found their home in the grand narratives of the past and provided ontological stability to their adherents, it is becoming increasingly apparent in liquid times[1] that not only are fixed meanings arbitrary, but also the adherence to such meanings can become destructive, especially if one holds on to them too tightly (Becker, 1997/1973; May, 2011). In fact, many existential theorists argue that either too much adherence or too little adherence to a system of meaning may be a cause of much individual, societal, and even planetary suffering. For example, Camus (1991/1951) argues that various political regimes throughout history have resorted to mass violence to protect the certainly of their meaning systems. To me this signals a need for an art of living in this existential paradox to mitigate these possible outcomes.

However, existential panic often results when one's meaning system and identity are threatened. According to Green and Gary (2016, pp. 49) "overcoming the illusion of reification results in either experiences of dread or awe; it depends on where one secures one's identity." They continue that if a person identifies with fixed meanings and those meanings are threatened, then they may experience the abyss. On the other hand, negative reactions to existential paradox may be mitigated if an individual identifies with existential paradox itself (Schneider, 2003, 2004). If this is the case, then it behoves us to find a way to identify with and even flourish in existential paradox.

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[1] According to Bauman (2015) liquid modernity is a result of the advent of globalization, individuation, and consumerism wherein there is an excess of meaning systems and offerings that vie for our attention and promise relief from the search for certainty. As a result liquid times are characterized by the instability of meanings, categories, and frames of reference that once provided a sense of certainty and coherence.

Meanwhile, Green and Gary (2016) suggest that living in existential paradox requires ontological security in the face of the existential givens of existence, especially the unrequited desire for meaning. According to Giddens (2010), ontological security is a stable mental state derived from a sense of continuity and order about the events in one's life. Thus, exploring what factors allow an individual to have ontological security despite their awareness of existential paradox may be an important contribution to an art of living in existential paradox.

Subsequently, I suggest that such reactions while certainly complex, may be tied to a person's attachment style and that such an understanding may contribute to and is perhaps necessary for living in existential paradox. Thus, in this paper I explore the link between adult attachment style and reactions to existential paradox, specifically, the unrequited desire for an absolute meaning system (Camus, 2000/1942). I will first explore the nature of the existential paradox and how it is theorized to be one of the fundamental drivers of human behaviour. Next, I will propose a general link between this existential paradox and attachment theory. After this has been established, I will link Bowlby's (1982) four adult attachment styles to specific reactions to existential paradox. In the final section of this paper I explore possible therapeutic methods of encouraging ontological security while living in existential paradox.

3.3. Existential Paradox and the Existential Givens of Existence

Existential theorists suggest that human behaviour is driven by attempts to deny or overcome the existential givens of existence, or existential realities (Camus, 2000/1942; Becker, 1997/1973, 1975; Yalom, 1980). According to Yalom, the most influential of these are the freedom and responsibility in life choices, the inevitability of death, and the elusiveness of an absolute meaning system. Ironically, the desire for immortality, absolute meaning, and an infallible guide for making life choices juxtapose these existential realities. This is existential paradox. However, Becker suggests that these existential givens are rendered largely inert by hero systems, or meaning systems, which Becker defines as a canopy of symbolic meanings that protect individuals from the

bare reality of the existential givens. However, when a meaning system is threatened, then ontological insecurity and several maladaptive, and sometimes pathological reactions may result (Becker, 1997/1973; Green & Gary, 2016). This is because a person's meaning system is a cultural or personal mythology that allows a person to function in the world by way of resolving the existential paradox and/or denying the existential givens. However, when the meaning system is threatened, existential panic ensues that might result in mental illness or violence. For example, Becker links ideological threats to a culture's meaning system with violence toward that threat. What is then fundamental is an ontological security that enables an individual to live with this existential paradox without falling prey to dread or reconciliation.

3.4. Attachment Theory and Existential Givens

The link between attachment theory and reactions to the existential givens may at first not seem obvious since attachment theory to this point has largely been associated with intimate relationships between people. However, I suggest that expanding the scope of attachment theory to include attachment to an individual's meaning system that protects them from the existential givens would provide a useful link with existential theory and for living in existential paradox.

Attachment theory, based on the work of John Bowlby (1982), postulates that all individuals are born with an innate desire to seek proximity to others and that this need is enhanced in times of need or distress to enhance their survival prospects. Thus, the main contention of attachment theory is that each individual possesses an intrinsic behavioural system that aims at seeking proximity to caring and supportive attachment figures especially when feeling threatened. According to Bretherton (1985) and Sroufe and Waters (1977), attachment security facilitates the internal stance that the world is generally a safe place, and that one can rely on the attachment figure to be available when needed. While all people seek secure attachment figures, our early experiences may result in maladaptive attachment styles, or insecure attachment typologies that carry over into adulthood.

While attachment theory is prevalent in psychotherapy, critics suggest that it is not without it flaws. For example, Goodwin (2003) argues that Bowlby's original research was partially based on the attachment behaviour of animals, which does not necessarily translate to humans. In addition, Goodwin points out that research with human subjects focused on the mother-child relationship leaving out the influence of fathers and other attachment figures. Meanwhile, Tizard (1991) points out that much of the original research was conducted on children who had been separated from their parents as a result of World War II, which may have influenced the results.

Despite these limitations and the need for more development and research, Goodwin (2003) suggests that attachment theory is still a valuable theory for mental health care. I argue that attachment theory may provide insight into the reason some individuals are able to remain ontologically secure while living in existential paradox while others are not. This is because while attachment theory is largely applied to intimate relationships with other humans, there is significant evidence (e.g., Granqvist, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2008; Pickard & Nelson-Becker, 2011) that it can be applied to an individual's relationships to their meaning system that protects them from the existential givens.

Bowlby's (1982) original concept of attachment to a primary caregiver can be expressed in a spiritual sense as internal representations of and relationship to the transcendent (Pickard & Nelson-Becker, 2011). In addition, Kirkpatrick (2008) made a convincing case for the idea that perceived relationships between believers and the transcendent often tend to meet the established criteria for characterizing attachment relationships. Likewise, Pickard and Nelson-Becker found that beliefs about and attachment to the transcendent are either reflections of prior attachment experiences to other humans beginning with original caregivers, or compensatory measures for a lack of successful attachments in childhood. In fact, they argue that people relate to the transcendent in the same manner as they do to other people. Granqvist (2010) even contends that an insecure individual may develop an attachment to the transcendent or other divine figures as surrogates for unsatisfactory human attachment figures. This compensation hypothesis suggests that we compensate in ways to make up for insecure

attachment in childhood. Moriarty, Hoffman and Grimes (2006) echo this belief insisting

that a person's attachment style and image of God will be parallel in emotional and

cognitive experience. Therefore, a person's attachment style may affect their relationship

with a transcendent meaning system. While most of these theorists are writing about

specific spiritual traditions, attachment theory can also be linked to meaning systems in

general based on the assumption that traditional religions an spiritual traditions are

commensurate with Becker's (1997/1973) codified hero systems.

Thus, Becker (1997/1973) provides a foundation for the idea that not only can

attachment theory be applied to relationships to the transcendent or a creator, but to any

meaning system. He writes,

> society itself is a codified hero system which means that society
> everywhere is a living myth of the significance of human life, a defiant
> creation of meaning. Every society and culture is thus a religion whether it
> thinks so or not no matter how they disguise themselves by omitting
> spiritual or religious ideas (p. 7).

Subsequently, Becker suggests that all meaning systems—whether they are cultural,

religious, personal, or otherwise—are religious in nature because they provide security

from the existential givens. He adds that meaning systems serve to provide safety from

the terror and mystery of existence byway of

> A feeling of primary value, of cosmic specialness, of ultimate usefulness
> to creation, of unshakable meaning. They earn this feeling by carving out a
> place in nature, by building an edifice that reflects human value: a temple,
> a cathedral, a totem pole, a skyscraper, a family that spans three
> generations. The hope and belief is that the things that a man creates in
> society are of lasting worth and meaning that they outlive or outshine
> death and decay, that man and his products count (Becker, 1973, p. 5).

Furthermore, Becker (1997/1973) calls meaning systems the need humans have to rely on

something that transcends us, some system of ideas and powers, some system in which

we are embedded, that supports us and that we enter into symbiotically in order to get

security and relief from our anxieties. Thus, the purpose of the meaning system and of the

attachment figure is one in the same—protection from threat. In addition to having the

same purpose of safety and security under threat, the various attachment styles in

attachment theory and reactions to the existential givens are commensurate in characterology.

3.5. Attachment Typologies and the Existential Givens

Attachment theorists posit four styles of attachment or typologies of attachment: secure, preoccupied, dismissive and fearful, which are derived from how individuals create a model of themselves and of others. Individuals who view themselves and others positively are defined as secure; people who perceive themselves negatively, but hold positive views of others, are referred to as preoccupied; individuals who perceive themselves positively, but hold negative views of others are referred to as dismissive, and those who hold negative views of self and others are deemed fearful (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

These four typologies are also based on levels of avoidance and anxiety. Attachment-related avoidance reflects preference for interpersonal distance, discomfort with emotional closeness and interpersonal dependence, extreme self-reliance, and low emotionality. Attachment-related anxiety entails intense concerns about partner availability and responsiveness, a strong desire for closeness and safety, and concerns about one's value to a partner. In comparison to the other three attachment types, securely attached individuals wish for and pursue intimate and close relationships, but at the same time can maintain their autonomy within such relationships (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004).

In the section that follows I suggest that these four attachment typologies are commensurate with different reactions to the existential human condition and to existential threat. Just as attachment theorists have different adult attachment styles, existential theorists posit different ways that people respond to the existential human condition. In particular, the following section will draw links between Kierkegaard's ontology of despair, Yalom's (1980) existential defense mechanisms, and the four attachment styles outlined above.

3.5.1. Anxious-preoccupied Attachment

The behavioural relationship patterns between an individual whose adult attachment style is anxious-preoccupied and those who seek an *ultimate rescuer* defense against the existential givens bear a striking resemblance. Similarly, those with this attachment style also share characteristics of Kierkegaard's *despair over the earthly*.

As the name suggests, anxious-preoccupied attachment is one in which individuals view themselves negatively while viewing others in a positive light, thus believing that they need to merge with the positive other to feel secure. According to Hazan and Shaver (1987) these individuals are preoccupied with seeking emotional closeness to others and do not feel secure unless they have close contact with other people. They feel a sense of unworthiness that is only eliminated by merging with another. Foster, Kernis, and Goldman (2007) note that such people find it difficult to rely on themselves to bring importance and security to their existence and thus rely on others to provide meaning and importance. Similarly, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) suggest that these individuals seek to become one with other people and sometimes become over involved such that they excessively seek merging and dependence.

Anxious-preoccupied attachment and the ultimate rescuer defense

This seeking closeness or merging with the other for security is demonstrated existentially in what Yalom (1980) calls the *ultimate rescuer* defense. This reaction to existential threat is characterized by the belief that there is a force, being, or movement that protects and even saves the individual from the terror of death and meaninglessness. As Yalom suggests, a person using this defense is living for the other and attempting to merge with them because the other is the dispenser of protection and meaning. This fusion to the other protects the individual from isolation and thus the need to confront existential paradox by themselves. Yalom (1980) further suggests that people who fuse with an ultimate rescuer, whether it is another person, a cultural movement, or a divine being, "soften their ego boundaries and become part of another individual or group" to protect themselves (p. 378).

There is also a tendency for overly fused individuals to enter dominating and sometimes destructive relationships. In fact, Yalom (1980) suggests that the

> fusion seeking individual is one who is dependent, obsequious, self sacrificing, who will bear the pain, who in fact enjoys the pain because it dispels solitude, who in short is anything the other wishes in return for the safety of merger (pp. 381-382).

Fromm (1969/1941) writes that these individuals strive for submission and domination as a method of escaping the responsibility of dealing with the existential givens of existence.

Anxious-preoccupied attachment and despair over the earthly

In a similar vein, the anxious preoccupied style mirrors Kierkegaard's *despair over the earthly.* Kierkegaard (2004/1849) theorizes that a person in this type of despair is one who lives completely externally and has no concept of self and that when there is a threat, there is no attempt at any personal reflection but rather a wish to be someone else. In fact, referring to this type of person as an immediate man, Kierkegaard (2004/1849) writes, "in the moment of despair no wish comes more naturally to them than that they were or could become someone else" (p. 83). Kierkegaard suggests that this type of despair is characterized by weakness, passivity, and dependence upon others to be a self. In striking similarity to attachment language, Kierkegaard (2004/1849) writes, "the immediate person seeks continuity with the other and presents only an illusory appearance of having something eternal in it. Thus the self coheres immediately with the other" (p. 81).

Similarly, Becker (1997/1973), drawing on Kierkegaard, writes about partialization or fetishization wherein in order to protect themselves from the world sometimes the person must narrow down, partialize or fetishize which allows the person to be oblivious to the terrors of the world and the human condition. He calls this creative self-restriction "when an object, idea, or person has become your all. When you put all your eggs in one basket, you must clutch onto that basket for dear life" (p. 178).

3.5.2. Dismissive-avoidant Attachment

While the anxious-preoccupied individual seeks security and safety in others, the dismissive-avoidant person has the tendency to rely only on themselves. According to Žvelc (2010), people with a dismissive-avoidant attachment style feel well without close relationships with other people. For these individuals, it is very important that they feel independent and self-sufficient. They have a positive self-regard, yet value other people negatively. They protect themselves from disappointment by avoiding relationships that demand closeness and intimacy, and by preserving a feeling that they are independent and invulnerable. As previously stated, dismissive individuals hold a positive view of the self, but a negative model of others resulting in emotional stoicism (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991). These traits are commensurate with reactions to existential paradox posited by Yalom and Kierkegaard.

Dismissive-avoidant attachment and specialness defense

Expanding this attachment style to reactions to existential paradox, this type of individual is like one who engages in the *specialness defense.* The specialness defense is one in which an individual relies on their own powers to overcome the terror of meaninglessness and death. Yalom (1980) describes this defense thus:

> The belief that deep down that the rules of mortality do not apply to us as it does to others. A personal belief in specialness is very adaptive and permits us to emerge from nature and tolerate the accompanying dysphoria of existential awareness. Our beliefs in our exception from natural law underlies much of our behavior. This leads to a striving for competence, effectance, power and control. The more power one obtains the further that specialness is enforced. Getting ahead, achieving, accumulating wealth, leaving behind great works becomes ways of proving specialness to our selves (p. 117).

Through these actions, the individual creates her or his own special meaning-system that will act as a defense against the existential givens. Likewise, Yalom continues that another more extreme form of the specialness defense is compulsive heroism wherein a person tries to prove their specialness by increasingly drastic measures. These individuals try to secure immortality through specialness. This drive for power and immorality can

lead to sadism in extreme cases. For example, Fromm (1969/1941) suggests that individuals may seek power over others through violence and aggression in an attempt to prove that they are more powerful and special.

Dismissive-avoidant attachment and despair of defiance

The dismissive-avoidant individual also shows signs of Kierkegaard's (2004/1849) *despair of defiance*. In despair of defiance, a person recognizes that she or he in despair, tries to find some way of alleviating this despair, but when no cure occurs, becomes hardened against any form of help besides herself or himself. Further, Kierkegaard writes that this despair,

> wills not to let itself be comforted by the eternal, which rates the earthly so high that the eternal can be of no comfort. But this too is a form of despair: not to be willing to hope that an earthly distress, a temporal cross, might be removed. This is what the despair which wills desperately to be itself is not willing to hope (p. 101).

In other words, a person in this type despair eschews all other meaning systems and resolutions to existential paradox besides those of their own making. Nielsen (2006) echoes these sentiments writing that this type of despair is a person's attempt at autonomy and self-worship wherein the self is its own master. Kierkegaard (2004/1849) also describes this despair as being "arbitrarily based upon the self itself" (p. 100). In this way, this form of despair is akin to creating one's own meaning system to defend against existential paradox. Again Kierkegaard writes,

> In order to want in despair to be oneself, there must be a consciousness of an infinite self. However, this infinite self is really only the most abstract form of self, the most abstract possibility of self. And it is this self the despairer wants to be, severing the self from any relation to the power which has established it, or severing it from the conception that there is such a power. By means of this infinite form, the self wants to in despair to rule over himself, or to create himself, make this self the self he wants to be, determine what he will have and what he will not have in his concrete self (p. 99).

Thus, with this attachment typology, individuals have a positive view of their own power and negative view of others that leads them to seek security and satisfaction in an individualistic fashion. Because they cannot trust that others will keep them safe, these

people must create their own hero systems that inoculate them from the terror of existential paradox.

3.5.3. Fearful-avoidant Attachment

Whereas the previous two attachment typologies were opposites wherein depending solely upon the self or upon the other were used as a means of defence against the existential givens, the fearful-avoidant individual finds solace neither in themselves nor in others. Accordingly, this person has a negative view of themselves as well as others. People with a fearful-avoidant attachment style are not relaxed when entering into close contact with other people (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Although they desire to have close relationships, they distrust other people and show substantial difficulties in relying on them and fear losing themselves. Zvelc (2010) argues that one of the main factors in the development of the fearful-avoidant attachment style may be early childhood rejection. Therefore, such individuals may conclude that other people are untrustworthy and uncaring, and that they too are untrustworthy. Thus, they may develop both a negative self-model and a negative other-model.

Despite wanting social contact and intimacy, they are unable to shake off their feeling of distrust and fear of rejection. High sensitivity to social acceptance is a typical feature of this attachment style and such individuals tend to avoid social situations to avoid the possibility of being rejected (Zvelc, 2010). Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) purport that the fearful individual searches for security but rarely finds another person or their own personal power trustworthy enough. Thus, these authors conclude that the fearful-avoidant person is the least securely attached and that life is especially difficult for her or him. As a result, they tend to have the poorest mental health of all the attachment styles (Reis & Grenyer, 2004).

Translating this attachment style to reactions to the existential paradox, it may be that this type of individual does not find ontological security in fusion to an ultimate rescuer as the anxious-preoccupied individual would or in personal specialness or power

that protects the dismissive-avoidant individual. As a result, this type of individual may be particularly susceptible to existential dread.

Fearful-avoidant attachment and despair over the eternal

Kierkegaard (2004/1849) calls this *despair over the eternal* wherein a person recognizes his or her own weakness and limitations, but instead of turning to God, or to himself or herself as a cure, he or she despairs over his or her own despair. Kierkegaard writes,

> this is *despair over his* weakness, although it still remains as to its nature under the category "despair of weakness," as distinguished from defiance in the next section. So there is only a relative difference. This difference consists in the fact that the foregoing form has the consciousness of weakness as its final consciousness, whereas in this case consciousness does not come to a stop here but potentiates itself to a new consciousness, a consciousness of its weakness. The despairer understands that it is weakness to take the earthly so much to heart, that it is weakness to despair. But then, instead of veering sharply away from despair to faith, humbling himself before God for his weakness, he is more deeply absorbed in despair and despairs over his weakness. Therewith the whole point of view is inverted, he becomes now more clearly conscious of his despair, recognizing that he is in despair about the eternal, he despairs over himself that he could be weak enough to ascribe to the earthly such great importance, which now becomes his despairing expression for the fact that he has lost the eternal and himself (pp. 92-93).

In other words, a person suffering from this type of despair might find solace neither in the meaning systems available to them nor in their own power.

Fearful-avoidant attachment and nihilism

This type of attachment's characteristics also bear a resemblance to the nihilism that Yalom (1980) describes as an active and pervasive proclivity to discredit any type of meaning. He continues that the nihilist's energies and behaviour flow from despair. The nihilist's attempts to discover meaning are always frustrated resulting in the futility of believing in the meaning of anything that often leads to depression.

Extreme forms of meaninglessness lead to what Yalom (1980) calls the *vegetative* form of existential sickness. This is characterized by a severe state of aimlessness and

apathy wherein an individual has a chronic inability to find value in life's endeavours and cultural meanings and is overcome by boredom and depression. Yalom characterizes this type of individual in voices such as: Why bother working half your life if everything ends in death? Aren't all values arbitrary and all goals illusory? Such an individual is unable to find solace and security in anything. Becker (1997/1973) relates that this reaction is what is known as failed heroics when a person is unable to exercise the normal cultural meaning system of other members of society nor can they permit themselves heroic self expansion. The fearful-avoidant individual, despairer over the eternal, and the nihilist all share their inability to find safety and security in anything at all.

3.5.4. Secure Attachment and the Art of Living in Existential Paradox

Living in existential paradox requires the ability flourish despite the terror and uncertainty of the existential givens of existence. While all the previous reactions to existential threat are pathological if taken to extremes, there are some individuals who are able to withstand existential threat with few negative consequences (Yalom, 1980). They seem to be able to hold onto something securely even in times of existential chaos and ontological flux. Accordingly, Schneider (2003, 2004) argues that if one can secure one's identity existential paradox then they are more likely to experience ontological security without resorting to the ultimate rescuer, specialness, or nihilism. Thus, I suggest that the characteristics requisite for this reaction correspond with those of the secure attachment typology.

Secure attachment is characterized by a positive view of self and other. Securely attached individuals have no difficulties in becoming emotionally close to other people (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991). They feel pleasant and secure if they can rely on other people and vice versa. They are not worried about being left alone, or that people might not accept them. Securely attached people have a positive self-image and a positive image of others (Bartholomew, 1990).

Under threat the secure individual will not overly fuse with the other nor will they rely solely on their own power. Instead, securely attached individuals wish for and pursue

intimate and close relationships but at the same time are able to maintain their autonomy within such a relationship. (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004). In terms of the transcendent, Granqvist (2010) argues that securely attached individuals who possess positive working models of themselves and others will come to view the transcendent as reliable and secure even when life, or the transcendent itself is unstable. Thus, even in situations of threat, a securely attached individual has developed the ability to feel relatively safe and secure. Because the characteristics of securely attached individuals seem to match those who can withstand existential threat with equanimity, it may be beneficial for the development of an art of living in existential paradox to explore methods of encouraging attachment security.

3.6. Implications for Living in Existential Paradox

The link between adult attachment style and reactions to the existential paradox has clear implications for living in existential paradox. The goal of this art is to promote an awareness of and ability to live in existential paradox and secure individuals may be more likely to be able to do this. Accordingly, attachment theory may provide a road map as to how one might go about moving an insecure individual to a more secure form of attachment reaction that would help them live with existential paradox. While Kierkegaard (2004/1849) suggests that the movement for one form of despair to a "higher" form of despair is a dialectical and linear process, I posit that an individual instead moves from their "original" attachment style to more secure attachment as is posited by attachment theorists (Bowlby, 1982). Thus, I suggest that methods of counselling to promote attachment security for each style of attachment would provide useful methods for the promotion of the ontological security necessary for living in existential paradox

The first implication of attachment theory for living in existential paradox is the awareness that there seems to be predictable behavioural reactions depending on attachment style. Understanding a person's reaction to existential threat as a function of their attachment style may illuminate the underlying dynamics that lead to various "insecure" reactions to the existential givens. Thus, the understanding of why a person

reacts the way she or he does provides a basis on which to engage with her or him and promote security.

Wei (2008) supports using counter-complementary interventions to encourage attachment security. For example, she suggests that individuals with high attachment avoidance may begin to trust others and view others more positively by providing an especially empathic environment. Conversely, for those with high attachment anxiety, she suggests promoting self-compassion as well as exercises that may help them become more of their own attachment figure and gain more independence. This argument suggests that there is not just one way to bring an individual from insecurity to security, but instead, if our goal is to promote an art of living in existential paradox, then methods can must be adapted to the attachment style of the individual.

Escolas, Escolas, and Bartone (2014) also suggest that the goal of attachment theory for counselling is to provide individuals with a safe environment where they can develop themselves in terms of self-perception and knowledge. Thus, the creation of an environment for encouraging ontological security would require sensitivity as to what each attachment style would consider a safe environment.

According to Moriarty, Hoffman, and Grimes (2006), working with an individual's transference is also a key component for promoting more secure attachment. Weiner (1998) states "transference consists of the displacement of feelings, attitudes, impulses, and experiences towards previous attachment figures in a person's life onto current figures" (p.196). Applied to the current work, an individual's transference of their attachment typology onto a counsellor would theoretically reveal a corresponding relationship with her or his own meaning system, and existential givens. Moriarty et al. suggest that an awareness of this transference prevents potential attachment figures such as counsellors from getting "ensnared" in a person's maladaptive attachment transference and thus stopping the perpetuation of maladaptive ways of relating to others and to their own meaning system. These authors suggest that potential attachment figures should become "unhooked" from others' attachment styles so that they can be worked through. In fact, they suggest that if attachment figures can themselves become unhooked from an

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individual's attachment style then this will encourage the insecure individual to change their corresponding relationship with their meaning system and existential paradox.

Speaking in terms of therapy, Moriarty et al. (2006) assert that if people are mindful of their attachment relationship with others (such as teachers, therapist, etc.) then they can also be aware of their relationship with their meaning systems. As such, being aware of how one's attachment style affects their relationship with their meaning system allows them to consciously monitor their thoughts and experiences so they can more readily abide existential paradox.

3.7. Summary and Conclusions

The goal of an art of living in existential paradox is the ability to accept the existential givens of existence without resorting to the potentially destructive behaviours discussed throughout this exploration. Because this requires the ability to abide in ontological flux, the capability to be secure in insecurity is required. As such, I explored the link between adult attachment style and reactions to the existential givens of existence arguing that those with maladaptive or insecure adult attachment react in the same way to existential threat as they do in intimate relations. Meanwhile, I argued that secure individuals are ideally situated to bear the instability needed for living in existential paradox. Having established a link between attachment style and reactions to existential threat, I suggested that therapeutic methods employed for moving an individual from an insecure to secure attachment in intimate relationships would apply to individuals who have insecure reactions to the existential givens and thus may be imperative for an art of living in existential paradox.

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Chapter 4.

Absurd Creation: Examining the Oeuvres of Camus and Becker

To live the absurd artistically is to fashion for oneself an art of living (Bree, 1996/1964, p. 239).

4.1. Abstract

Albert Camus and Ernest Becker were both concerned with the effects of existential paradox (the paradox of the absurd) on human behaviour and how the ability to accept this paradox may alleviate much individual, societal, and even planetary suffering. Their respective works focus on different aspects of existential paradox and I propose an integration of their main themes leads to a deeper and more robust understanding of existential paradox and its effects. Thus, this paper is an exploration of how an integration of Camus and Becker's work may enrich our understanding of existential paradox, its affects on human behaviour, and provide a way to live with it. I conclude from this integration that the creation of absurd works of art is the method *par excellence* for promoting the ability to live in existential paradox without appeal.

Keywords: Absurdity; Absurd Creation; Becker; Camus; Existential Paradox; Paradox of the Absurd

4.2. Introduction

Frankl (2007) argues that humanity's fundamental drive, besides survival itself, is the *will to meaning* characterized by seeking out meaning to one's life and the universe, which will provide certainty and coherence. Yet, our desire for certainty of meaning goes unrequited by the irrational silence of the world (Camus, 2000/1942). This creates an existential paradox that is considered by many existential theorists to be one of the main underlying drivers of human behaviour (Becker, 1997/1973,1975; Camus, 2000/1942; Kierkegaard, 2004/1849; Yalom, 1980). At one time many people likely found meanings for their lives and universe in the grand narratives of traditional religions that provided ontological stability to their adherents. However, it is apparent to many individuals in postmodern times that not only are fixed meanings arbitrary, but also the adherence to such meanings can become destructive under certain circumstances that will be discussed in this exploration. (Bauman, 2015; Becker, 1997/1973; May, 2011). In fact, many existential theorists argue that the seeking out of absolute meaning systems may be the cause of much individual, societal, and even planetary suffering. This has largely influenced scholars to explore different methods of living with existential paradox without resorting to attempts at reconciling it.

However, part of the difficulty is that existential panic often results when one's meaning system and identity are threatened. That is, according to Green and Gary (2016), "overcoming the illusion of reification results in either experiences of dread or awe; it depends on where one secures one's identity" (p. 49). If an individual identifies with a meaning system and that meaning is threatened, then they may experience mental and emotion distress or resort to destructive behaviours. On the other hand, if they identify with the paradox itself then they may be able remain lucid to existential paradox without attempting to reify a particular meaning system. Accordingly, an art of living in existential paradox would require a method that would help individuals identify with the absurd, rather than with fixed meanings.

To accomplish this task, I will explore the work of Albert Camus and Ernest Becker who are two of the most influential scholars of existential paradox and its effects

on human behaviour. Although both study existential paradox with the purpose of promoting human flourishing, Ernest Becker largely focuses on how this paradox unconsciously affects human behaviour, while Camus explores how people should live once they are conscious of this paradox. Consequently, Camus picks up where Becker leaves off, and when integrated, this synthesis leads to a more complete view of the human condition.

Thus, in this paper, I will explore how an integration of the works of Ernest Becker and Albert Camus will not only enrich understanding of the aforementioned human condition and its effects on human behaviour, but also how this integration points to an art of living in existential paradox via absurd creation that contributes to the art of living in existential paradox. The first part of this exploration will provide an overview of the oeuvres of Becker and Camus before an integration of the main themes of their work. The final section examines absurd creation as the method *par excellence* of living with lucid awareness of the existential paradox.

4.3. Becker's Oeuvre

Becker's (1997/1973) fundamental inquiry was "what makes people act the way they do" with the purpose of improving life for humans and those other than human (p. vii). This enlightenment project that he dubbed the 'science of man' was an interdisciplinary venture aimed at understanding the human condition and its effect on human behaviour to better understand and control human behaviours that led to destruction or flourishing.

He saw the fundamental characteristic of the human condition to be the existential paradox at the core of our being wherein we are animals with a natural instinct for survival, yet are also faced with the awareness of our eventual death. Becker (1997/1973) explains,

> Man is a union of opposites, of self-consciousness and of physical body.
> Man emerged from the instinctive thoughtless action of the lower animals
> and came to reflect on his condition. He was given a consciousness of his
> individuality and his part-divinity in creation, the beauty and uniqueness
> of his face and name. At the same time he was given the consciousness of
> the terror of the world and of his own death and decay. This paradox is the
> really constant thing about man in all periods of history and society; it is
> thus the true essence of man (pp. 68-69).

In other words, Becker (1997/1973) claims that the essence of humanity is paradoxical in nature because we are half animal and half symbolic, finding ourselves both in and outside of our physical reality (Hardie-Bick, 2012). Essentially, the fact that we are aware of our own finite nature is the "worm at the core" of our being (James, 1994, p. 121). Although this self-consciousness can be an overwhelmingly positive experience that encourages a sense of wonder and allows human beings to contemplate and reflect on "the sheer joy of being alive," it can also engender an overwhelming sense of existential anxiety and dread (Pyszczynski et al., 2003, p. 15). Yalom (2008), drawing from Becker notes,

> Self-awareness is a supreme gift, a treasure as precious as life. This is
> what makes us human. But it comes with a costly price: the wound of
> mortality. Our existence is forever shadowed by the knowledge that we
> will grow, blossom, and, inevitably, diminish and die (p. 1).

Because humans have the animal instinct for self-perpetuation and immortality coupled with the awareness of death, we strive for immortality unconsciously and symbolically. Becker (1975) concludes,

> The tragedy of evolution is that it created a limited animal with unlimited
> horizons. Man is the only animal that is not armed with the natural
> instinctive mechanisms or programing for shrinking his world down to a
> size he can automatically act on. This means that men have to artificially
> and arbitrarily restrict their intake of experience and focus their output on
> decisive action (p. 153).

Hardie-Bick (2012) corroborates Becker's conclusions that the unique predicament of the human animal is that they have a biological need to control their mortality awareness so that they are not constantly in terror of life and death. However, death awareness always rumbles below the surface. To reconcile our animalistic need for indefinite self-

perpetuation with this death awareness, Becker (1997/1973) asserts that humans need to symbolically deny death via a transcendent meaning system. In other words, our self-conscious transmutes the animalistic need for immortality into a meaningful compelling illusion in an attempt to allay or deny human mortality.

The need for humans to symbolically transcend death via a meaning system is what Becker (1997/1973) calls, *heroism*. Much of his work explores how human beings engage in various heroics to either transcend or keep their fear of death unconscious.

4.3.1. Existential Paradox and Heroics

The first defense that humans rely on to protect themselves from the terror of death is the vital lie of character, or *character armour* that protects people from addressing the absurdity of their existence (Becker, 1972). Becker refers to character armour as the lifestyle that a person assumes to live and act with a certain security. Goleman and Leitchy (2002) describe it as the shielding of the self through habitual defenses acting to ward off anxieties of a threatening world. Consequently, Becker (1997/1973) explains that this type of person is an "everyday cultural man" who lives out dominant cultural roles automatically and uncritically (p. 86).

Becker (1997/1973) sees this as a vital and necessary lie disguising the despair of the human condition. We avoid despair by building defenses that provide a sense of self-worth, meaningfulness, and power to our lives. The human animal is a meaning-creating symbolic animal that thrives on constructing fantasies in order to disguise the true condition of their existence. Becker (1997/1973, p. 55) writes that these defenses are a "necessary and basic dishonesty about oneself and one's whole situation; a dishonesty that protects people from acknowledging the reality of the human condition" because even though is potentially liberating, it is both terrifying and devastating to see the world as it actually is. Without certainty of transcendence, or at the least repression that character armour provides, humans have to deal with the terror of life and death (Hardie-Bick, 2012). Thus, this character armour protects humans from addressing their existential helplessness and allows them to live with a sense of ontological security.

Character armour usually influences an individual's *causa sui* project. A *causa sui* project is the means by which a person tries to achieve self-esteem, significance, and meaning in order to transcend or render death unconscious (Becker, 1997/1973). This project is carried out within the confines of an adopted *hero system*. A hero system is "symbolic action system, a structure of statuses and roles, customs and rules for behaviour designed to serve as a vehicle for earthy heroism" (Becker, 1997/1973, p. 4). Also, Becker describes hero systems as standardized systems to deny death by giving formulas and structures for transcendence. He continues, "society itself is a codified hero system which means that society everywhere is a living myth of the significance of human life, a defiant creation of meaning. Every society is thus a religion whether it thinks so or not" (p. 7).

Thus, a person transcends death by finding a meaningful lifestyle, a larger scheme into which they fit and which is largely governed by an individual's culture. Humans may believe they have fulfilled God's purpose, or done their duty to their ancestors or family, or achieved something that has enriched humankind. Becker (1975) writes that "it is an expression of the will to life, the burning desire of the creature to count, to make a difference on the planet because they have lived, have emerged on it, and have worked, suffered, and died" (p. 3). Furthermore, Becker concludes that what humans really fear is not so much extinction, but extinction with insignificance

The most effective form of hero system is traditional religion because religions link the cultural heroics not just to a specific culture, but also to grand cosmic and metaphysical meanings. Thus, for the faithful, they provide absolute certainty of immortality and the significance of human life. Without the comfort of having a canopy of transcendent symbols embodied in most religions, humans are left to their own devices to transcend death via other hero systems such as secular culture. However, Becker (1975) indicates "that self-transcendence via culture does not give man a simple and straightforward solution to the problem of death; the terror still rumbles underneath the cultural repression" (p. 5). Thus, the modern era is imbued with a secondary paradox: the need for a certain and transcendent meaning system in a universe that is silent to our need. In this more secular world such a readily available religious heroism is lost to

many. Nonetheless, the tensions and fears, emanating from the human condition of existing as both animalistic and symbolic beings, continue to demand merger with a transcendent meaning outside of the individual. This irreconcilable gap may draw the individual to lesser forms of heroism that are sanctioned by one's culture such as the accumulation of material wealth, the raising and providing for family, or the defense and promotion of democracy and capitalism. Becker (1997/1973) calls these *normal neuroses* because they are more dominant and culturally predetermined methods of attempting to create a meaningful existence that provides a sense of protection from the terror of the human condition. However, because these cultural hero systems are not necessarily attached to something transcendent, they do not fully mitigate the terror of finitude and insignificance and may, therefore, be taken *in extremis* to reconcile the paradox.

While religion may offer certainty of transcendence and significance, Becker (1997/1973) maintains that a universal *causa-sui* project of denying one's *creatureliness* is still necessary in the absence of such a certainty. Consequently, according to Martin (2012), in the absence of a religious cosmology, humans employ numerous methods of denying and suppressing the "the terror, perdition, and annihilation that dwell next door to every man" (Kierkegaard, 2004/1849, p. 140). Therefore, human behaviour in the modern secular era might be largely governed by how we go about reconciling the existential paradox.

4.4. Camus' Oeuvre

In a similar vein as Becker, Camus' main concern is with the nature of the paradox of the absurd and how humans might best respond to it. In Camus' works, the absurd is the unrequited human need for a transcendent meaning that will provide certainty to life. Camus (2000/1942) insists that the absurd arises from the divorce or confrontation between human beings and the world. He writes, "What is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world" (p. 20).

According to this view, the absurd lies in the clash between human beings' longing for clarity, order and consistency, and the apparent uncertainty, messiness, and irrationality that characterizes our existence (Gordon, 2012). Humans desire a unity between their lives and the universe. In other words, beyond survival itself, human beings require meaning and certainty to make sense of themselves and the universe, yet for many, there is no longer any cosmic meaning that can be accepted (Frankl, 2007). Similarly, Camus (2000/1942) asserts that the absurdity of life is not simply the meaninglessness of life, but a tension between two terms: objective meaninglessness and the human desire for meaning that humans long to unify. The inability of reason to understand the world amounts to the failure of the possibility of unity. This is the absurd gap that is sometimes called the existential void.

Woodward (2011) states that Camus' absurdity of life arose especially in western culture because of the "bankruptcy of evaluative structures such as religion that previously gave life consistency, direction, and transcendent categories of evaluation" (p. 544). Furthermore, it is human consciousness coupled with inherent desire to understand the world rationally that thwarts the possibility of unity. Camus (2000/1942) believes that if humans had no more consciousness than the lower animals, no rational divisions would exist. We would be part of it, at one with it. There would be no tension between the human desire for meaning and the world, and we would not experience the absurd. Likewise, if the universe thought and felt as we do (i.e., if there were a God, who manifested a divine order), there would be no division and absurdity would not take hold (Woodward, 2011). This nostalgia for unity and an appetite for the absolute illustrate the essential impulse for the human drama that is thwarted by the absurd moment (Camus, 2000/1942).

4.4.1. The Absurd Moment

Camus (2000/1942) explains that the "absurd moment is the odd state of the soul when the void becomes eloquent, in which the chain of daily gestures is broken, in which the head vainly seeks the link that will connect it again" (p. 11). This is the first sign of absurdity. Alternatively, he writes "that one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in

that weariness tinged with amazement" (p. 12). Here Camus is writing about the moment when one realizes that their meaning system may be arbitrary, potentially resulting in both anxiety and/or amazement.

Despite lamenting the bankruptcy of many grand narratives that once provided a degree of cosmic certainty and a hope for unity, Camus (2000/1942) was adamant that attempting to return to these was not possible. He argues,

> Such are the 'returns' to the middle ages, to a primitive mentality, to the so-called 'natural life,' to religion – in short, to the arsenal of old solutions. But to give a shadow of usefulness to these cures, several centuries' contributions must be denied; we must pretend to be ignorant of what we know very well, to pretend we have learnt nothing, and to efface what is ineffaceable. This is impossible (Camus as cited in Woodward, 2011, p. 545).

Camus insists that humans must give up their hope of unity with the universe and live lucidly "in the shadow of the absurd," and as such he concludes that,

> Carrying this absurd logic to its conclusion, I must admit that that struggle implies a total absence of hope, a continual rejection, and a conscious dissatisfaction [yet] …a man who has become conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it (p. 24-25).

This quotation suggests that once a person becomes aware of the arbitrariness of a meaning system, it may be difficult to return to it or to adhere to another. He continues that with the absurd, the meanings that we once regarded as important and necessary suddenly lose their rationale where

> in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting is the proper feeling of absurdity (p. 7).

However, despite the seemingly depressing and forlorn nature of lucid absurdity, Camus argues that suicide is a not valid response and he insists that living with lucid absurdity is not a life of despair, renunciation, and unrest but one of rebellion and even happiness. In fact, he believes that by maintaining palpable consciousness of this existential situation, we can live a worthy (happy) life and, consequently, die a happy death without hope of

transcendence and without appeal to some transcendent force (Camus, 2000/1942). At the same time, Camus warns that living lucidly is not an easy step to take and that we can remain tempted by a hope that will quell both the challenge and the rise of the absurd in our consciousness:

> Eluding is the invariable game. Hope of another life one must 'deserve' or trickery of those who live, not for life itself, but for some great idea that will transcend it, refine it, give it a meaning, and betray it (p. 8).

This is the hope and certainty that Camus insists we must rebel against. However, living with lucid absurdity is not to be taken as a conclusion in itself. In fact, in the introduction to Th*e Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus (2000/1942) remarks, "it is useful to note at the same time that the absurd, hitherto taken as a conclusion, is considered in this essay as a starting point" (p. 4). Accordingly, much of the rest of the essay and Camus' other works attempt to answer the questions: how are we to live without belief in a transcendent meaning and a given code of values? Camus is essentially exploring the question: now what?

4.5. Destructive Reactions to Existential Paradox

4.5.1. Mental Illness and Suicide

Both Camus and Becker address the possible effects of existential paradox on an individual's mental health. However, while Becker explores the largely unconscious reactions, Camus examines how the absurd affects an individual's mental health once she or he has become aware of it.

Becker (1997/1973) argues convincingly that not only are common mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety reactions to the existential paradox, but also severe forms of schizophrenia and other psychoses. He suggests that while most people deal with the terror of life and death through a transcendent or cultural hero system in which they find meaning, value, and self-esteem, those who are unable to do so must still attempt to reconcile the paradox through less normative means. Accordingly, Becker

concludes that issues of mental health are largely related to what he calls "failed heroics."
He explains,

> The avoidance of life and the terror of death become enmeshed in the
> personality to such an extent that it is crippled—unable to practice the
> normal cultural heroism of other members of society. The result is that the
> person cannot permit himself the routine heroic self-expansion, nor the
> easy yielding to the super ordinate cultural worldview that other members
> can (p. 248).

In other words, mental illnesses might "refer to the terror of the human condition in
people who can't bear up under it" (Becker, 1997/1973, p. 250). Essentially, Becker
posits that mental illnesses might be connected to extreme reactions to the human
condition in those who cannot deal with such terror. For example, he describes
schizrenia:

> The schizophrenic was crippled by the fear of life and its demands, by low
> self-evaluation in the face of them. He mistrusts not only himself but also
> the knowledge and ability of others; nothing seems to him to be able to
> overcome the inevitable horrors of life and death—except perhaps the
> ideational system that he fabricates for his own salvation. His feelings of
> magical omnipotence and immortality are a reaction to the terror of death
> by a person who is totally incapable of opposing this terror with his own
> secure powers (p. 218).

Thus, mental illness may be an adaptive behaviour resulting from the inability to buy into
the prevailing cultural heroics while at the same time lacking the courage to transmute the
terror of death on one's own. Alternatively, they may be a result of the shattering of one's
meaning and security through such events as war, or other trauma.

For Becker (1997/1973), the only freedom from such ailments is the awareness of
how individuals react to the human condition. He concludes that one of the most
important questions a person can ask themselves is "How conscious [am I] of what [I am]
doing to earn [my] feeling of heroism" (p. 5). Once aware of one's own reactions to
existential paradox, there is often no return to previously comforting illusions. Instead,
Becker insists that the individual must have the courage to stay in the terror and wonder
of existential paradox.

At this point, however, Becker (1997/1973) warns about the dangers confronting existential paradox when he remarks that liberation from the illusions that provide meaning and death transcendence may lead to the "real probability of the awakening of terror and death from which there is no return" and that this leads to the occasional suicide (p. 271).

In this way, it is here that Camus picks up where Becker leaves off. Camus (1956) believes that for those who have become aware of the absurdity of the existential paradox, the "weight of days is dreadful" and the choice of whether or not to keep living is paramount (p. 40). In fact, in the opening lines the *Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus (2000/1942) writes "there is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether or not one's life is worth living amounts to answering the fundamental questions of human philosophy" (p. 5). Of course, Camus is referring to the choice presented to the individual who comes to realize the absurd nature of human existence that strips previously held meanings from their lives. In his way, Camus echoes Becker when he remarks that weariness and suicide as a reaction to the absurd is "merely confessing that [life] is not worth the trouble… and killing yourself amounts to confessing that life is too much for you or that you do not understand it" (p. 7).

4.5.2. Murder and Evil

While mental illness may be viewed as an inability to deal with the paradoxical nature of the human condition via mainstream cultural heroics, adherence to hero systems can also be destructive. While on an individual level mental illness and even suicide are less than ideal ways of dealing with existential paradox, on a collective, or societal level murder and other destructive behaviours often result from a group's attempt to secure the certainty of their meaning system. However, "the fact is that self-transcendence via culture does not give man a simple and straightforward solution to the problem of death; the terror still rumbles underneath the cultural repression" (Becker, 1975, p. 5). Because much of humanity depends on cultural or religious hero systems to transcend the fear of death, people will do almost anything to protect their meaning systems, which results in much of the evil that exists. In fact, Becker (1975) concludes that faced with any

perceived threat to their culture, humans will kill and destroy—"the logic of killing others to affirm our own life" is the paradox which unlocks much that puzzles us about the history of evil (p. 10). As such, Becker believes that much of the killing and destruction throughout history has been done in defense of meaning systems that provide a means of death transcendence. Unfortunately, our "search for immortality is most often worked out as a frenzied and fetishistic escape from mortality and weakness through victory over an enemy, a hate object" (McCarthy, 1981, p. 50).

Becker's (1975) fundamental thesis concerning what he defines as evil is that even the most comprehensive and transcendent meaning systems have to explain the existence of "the other," that is, the person, society, or belief system that contradicts their own, that throws what they believe into doubt and challenges their most cherished beliefs that guarantee transcendence of the human condition. In this way, "the other", the scapegoat, is the very embodiment of evil, the harbinger of death and suffering that must be destroyed if they are to live.

It is by erecting cultural symbols and artifacts that humans achieve the promise of a transcending significance (Becker, 1975). For Becker, all cultures, religious or not, are *de facto* supernatural because the function of every culture is to assure its members in one way or another of the meaningfulness of life and transcendence of death (Martin & Leichty, 2016). "It is an expression of the will to live, the burning desire of the creature to count, to make a difference on the planet because he has lived, has emerged on it, and has worked, suffered and died" (Becker, 1975, p. 3). In another instance Becker writes that,

> Man transcends death not only by continuing to feed his appetites, but by finding a meaning for his life, some kind of larger scheme into which he fits…since men must now hold on for dear life onto the self transcending meanings of society in which they live, onto immortality symbols which guarantee them indefinite duration of some kind, a new kind of instability and anxiety are created. And this anxiety is exactly what spills over into the affairs of men. In seeking to avoid evil, man is responsible for bringing more evil into the world than organisms could ever do merely by exercising their digestive tracks. It is man's ingenuity…and [his] impossible hope and desires that have heaped evil in the world (p. 5).

In essence, Becker (1975) concludes that our need for a transcendent meaning system that reconciles the existential paradox leads to the impugning of other meaning systems that seem to threaten our own. Thus, the "other" is seen as a threat that must be treated as evil. For Becker, evil means death and meaninglessness that people and societies transfer onto unfamiliar "others."

Thus, Becker (1975) brings a psychological depth and justification to what Camus had concluded in *The Rebel*: that our desire for certainty of meaning leads some individuals and societies to eradicate those whose meaning systems seem to threaten the legitimacy of their own. As Camus (2000/1942) famously writes, "I see many people die because they judge life not worth living. I see paradoxically, getting killed for the idea or illusions that give a reason for living—what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying" (p. 5). If people are willing to die for their meaning system, they would certainly be willing to murder to maintain its integrity. According to Camus (1991/1951), rebellion "is above all a demand for unity [wherein the rebel] obstinately confronts a world condemned to death and the impenetrable obscurity of the human condition with his demand for life and absolute clarity" (p. 57).

However, when rebellion turns to revolution with its need for absolutes, it becomes the very antithesis of what it fought for. The threat to its survival increases its appetite for ideological violence. For Camus (1991/1951) what is lost is the stepping off point; the absurd demands of us that we look for the actions that can be authentically "drawn from it" (p. 59). The temptation is to turn away from this doubt into absolutism: "then begins the desperate effort to create, at the price of crime and murder if necessary" (p. 25). Rather than remaining faithful to the absurdity and ambiguity inherent within existential freedom, the rebellion turns to revolution and destruction of "the other" (Curzon-Hobson, 2013).

For Camus and Becker, our need to protect our meaning systems leads to murder and destruction, while our inability to effectively deal with the paradox at an individual level leads to mental illness. Yet both authors only elucidate these theories so that

humans can be aware of the destructive reactions as a first step in their goal of establishing a way to avoid them.

4.6. Ideal Reactions to Existential Paradox

Despite their explanations for how the attempt to resolve existential paradox may lead to mental illness and destructive behaviour, Camus (1991/1951; 2000/1942) and Becker (1975; 1997/1973) agree that awareness of absurdity, how people react to it, and methods of living with it are imperative for improving human life.

In his two major non-fiction works, *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel,* Camus (1991/1951; 2000/1942) focuses on what he considers are inappropriate reactions to lucid absurdity. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he argues that suicide is not an appropriate reaction to the apparent meaninglessness of life assumed in absurdity. Essentially, he is arguing that a lack of cosmic meaning is not a valid reason for suicide, because, even though it may feel appropriate at times, it would be denying what is fundamental about human condition—absurdity. Accordingly, Camus advocates for living with lucid absurdity.

For Camus (1991/1951), rebellion is the most appropriate response to the absurd nature of human existence. Aside from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and the *Rebel*, rebellion as a response to the absurd nature of human existence is reiterated in many of Camus' writings (Gordon, 2012). On an individual level, rebellion refers, on the one hand, to rejecting absolutes and certainties while at the same time resisting nihilism and meaninglessness. For example, Camus in Gordon maintains,

> The rebel is first and foremost one who refuses, who says 'no'. But, Camus observes, this refusal is also affirmative, because the declaration implies a discourse of value: the rebel must revolt in the name of something (p. 57).

Collectively to rebel, he argues that the apparent meaninglessness of existence does not lead to an "anything goes" ethical disposition that would lead to murder. Instead, he explains that lucidity does not mean that an ultimate meaning does not exist, but rather that humans are unable to obtain that meaning. Thus, instead of arguing for an absolute of

meaninglessness, he advocates for a constant 'rebellion' against absolutes and certainties in general. Additionally, because all humans are in the same absurd predicament, Camus (1991/1951) believes in a sense of solidarity among humans, which he envisions as preventing violence.

While Becker never formally provides any clear solutions to existential paradox, throughout his works there are moments when he does reflect on the implications of his work.

According to Scimecca (1978), Becker views his work as being concerned with two fundamental tasks. The first was to understand and become aware of the fictions individuals create to transcend death, and second, to point the way toward the transcending of these fictions in order to ensure freedom. What is proper for man is freedom, freedom from the constricting nature of the very social fictions he creates. The only questions worth asking are how man got to be as he is and how can he use this knowledge to attain freedom (Scimecca, 1978). However, this freedom does not come easily:

> Becker is willing to accept the consequences that exposing the fictional nature of reality might unleash, hoping that exposure might bring freedom. In taking this radical stance Becker is well aware that the risks are great, for once the fictional nature of human existence is revealed the individual can be deprived of heroic meaning. Culture as currently constituted provides the only way man can see himself as a hero within the symbolic fiction. Without his fictions man is reduced to his basic animal existence. This is the fundamental anxiety of human existence…Man creates a tenuous, fragile fiction, but it is the only defense he can muster against the despair that is inherent in the human condition. Discrediting the social fiction may be a terrible price to pay, but it must be paid if man is to be free (p. 101).

Becker was attempting to figure out how we can live with this paradox without resorting to reified and destructive meaning systems, the same project that Camus was engaged in. Originally, Becker (1967) envisioned a healthy democracy coupled with education to be a heroic meaning project that would fulfil his ideal project and may be an ideal response to existential paradox for individuals and society. Martin and Leichty (2016) reflecting on Becker write that,

Our only hope for enlightened life together is a kind of cosmic heroism that might issue from a fusion of the insights of an idealized social science with the functions of religion, a merging that will require an honest and sustained confrontation with the reality of our condition, nature, and limits, at both collective and individual levels. This challenge helps to define Becker's legacy. It was his call to us to be continuingly vigilant and reflective about the evil that lurks within our own best critical thoughts and practices, waiting to turn them into exactly that which they are set against (p. 9).

However, Becker also warns of the danger of reaching such awareness and liberation concluding,

that even with the highest personal development and liberation, the person comes up against the real despair of the human condition. Indeed, because of that development, his eyes are opened to the reality of things; there is no turning back to the comforts of a secure an armoured life. The person is stuck with the full problem of himself and yet he cannot rely on himself to make any sense of it. For such a person as Camus said, 'the weight of days is dreadful' (p. 269).

Becker (1997/1973) admits, "there is simply no way to transcend the limits of the human condition or to change the psychological structural condition that makes humanity possible" (p. 277). Instead, he argues that humans must have a compelling illusion that does not "lie about the human condition…a lived compelling illusion that does not lie about life, death and reality; one honest enough to follow its own commandments: I mean, not to kill not to take the lives of others to justify itself" (p. 204). So, the question becomes: how do people live a compelling yet lucid illusion, or illusions at the dizzying crest of existential paradox?

4.7. The Creative Solution

As is apparent to this point, both Camus (2000/1942) and Becker (1975; 1997/1973) took up the task of elucidating the human condition for improving the lot of humans and the planet. Likewise, they agree that the only way forward is to have the courage to remain at the dizzying crest of lucidity. While Camus examines a myriad of ways of being lucid in his various works and Becker explores our psychological reactions to paradox, they both conclude that creativity and art is one of the best ways of staying

lucid to the existential paradox without devolving into nostalgia, suicide, murder, or mental illness.

In the closing lines of *The Denial of Death*, Becker (1997/1973), with a rueful tone, concludes that "the most anyone of us can seem to do is to fashion something—an object or ourselves—and drop it into the confusion, make an offering of it, so to speak, to the life force" (p. 285). This marks the end of Becker's uncompromising search for an response that "does not lie about the human condition" and typifies what he calls the creative solution. Becker describes a work of art as a combination of the fullest of self-expression and renunciation that saves one's soul yet cannot provide salvation, or reconciliation.

Becker (1997/1973) explains that creation is ideal for remaining lucid awareness of the paradox because the creative type is separated out of the common pool of shared meanings and takes the problem of existence as something they must make personal sense of. He explains that for the creative type, "existence becomes a problem that needs an ideal answer, but when you no longer accept the collective solution to the problem of existence, then you must fashion your own" (1997/1973, p. 171). Yet the creator of the work of art is aware that both the creation and herself or himself are ephemeral and potentially meaningless.

Thus, Becker (1997/1973) reveals that the artist takes in the world and the nature of existence, but instead of being oppressed by it or reacting negatively to it, they rework it in their own personality and recreate it in the work of art. He compares the artist and the neurotic saying that they both "bite off more than they can chew, but the artist spews it back our again and chews it over in an objectified way as an external, active work project" (p. 184). In this sense, Becker sees objective creativity as the only answer that humans have to the absurdity of existential paradox.

Similarly, while Camus (2000/1942) believes that anyone can be an 'absurd man' if they remain lucid to the absurd nature of the human condition, he explains that art is the paramount way of living under the shadow of absurd and the artist is "the most absurd character" (p. 67). Similarly, he concludes that art seems eminently suited to

exemplifying the absurd and is thus one of the principal ways of leading a life under the shadow of the absurd (Gotz, 1987).

Camus (2000/1942) explains that because true art hovers between failure and perseverance, negation and statement, it is an exercise between detachment and passion. It must maintain the longing, recognize the limits, and proceed with steadfast determination within the paradox of the absurd. Thus, the artist lives in such a state of ambiguity, incapable of negating the real, yet eternally bound to question it in its eternally unfinished aspects (Camus & O'Brien, 1955). In this way, art is a way of holding together the two terms of the existential paradox and is a way of concretizing the absurd in life.

Camus (2000/1942) also believes that the artist is a rebel *par excellence*. He equates the artistic endeavour to rebellion: "In every rebellion is to be found the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of capturing it, and the construction of a substitute universe. Rebellion, from this point of view, is a fabricator of universes. This also defines art" (Camus, 1991/1951, p. 255). He adds that to accept the vocation to be an artist is to accept the call to revolt without end.

Camus (2000/1942) adds, "all those lives maintained in the rarefied air of the absurd could not preserve without some profound and constant thought to infuse its strength into them" (p. 68). This, for Camus, is absurd creation which he describes as *living doubly* in that it both exalts and denies simultaneously in the sense that the artist demands a unity, wholeness, and meaning yet knows this is impossible. Finally, Camus (2000/1942) concludes that,

> Of all the schools of patience and lucidity, creation is the most effective. It is also the staggering evidence of man's sole dignity: the dogged revolt against his condition, perseverance in an effort considered sterile. It calls for a daily effort, self-mastery, a precise estimate of the limits of truth, measure and strength. It constitutes *ascesis*. All that 'for nothing', in order to repeat and mark time. But perhaps the great work of art has less importance in itself than in the ordeal it demands of a man and the opportunity with which it provides him for overcoming his phantoms and approaching a little closer to his naked reality (pp. 83-84).

4.7.1. Methods of Absurd Creation

While Camus and Becker are never formally instructive, both suggest the beginnings of methods for absurd creation. Becker (1997/1973) writes that the creative type must have the unique perception that encompasses both the terror and wonder of existence. That is, the artist must stay with lucid awareness of the paradox and wonder of not only the creation itself, but of human existence. Similarly, Camus (2000/1942) writes that true absurd creation does not provide any answer, reply, or hope for the artist or for the human condition, it merely describes. In this way, the absurd artist must work and create for nothing:

> To know that one's creation has no future, to see one's work destroyed in a day while being aware that, fundamentally this has no more importance than building for the centuries—this is the difficult wisdom that absurd thought sanctions. Performing these two tasks simultaneously, negating on the one hand magnifying on the other is the way open to the absurd creator. He must give the void its colours. (Camus, 2000/1942, p. 83).

Thus, both authors assert that "living and breathing" the existential paradox is a necessity for absurd creation lest it relapse into hope. In this way, an absurd work of art must always illustrate divorce and revolt and be created without appeal.

Expression and description over reason and explanation

Camus (2000/1942) and Becker (1997/1973) both determine that an absurd work must remain faithful to the existential paradox and Camus offers instruction on how we might do this. He suggests that the absurd artist must balance reasoned thought with expression so that thought (reason) does not co-opt the absurd creation with meaning. Furthermore, he asserts that "expression begins where thought ends" and that creation follows indifference and discovery from which absurd passions spring and where reasoning stops (p. 70). He explains,

For an absurd work of art to be possible, thought in its most lucid form must be involved in it. But at the same time thought must not be apparent except as the regulating intelligence. This paradox can be explained according to the absurd. The work of art is born of the intelligences' refusal to reason the concrete…it is lucid thought that provokes it but in that very act that thought repudiates itself. It will not yield to the temptation of adding to what is described a deeper meaning that it knows to be illegitimate…the absurd work requires an artist conscious of these limitations and an art in which the concrete signifies nothing more than itself. It cannot be the end, the meaning or the consolation of life (p.70).

In this way, the absurd artist and the art must resist that impulse to give answers to provide meaning. As such, the absurd work,

Embodies an intellectual drama. The absurd work illustrates thoughts renouncing of its prestige and its resignation to being no more that intelligence that works up appearances and covers with images what has no reason. If the world were clear, art would not exist (Camus, 2000/1942, p. 72).

The dethroning of thought in favour of expression also leads Camus (2000/1942) to conclude that an absurd creation must also value description over explanation. Camus asserts that absurd creation is not a matter of explaining and solving, but of experiencing and describing, which he characterizes as "the last ambition of an absurd thought" (p. 69). As such, the absurd artist must only describe life at the "dizzying crest" of existential paradox and nothing more—they must "give the void its colours" (p. 83).

4.8. Conclusion

Both Albert Camus' and Ernest Becker's works focus on understanding the effects of existential paradox on human behaviour and the various methods of living with this paradox. They agree that the human need for an absolute meaning system that inoculates against the terror of death in a universe that provides no such certainty leads not only mental illness but also to scapegoating, murder, and other destructive behaviours. While Becker is focused on humanity's psychological and behavioural reactions to this paradox and Camus is interested in different ways of living with absurdity, they both suggest that creativity and especially the creation of absurd art is the best method for remaining lucidly aware of existential paradox while avoiding

destructive reactions. In fact, Camus (2000/1942, p. 68) evoking Nietzsche, writes, "art and nothing but art…we have art in order not to die of truth." Therefore, absurd creation may be an integral part of the art of living with existential paradox.

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Chapter 5.

The Paradox of Tranquility: Expanding the View of Existential Paradox

5.1. Abstract

Existential paradox has long been predicated on the notion that humans have a need to seek and make absolute meanings in a world that does provide such certainty. According to most existential thinkers, the resulting drive to resolve this absurd situation is the main motivator of human behaviour. While not all actions resulting from this situation are negative, extreme reactions to this existential bind are often linked to destructive behaviours in individuals as well as within societies. Accordingly, many authors have attempted to devise methods of living with this existential paradox without reconciliation. However, because these methods of living with paradox largely assumes the will to meaning as humanity's fundamental drive, their effectiveness may be limited. Instead, in this paper, I suggest that the underlying mechanism driving existential paradox is a synthesis of the will to meaning, the will to power, and the will to pleasure, aptly named the will to tranquility. With this understanding, I integrate Epicurean and existential philosophy to propose a strategy for living lucidly in existential paradox.

5.2. Introduction

Existentialists have long held that existential paradox fuelled by the will to meaning is the fundamental driver of human behaviour of both a constructive and destructive type. For example, Becker (1975, 1997/1973) argues that attempts to devise or discern the absolute metaphysical meaning of the cosmos has led to great creative feats in philosophy and science, but also to the destruction and murder of belief systems and people whose meaning systems may differ. Because of the potentially destructive consequences of attempts to reconcile this paradox, several existential theorists have attempted to devise methods of living with this absurdity without negative consequences (Becker, 1967, 1975, 1997/1973; Camus, 2000/1942). However, if the underlying mechanism of existential paradox is expanded beyond the will to meaning to include all aspects of drive theory (the study of psychological drivers of human behaviour), a more holistic vision of human behaviour may arise that carries with it new methods of living with the absurd nature of the human condition. Drive theory is well suited to this exploration since it is also concerned with determining the motivations for human behaviour. Accordingly, I will demonstrate how the will to power, will to meaning, and will to pleasure may actually be directed toward the Epicurean notion of *ataraxia* (tranquility) as their ultimate *telos*. Thus, the synthesis of these drives I will refer to as the *will to tranquility*. Thus, I argue that it is the unrequited human will to tranquility (the paradox of tranquility) that is the main motivator of human behaviour. With this in mind, the remaining sections of this paper are dedicated to applying existential and Epicurean philosophy to formulate a potentially fruitful template for living lucidly with existential paradox.

5.3. Existential Paradox

Existential paradox resides in the fact the humans seem to be both in and outside of nature and thus divorced from other beings on the planet (Camus, 2000/1942). That is, existential paradox arises with advent of human self-reflexivity and is characterized by our ability to infinitize or imagine infinite possibilities for our lives (Becker, 1972/1962; Kierkegaard, 1994/1849). Becker (1975) concludes,

The tragedy of evolution is that it created a limited animal with unlimited horizons. Man is the only animal that is not armed with the natural instinctive mechanisms or programing for shrinking his world down to a size he can automatically act on. This means that men have to artificially and arbitrarily restrict their intake of experience and focus their output on decisive action (p. 153).

Furthermore, Becker (1971/1962) evokes an existential interpretation of Genesis to emphasize this point. He surmises that,

The myth of the Garden of Eden, which occurred so early on to man, still serves us today. Man was on par with the rest of nature, blissfully ignorant of his condition and fate. But then he 'ate the apple' of self knowledge and felt 'shame': that is, he now had self reflexivity and self consciousness, he 'stuck out' from all the other animals and could no longer enjoy their serene existence, their ignorance of death and the burden of the miraculous…little wonder that the searching genius of man is driven again and again to this problem (p. 196).

This self-reflexivity and ability to infinitize created what Kierkegaard (2004/1849) called a synthesis. He writes that, "man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short it is a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two factors" (Kierkegaard, 2004/1849, p. 43). According to Becker (1997/1973), this synthesis was composed of what he calls the creaturely and the symbolic. That is, humans are driven by all of the same animalistic drives as the rest of nature but they also are able to reflect upon them. Put differently, human animalistic drives are transmuted symbolically via human self-reflexivity. Thus, the animal instinct for self-perpetuation becomes the desire for immortality. Security from threat became the will to power while the instinct for procreation and sustenance is the will to pleasure. Meanwhile, all these take place not just in a physical environment as in the animal world, but also a symbolic one of culture known as meaning systems that, according to Becker (1997/1973), are societally specific reactions to existential paradox.

In this way, existential paradox arises from our ability to imagine the perfect fulfillment of all the animalistic desires while also being aware that their full realization is impossible (Kierkegaard, 2004/1849). While much of humanity may be unaware of existential paradox, it often manifests as a feeling of emptiness, a dull longing for

something that one cannot quite grasp, or boredom. It may also manifest as intense anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues (Becker, 1997/1973; May, 1991; Yalom, 1980). All of these indicate the inevitable falling short of our desire for the fullness of life (Svendsen, 2007). Therefore, according to existentialists previously referenced, humans employ a multitude of methods to reconcile or deny this paradox and regain the fullness of life that they desire. According to many existential thinkers, this striving for wholeness, that is, the reconciliation of our animalistic drives with our infinitizing minds, is the root cause of individual and societal strife (Becker, 1975, 1997/1973; Kierkegaard, 2004/1849).

5.4. The Will to Tranquility

5.4.1. Movement

Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of existential paradox is the psychophysical movement involved in attempting to satiate the various drives to reach tranquility. Erich Fromm (1976) explains that "one crucial point can be gleaned from millennia of philosophy: that the concept of process, activity, and movement is an essential element of being and existence" (p. 22). In fact, both Plato and Aristotle believed that motion was a fundamental force in the universe and that by studying the movement of the cosmos, the mysteries of the universe could be understood, and humans could live according to that force (Cooper, 2012). Moreover, movement was such a fundamental force to these Hellenistic philosophers that it was movement in the form of the Unmoved Mover that was the fundamental cosmic force in the universe--God. In fact, so important was the idea of change and movement that many Greek philosophers considered the discovery of its origin and purpose to be the foremost task of the philosopher (Tarnas, 1991). Tarnas describes this Unmoved Mover as a state of eternal unhindered enjoyable activity. Meanwhile, according to Aristotle, change and movement are expressive of a teleological striving to fulfillment and that unimpeded activity is a natural condition of the soul (Tarnas, 1991, pp. 59; Erler & Schofield, 1999).

However, movement as a fundamental aspect of being is not confined to the Western Canon. In Taoism, Watts (1988) explains the Tao as the fundamental force of the universe in terms of movement: "It has the sense of rhythmic motion, of going on and stopping… and so you get the idea of a sort of rhythmic intelligence that ebbs and flows like the tides" (p. 37). Movement is also a fundamental force in Hinduism and Buddhism. In fact, the world *Samsara* is derived from the Sanskrit word for "wandering". According to Monier-Williams (2008), *Saṃsāra* is rooted in the term *Saṃsṛ*, which means to go round, revolve, pass through a succession of states, to go towards or obtain, moving in a circuit, and go around through a succession of states, birth, rebirth of living beings and the world.

This movement is also expressed antonymously by several more recent thinkers who examined the nature of boredom. Kant wrote that "man feels his life through actions and not through enjoyment and that in idleness man feels a lack of life" (Kant as cited in Svendsen, 2005, p. 54). Here, Kant is hinting to engagement and movement being the force more fundamental than any of the drives while boredom is a lack of psychophysical movement. Pascal (1986/1666) echoes the same sentiment that,

> Man finds nothing so intolerable as to be in a state of complete rest, without passions, without occupation, without diversion, without effort. Then he feels his nullity, loneliness, inadequacy, dependence, helplessness, emptiness (p. 27).

Russell (2015/1930) contrasts boredom with excitement, explaining that the desire for excitement is deep seated in human nature and argues that boredom may underlie the vast amount of human activities and has been underestimated as a fundamental factor of human behaviour. Thus, some form of psychophysical movement seems to be an essential aspect of the human condition. While the ontology of this movement may be one of the greatest mysteries of the universe, through an Epicurean-existential lens, it manifests as an unending striving to reconcile the existential paradox of tranquility.

Drive theory and the teleology of movement

The saliency of movement in living beings is also the underlying principle of drive theory. Drive theory attempts to define, analyze, or classify the psychological

drives that are often viewed as instinctual needs that have the power of directing the behaviour of an individual (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). Thus, drive theory attempts to ascertain the underlying *telos* of movement in humans. While several drives have been theorized to exist, modern psychology focuses on three main ones: the will to pleasure, the will to power, and the will to meaning (Hoffman, 2009). While different counselling modalities favour some of these drives over others, I suggest that the will to power, the will to meaning, and the will to pleasure are aspects of the will to tranquility.

5.4.2. The Will to Pleasure

The pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain forms the basis of the *will to pleasure* (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). Freud named this phenomenon the *Pleasure Principle,* while Epicurean philosophers touted pleasure as the ultimate good and that which humans should pursue (Yahalom, 2014). Both Freud and Epicurean philosophers agree that this phenomenon is the fundamental driver of human behaviour. Melchert (2011) explains that according to the Epicureans, all living things seek pleasure as a natural good and that it is the one thing that is not good by convention, but by *physis.* Likewise, Cicero (trans. 2012) wrote,

> Every animal, as soon as it is born, seeks for pleasure, and delights in it as the Chief Good, while it recoils from pain as the Chief Evil, and so far as possible avoids it. This is behavior which has not yet been corrupted, and its nature remains pure and whole (p. 25).

Thus, not only do Epicureans hold that pleasure is the chief good, they believe that it is also the driver of human behaviour. Similarly, Freud's view on pleasure is commensurate insofar as he argues that "all facets of psychic life are constituted by the pursuit of greater pleasurable states or synonymously, the reduction of unpleasurable ones" (Freud as cited in Yahalom, 2014, p. 396). In other words, organic life is motivated to achieve pleasure by avoiding the instability associated with psychological unrest.

Both Freud and the Epicureans have largely been misrepresented as promoters of sensual pleasure. However, Epicurus (trans. 1993) explains that this is not the case:

> When we say that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasure of the profligate or that which depends on physical enjoyment…but by pleasure we mean the state wherein the body is free and the mind from anxiety (p. 66).

In Epicurean philosophy the most desirable state for organic life is *ataraxia,* which can be defined as an absolute state of tranquility characterized by freedom from any disturbance of body or mind (Yahalom, 2014, pp. 398). Thus, the goal of life is not the pursuit of pleasurable experiences as much as it is the avoidance of psychophysical strife. In the same vein, Freud claimed that all organisms strive toward stability and security and, as a result, all of life is in search of an impossible psychophysical state (Freud, 2011/1920).

5.4.3. The Will to Power

Despite Nietzsche's (2014) claim that the will to power is the fundamental driver of behaviour, I ague that it may be one facet of the will to tranquility. In Nietzsche's philosophy, the will to power stipulates that living beings want above all else to release their strength and strive instinctively for an optimum combination of favourable conditions which allows them to expend their energy and achieve a maximum feeling of power. However, the *telos* of this instinct is not power for its own sake, but power for the sake of tranquility (ataraxia). Yahalom (2014) argues that the desire for power arises as a defense against insecurity and that security is needed for tranquility. Furthermore, according to Ansbacher (1972, p. 21), while Nietzsche argues that the striving for more and more power was the ultimate driving force in humans, he ironically claims that human happiness was achieved via *amor fati* (the love of one's fate) when "one wants nothing to be different, not forward not backward, not in all eternity." While not entirely commensurate with tranquility, this does suggest that Nietzsche thought that happiness is achieved via equanimity rather than the striving for power. Thus, it may be the desire to feel secure and tranquil is driving the will to power. In fact, Epicurus (trans. 1993) suggests that obtaining security is fundamental for the happy life:

> Whatever you can provide yourself with to secure protection from men is a natural good...Some men wished to become esteemed and admired by everyone, thinking that in this way they will procure for themselves safety from others. Therefore, if the life of such men is safe, they have received the good that comes from nature. If it is not safe, they do not have that for which they struggled at first by natural instinct (p. 70).

Furthermore, there are several other instances in Epicurus' (trans. 1993) *Principal Doctrines* where he emphasizes security as a prerequisite for tranquility. Essentially, the person views power as the means to stability and tranquility of the soul, she or he may not want power for its own sake.

5.4.4. The Will to Meaning

According to Frankl (2007), the fundamental driver of human behaviour is the *will to meaning,* which is characterized by the seeking and making of meaning. The resulting meaning systems—divine or otherwise—Becker (1997/1973) explains, are symbolic action systems that guide human behaviour. However, rather than meaning being the goal, it too may be another means of achieving the *telos* of tranquility.

Wong (1998) proposes a three-part definition of personal meaning that encompasses both divine and cultural systems. Cognitively, he defines personal meaning as "an individually constructed and culturally based system that makes sense of life and endows it with purpose and significance" (p.12). This system of meaning contains both motivational (behavioural) and affective aspects. The motivational component is defined as the pursuit of activities and life goals that are valuable and worthwhile while feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment that emanate from the pursuit of those goals are considered to be the affective aspect of personal meaning. Thus, Wong himself implies that the goal of personal meaning and a meaning system is in fact feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment emanating from the pursuit of worthwhile goals.

In the same vein, Campbell (1986) argues that it is not meaning that humans are seeking, but the blissful experience of being alive. Accordingly, he recommends that we 'follow our bliss' in pursuit of activities and goals that give a sense of satisfaction and pleasure. Thus, a meaning system provides a canopy of symbolic meanings that act as a

template for living a pleasurable and tranquil life. Therefore, I posit that movement is the fundamental force in the universe, the *telos* of which is the drive to tranquility of the soul through the seeking of security and power within a meaning system. However, as Freud pointed out, perfect tranquility is an impossible psychophysical state (Freud, 2011/1920). Thus, humans are caught in a paradox of tranquility.

5.4.5. Existential Paradox and the Will to Tranquility

Under the aspect of the *will to tranquility*, existential paradox is the unrequited desire for a perfectly tranquil psychophysical state that the infinitizing self can imagine (Kierkegaard, 2004/1849). However, the fact that full tranquility of the soul can never be achieved results in humans groping and scrambling for perfect tranquility via more power, more pleasure, or a more transcendent meaning system.

The resulting issue is that the self-conscious human can imagine such a perfect tranquility whereas less conscious beings are probably only aware of the dull instinct to keep moving to the pleasurable experiences that keep them alive (Becker, 1997/1973). Similarly, Camus argues that if humans had no more consciousness than the lower animals, no paradox would exist and there would be no tension between the infinitizing self and animal desires (Camus, 2000/1942). While it may seem a subtle shift in perspective from traditional existential theory and its adherence to the will to meaning, viewing existential paradox and human behaviour in this way may greatly enrich the work already pioneered by such scholars as Becker and Camus.

More specifically, most existential theories have attempted to find a way to overcome the predicament wherein humans seek absolute meaning in a universe silent to our plight (Becker, 1997/1973; Camus, 2000/1942; Kierkegaard, 2004/1849). Alternatively, if the will to tranquility is the underlying mechanism of existential paradox, then Epicurean philosophy may offer a way to live with the existential double bind that has confounded thinkers for over two centuries. This is because the Epicureans had already established a sophisticated philosophical system founded on the very idea

that pleasure or tranquility was the greatest good. Thus, an integration of Epicurean philosophy with modern existential works may offer a fruitful venture.

5.5. Epicurean Pleasures and Existential Human Nature

In this section I explore how Existential and Epicurean philosophy might be integrated for the purpose of developing an art of living in existential paradox. The first salient points of integration are the foundational suppositions of both schools of thought. The foundation of the Epicurean way of life is the pursuit of pleasure as the natural *telos* and therefore the ultimate good for humans. More specifically, the Epicureans differentiate between two sources or types of pleasure: *kinesthetic* and *katastematic pleasure* (Cooper, 2012). Kinesthetic pleasures arise from movement of the body or mind and are transitory in nature. These pleasures, while providing a certain amount of tranquility of the soul, are always short lived and may lead to more pain in the future, such as the pleasures experienced through alcohol or drugs. This pleasure is often mitigated by accompanying pain and short duration (Epicurus, trans. 1993; Cooper, 2012). Kinesthetic pleasure is also commensurate with the fundamental need for movement—the word kinesthetic is derived from the Greek word for movement.

While the Epicureans believed that kinesthetic pleasure was good, the *summmum bonum* was *katastematic* pleasure that arose not from psychophysical movement, but from the absence of psychophysical disturbances such as the experience of anxiety or intense physical pain (Epicurus, trans. 1993). Alternatively, Cicero (trans. 2012) characterizes katastematic pleasure as the state when one enjoys kinesthetic pleasures without physical pain or anxiety. Thus, in this way, the ultimate good is the combination of both katastematic and kinesthetic pleasures. Accordingly, the goal of Epicurean ethics is to achieve this katastematic pleasure (tranquility) without resorting to potentially destructive kinesthetic behaviours that may disturb katastematic pleasure. While kinesthetic pleasures are a natural good in Epicurean philosophy, they must be pursued wisely so not result in net pain (Epicurus, trans, 1993; Cooper, 2012).

These two sources of pleasure are commensurate with the existential duality of the human condition theorized by Becker. Becker (1997/1973) explains,

> Man is a union of opposites, of self-consciousness and of physical body. Man emerged from the instinctive thoughtless action of the lower animals and came to reflect on his condition. He was given a consciousness of his individuality and his part-divinity in creation, the beauty and uniqueness of his face and name. At the same time he was given the consciousness of the terror of the world and of his own death and decay. This paradox is the really constant thing about man in all periods of history and society; it is thus the true essence of man (p. 68-69).

In other words, Becker (1975) proposes that "the tragedy of evolution is that it created a limited animal with unlimited horizons" (p. 153). That is, humans are able to imagine an infinite amount of future possibilities. What Becker names our creaturely side or animalistic side is driven by the pursuit of increasing pleasurable states via kinesthetic pleasures while our symbolic side can imagine a perfect state of tranquility and satiation. Thus, kinesthetic pleasure and katastematic pleasure issue forth from our creaturely and symbolic side respectively. Perhaps more fundamentally, our symbolic nature transmutes and infinitizes our animalistic drive for pleasure.

The animal self drives us to be in perpetual movement towards more kinaesthetic pleasure and less pain. Because this aspect of the self is non-infinitizing, it cannot project itself into the future to imagine the satiation of greater pleasures or the anxiety of perceived future pain and therefore is fully satisfied in the present by kinesthetic pleasure (Erler & Schofield, 1999; Kierkegaard, 2004/1849). On the other hand, the symbolic self can infinitize and project itself into the future, imagining future pain as well as pleasure. This gives rise to the desire not only for the perfect satiation of desires, but also for a perfectly tranquil state without anxiety caused by the imagining of future pain. This state may be commensurate with the katastematic pleasure that Epicurean philosophy regards as the greatest good (Becker, 1997/1973; Cooper, 2012; Hicks, 1972). This state is also known as the *Nirvana* principle that forms the foundation of many religions (Yahalom, 2014).

However, because according to Kierkegaard (2004/1849) humans are a synthesis, we may never be able to reach a perfect state of katastematic pleasure just as we cannot return fully to the non-infinitizing animalistic self (Camus, 2000/1942). However, the relationship is not as simple as it may first appear. For example, it is not as simple as our animalistic side pines after sex and food, and our symbolic side does not. Instead, because we are both symbolic and creaturely, we must satisfy the animalistic drives both animalistically and symbolically (Becker, 1997/1973). Subsequently, not only do humans strive for physical power and security, we also strive for symbolic power and security. In other words, humans might be driven by kinesthetic pleasure animalistically and symbolically, imagining that we will eventually reach a state katastematic pleasure via more kinesthetic pleasure. Ironically, increasing the intensity, frequency, and novelty of kinesthetic pleasures leads to more disquietude, which is one aspect of the existential paradox (Erler & Schofield, 1999). However, the perfect state of tranquility for the infinitizing self requires a triangular satisfaction of all the drives rather than simple kinesthetic pleasure required by the creaturely self. Thus, while the animalistic self is driven by instinct to seek pleasure via the physical environment, the symbolic self must carry out this movement symbolically through meaning systems.

5.5.1. Meaning and Will to Tranquility

In Camus' works (2000/1942), the absurd is the unrequited human need for a transcendent meaning that will provide certainty to life. Camus insists that the absurd arises from the divorce of human beings and the world. He writes, "What is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world" (p. 20). However, under the will to tranquility, this desire for a transcendent meaning system is not *for itself* but for a tensionless state of wellbeing and contentment. Similarly, Becker (1997/1973) argues that cultures and religions everywhere are symbolic action systems that are symbolic and physical arenas for psychophysical movement toward which an individual believes will lead to the most tranquility of the soul. Thus, the goal of any meaning system may be the psychophysical movement toward the maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain.

Transcendent meaning systems such as religions and spiritualities provide the most certainty and security to their adherents. Not only do they often promise a state of eternal bliss and contentment (*ex*. Heaven), but they also set out specific guidelines on how to achieve these states (May, 2011). As such, these meaning systems conform to both aspects of the will to tranquility. First is the promise of an unfettered tranquility of the soul, which is accompanied by the movement in the form of specific actions and behaviours that will lead to that state. In this way, the anxiety of existential freedom may be rendered nearly impotent. Moreover, these meaning systems may mitigate the fear of death by making this tranquility eternal. Thus, transcendent meaning systems have the potential to provide reconciliation of existential paradox. Therefore, they might be commensurate with Epicurean ideal of katastematic pleasure, the complete absence of any type pain including the psychological disturbance of death. However, unlike most traditional religions, Epicurean philosophers knew that such a state could only be striven for, but never achieved (Cooper, 2012).

Secular meaning systems are also symbolic action systems that guide people towards lives of maximum tranquility; however, as Becker (1975) points out "self-transcendence via culture does not give man a simple and straightforward solution to the problem of death; the terror still rumbles underneath the cultural repression (p. 5). Similarly, Campbell (2004) argues that most of these functions of myth have now been taken over by secular beliefs, which do not provide the certainty of transcendent ones. Thus, while cultures and societies provide a means of tranquility-oriented action, they cannot promise a perfect state of tranquility. As a result, individuals must attempt to reach this state via individual power without the guidance of a divine being. As such, Nietzsche's (2014) *will to power* within a meaning system becomes increasingly important for achieving tranquility.

5.5.2. The Will to Power in Meaning Systems

According to Epicurus (trans. 1993), feelings of power and security are a prerequisite for katastematic pleasure in humans. Thus, in this section I explore how the will to power manifests within one's meaning system. I propose that will to power

manifests within a given meaning system in Becker's (1972/1962) notion of self-esteem. Becker views self-esteem as one's symbolic constitution of their self-worth and power within a meaning system that provides a sense of security. Therefore, Becker's self esteem is a person's perception of their power within their meaning system. Thus, in addition to physical power, because humans live in a symbolic world they must seek power symbolically via self esteem bolstered by socially constructed value and significance. In this way, Becker (1972/1962), points out that meaning systems act as a vehicle for the maintenance and bolstering of self-esteem concluding that humans measure their power and self esteem by the value they hold within their meaning system. The more self-esteem one has allows one to expand their energy and attain a maximum feeling of power (Nietzsche, 2014). While Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* may be advocating for striving for power through creation of one's own meaning system (the *Ubermensch*) as opposed to cultural one, it is a meaning system nevertheless (Nietzsche, 2006/1891). In fact, Becker (1972/1962) suggests that Nietzsche's will to power and ideal of the *Ubermensch* are commensurate with the 'cosmic heroism' that allays the terror of existential paradox. As such Nietzsche's will to power and the *Ubermensch* may be commensurate with absolute meaning systems that lead to feelings of heroism and power over the uncertainties of life such as death (Becker, 1997/1973). Nietzsche's will to power and ideal of the *Ubermensch* is also similar to Yalom's (1980) *specialness defense* in which an individual strives for specialness and power to feel secure in the face of existential paradox. Accordingly, I argue that the will to power is another means by which humans attempt to achieve tranquility.

Thus, to review before moving on, while the will to meaning, pleasure, and power are aspects of human motivation and behaviour, the goal of these drives is a perfect state of tranquility that is unattainable. Accordingly, the question becomes: How might humans contend with this paradox of tranquility?

5.6. Epicurean Ethics and the Art of Living in Existential Paradox

5.6.1. Epicurean Ethics

The Epicureans differentiated between different types of desires by which humans are driven. They first differentiate between the vain (empty) and the natural. Epicurus (trans. 1993) explains,

> You must consider that of the desires some are natural, some are vain and of those that are natural some are necessary, others only natural. Of the necessary desires, some are necessary for happiness, some for the ease of the body and some for life itself (p. 64).

Vain pleasures are those that—because of their intensity and peremptoriness—lead to pain and distress that are enough to undermine one's katastematic pleasure, or tranquility of the soul (Cooper, 2012, p. 239). For example, eating excessive amounts of food might lead to momentary pleasure, yet it may also lead to future pain. Furthermore, these vain desires are often based on false opinion or beliefs about what leads to the greatest state of pleasure or tranquility. For example, an excess of luxurious foods, or the strong desire for wealth and fame may carry with them mental distress not only in their pursuit but also in their absence.

Among the natural desires, Epicurus (trans. 1993) differentiates between those that are necessary and those that are merely natural. Cooper (2012) defines the necessary as those desires that arise inevitably at intervals that if unsatisfied, bodily pain and discomfort of a very distracting sort are inevitable. Thus, the desire for kinesthetic pleasures that sustain life is a necessity, but these types of desires are often easy to obtain. Consequently, the ethical life for Epicurus is one characterized by a continuous katastematic pleasure with a constant variation of kinesthetic pleasures, physical and mental, that do not disturb the tranquility of the soul (Cooper, 2012; Erler & Schofield, 1999; Lucretius, trans. 1986).

5.6.2. Epicurean Desires and Existential Theory

Interpreted existentially, vain desires are those drives that issue from our animalistic side for the pursuit of ever increasing and easily obtained experiences of pleasure. However, vain desires are only vain for the infinitizing humans who not only can imagine greater and greater states for pleasure, but also have created such a society where such pleasures are perhaps too easily obtained (Becker, 1997/1973; Cooper, 2012; Kierkegaard, 2014/1849) In this way, these desires are not vain in themselves, they are instead natural animalistic desires that because of our infinitizing nature actually lead to more disquietude. In other words, the desire for novel and easily obtained kinesthetic pleasures is completely natural, but because our animalistic side has an inclination to instant gratification, our symbolic infinitizing side obliges by providing increasingly easily obtained and thoroughly engaging kinesthetic pleasures. However, the problem is that many of these pleasures often lead to a net decrease in pleasure and thus are vain. The vanity of these desires might also come from lack of awareness and prudence or practical wisdom. In fact, both Epicureans and existentialists call for an awareness of the human condition as the starting point of a good life (Camus, 2000/1942; Epicurus, trans. 1993). Therefore, the awareness of this view of the human condition married to the practical wisdom of the Epicureans may provide the prudence and ability to differentiate between vain and natural desires.

The symbolic, infinitizing aspect of human nature, while providing the means to satiate animalistic and vain drives at a dizzying pace that leads to the disquietude of the soul, also provides for the imagining of a perfect state of tranquility and the means to work toward it (Becker, 1997/1973; Cooper, 2012; Kierkegaard, 2004/1849). While this ability may be the basis for the idea of heaven and the Nirvana principle, Epicurean philosophers attempted to cultivate this state in this life eschewing any such divine ever after while realizing the such a state could only be worked toward but never fully achieved (Yahalom, 2014). In essence, the goals of traditional religions and Epicurean philosophy may be the same state of tranquility; however, Heavan and the Nirvana principle of religion may be the reification of our infinitizing ability to imagine perfect tranquility coupled with the belief that it is attainable. On the other hand, the Epicureans

eschewed reification and believe that tranquility can be worked toward but never fully achieved (Cooper, 2012).

Existential-Epicurean desires and the will to tranquility

Epicurean desires can be seen as commensurate with the various drives in drive theory thus providing the basis for the synthesis of Epicurean and existential philosophy that could elucidate which aspects of the will to tranquility are vain, natural, and necessary (Hoffman, 2009; Yahalom, 2014).

The infinitizing aspect of the human condition allows us to imagine a perfect reconciliation of our insatiable animalistic drives for pleasure, security, meaning, and immortality. Thus, humans go about groping, searching, and striving for that blissful state. However, the pursuit of reconciliation often leads to disquietude of the soul and net pain. Epicurus (trans. 1993, p. 71) writes, "natural wealth is limited and easily obtained; the riches of idle fancies go on forever." Thus, any attempt to reconcile the existential paradox in any of its aspects can be categorized as a vain desire since it is irreconcilable. Accordingly, Epicurus (trans. 1993 p. 72) instructs that,

> He who understands the limits of life knows how easy it is to remove the pain that results from want and to make one's whole life complete. As a result, he does not need actions that bring strife in their wake

More specifically, it is vain to seek tranquility by striving for increasing amounts of security, power, meaning, or pleasure. In fact, Epicurus (trans. 1993, p. 85) continues,

> The possession of the greatest riches does not resolve the agitation of the soul or give birth to remarkable joy--nor does honour and admiration of the crowd, nor any other of those things arising from unlimited desires.

On the other hand, the desires that are necessary for the maintenance of life are natural and correspond with Fromm's (1976, pp. 72-73) notion of *existential having*. Fromm claims that "human existence requires that we have, keep, take care of, and use certain things to survive. This hold true for our bodies, for food, shelter, clothing, and for the tools necessary to procure our needs."

Likewise, according to Epicurus (trans. 1993), if humans were able be content with the bare essentials of life, those things necessary for life, then we would rival Zeus in happiness. However, the human drive for tranquility does require the cultivation of some power and adherence to some sort of meaning system just as there are basic necessities for physical survival.

This logic of what is enough for bare essentials of physical being can also be applied to the other aspects of the will to tranquility such as power and meaning. While it may be ideal to be content with the bare essentials of meaning and power, Epicurus (trans. 1993) suggests the pursuit of more of these is a natural good as long as it does not lead to net pain for the individual or others.

5.7. Epicurean *Tetrapharmakos* and the Art of Living in Existential Paradox

5.7.1. Prudence and Practical Wisdom

According to Epicurus (trans. 1993) prudence is the practical wisdom employed in living a good life. He describes it as the "sober reasoning which examines the motives for every choice and avoidance, and that which drives away those opinions resulting in the greatest disturbance of the soul" (p. 66). Living prudently with existential paradox involves knowledge of the paradox of tranquility and which drives of the individual are vain, natural, and necessary. Erler and Schofield (1999) agree that,

> Our feelings and sensations tell us that pleasure is good and pain bad. But how do we know that the pleasure which we should accordingly seek as our goal in life is freedom from physical pain and mental disturbance? Epicurus does not appear to have claimed that that too was evident, disclosed immediately by the senses. What is required for proper understanding of the goal is thought: not proof, but reflection on the nature of desire: 'surely directed consideration' of our desires (p. 651).

In addition to the ability to distinguish between vain, natural, and necessary desires, practical wisdom in this context would also involve specific methods of cultivating the tranquility of the soul in paradox. To achieve this, Epicureans follow a four-part remedy

that can be applied to living in existential paradox under the will to tranquility (Erler & Schofield, 1999).

5.7.2. Fear of the Gods

The first four of Epicurus' Principal Doctrines, known as the *Tetrapharmakos* (four-part remedy), provide a basic guideline for living a good or tranquil life. The first of these principles can be summarized as *do not fear the gods*. Epicurus (trans. 1993) writes, "the blessed and immortal is itself free from trouble nor does it cause trouble for anyone else; therefore it is not constrained either by anger or by favour. For such sentiments exist only in the weak" (p. 69).

Fear or favour of the gods interpreted existentially would be metaphysical assumptions that lead to anxiety or limit freedom. For example, some individuals may feel powerless to control their lives stemming from a belief about fate or destiny. Yalom (1980) suggests that while individuals may delegate their freedom to a vast array of portents, such as the *I Ching,* to avoid short term existential pain, in the long term this may lead to the inability live prudently. Thus, this may lead to short term pleasure of not having to decide, but long-term pain. Similarly, as Camus (2000/1942, p. 8) points out, humans may not be wise to hold out hope for another world one must 'deserve' or for some great idea that will transcend this one.

Alternatively, since Becker (1997/1973) concludes that all cultures and societies are religious in nature, those limiting beliefs inculcated by one's culture may also be considered arbitrary. Therefore, if these beliefs result in disquietude of the soul, their inclusion in one's core beliefs and worldview should be examined.

Similarly, Fatic (2013) interprets *fear of the gods* as an over consciousness and adherence to societal standards that may be detrimental. That is, Fatic suggests that it is not so much liberation from the fear of the god, but rather liberation from the fear reproach by peers and society that is necessary for tranquility. Thus, awareness of what makes up one's worldview and to what social norms one adheres, becomes a key component of living in existential paradox.

5.7.3. Death Acceptance

Perhaps more than any other point of integration, existential theorists and the Epicureans would likely agree regarding the necessity of death acceptance. In both philosophies the fear of death is the phenomenon that is most troubling and anxiety provoking to humans. Epicurus (trans. 1993) wrote that the "majority sometimes flee from death as the greatest of evils" (p. 63) Similarly, Becker (1997/1973) argues that,

> The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is the mainspring of human activity--activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny of man (p. xvii).

While Epicurus (trans. 1993) would certainly agree that the idea of death might cause great anxiety, he also believes that "death is nothing to us. For what has been dispersed has no sensation. And what has not sensation is nothing to us" (p. 72). In this way it is not death itself, but the cessation of pleasures that is most troubling to humans. Therefore, it is the infinitizing aspect of our condition that leads to the inevitable desire for the experience of perpetual tranquility. However, Epicurus (trans. 1993) ensures that,

> Unlimited time and limited time contain equal pleasure, if one measures its limits by reasoning...the flesh considers the limits of pleasure to be boundless and only infinite time makes it possible. But the mind having gained a reasonable understanding of the end and limit of flesh and having expelled fears about eternity, furnishes the complete life and we no longer have any need for time without end (p. 72).

Likewise, Yalom (2008) concludes that while ridding one's self entirely of the anxiety of death is impossible, the contemplation of one's finitude and cultivation of allaying this fear through psychotherapeutic exercises leads to a more fulfilling life. Therefore, it seems that allaying the fear of death constitutes a necessary element of living in existential paradox.

5.7.4. Cultivation of Katastematic Pleasure

While the first two principles of the *tetrapharmakos* focus on freeing the mind of the two phenomena likely to cause the most disquietude, the latter two outline the basic

knowledge regarding pleasure and pain deemed necessary for living a happy life. Epicurus (trans. 1993) wrote that "the limit of extent of pleasure is the removal of all pain. Wherever pleasure is present, for however long a time, there can be no pain or grief, or both at once" (p. 69). The removal of all pain is the *katastematic* pleasure described previously and the goal of any living being. According to Epicurus (trans. 1993), natural wealth, that is, the necessities of life are easily obtained, but the riches of idle fancies go on forever. That is, idle fancies or vain pleasures are insatiable. Likewise, such idle fancies are those that attempt to reconcile any aspect of the existential paradox driven by the will to tranquility. The solution in Epicurean philosophy is to live simply. Epicurus concludes that "when measured by the natural purpose of life, poverty is great wealth and great wealth poverty" (p. 79). Also, throughout much of Epicurean ethics, self-sufficiency is espoused as a bulwark against the disquietude of needing much to be satisfied (Cooper, 2012; Erler & Schofield, 1999). Under the will to tranquility, this would not only include pleasure, but also the need for power and meaning since the removal of all pain requires the feeling of security as well as the symbolic action system in which to move. Therefore, the cultivation of security and power in any situation and being loosely attached to our system of meaning would provide the tranquility of the soul that is the telos of all beings. Antonymously, intense and pervasive desires for power or certainty of meaning are vain and will lead to disquietude of the soul.

5.7.5. The Endurance of Pain

The last of the four-part remedy instructs on the endurance of pain. Epicurus (trans. 1993) argues,

> Pain does not dwell continually in the flesh. Extreme pain is present but a very brief time and that which barely exceeds bodily pleasure continues no more than a few days. But chronic illness allows greater pleasure than pain in the flesh (p. 69).

Epicurean philosophy holds some endurance of pain is necessary to cultivate katastematic pleasure. Epicurus (trans. 1993) instructs that

We regard many pains as better than pleasure, since a greater pleasure will attend us after we have endured pain for a long time. Every pleasure therefore because of its natural relationship to us is good, but not every pleasure is to be chosen. Likewise, every pain is an evil, but not every pain is of a nature always to be avoided (p. 69).

Those pains that aid in living lucidly and tranquilly in existential paradox are pains that should be endured. For example, the contemplation and acceptance of one's finitude is inevitably painful, but necessary for living zestfully (Becker, 1997/1973). Additionally, limiting one's need for power, pleasure, and certain meaning are also potentially painful endeavours, but necessary for cultivating tranquility.

5.8. Dereflection and the Paradox of Movement

Perhaps what ties all these methods of living in existential paradox together is the paradoxical nature of movement. While the Epicureans never explicitly write about movement and activity, kinesthetic and katastematic pleasure imply psychophysical movement and a lack of movement respectively. Cooper (2012) describes katastematic pleasure as being in a state of repose when one is just observing being. However, while humans can imagine and even attempt to cultivate a complete tensionless and motionless state of tranquility, this state is unachievable. Accordingly, because all phenomena seem to need to be engaged in some sort of psychophysical movement, humans must be engaged in something and seem to be able to tolerate neither complete inactivity, nor the frenetic action taken in attempting to resolve the existential paradox (Fromm, 1976; Svendsen, 2005). Epicurus (trans. 1993) agrees that "the leisure time of most men numbs them; activity drives them mad" (p. 77).

Therefore, living in existential paradox and cultivating the tranquility of the soul might necessitate that humans engage in tranquil movement not aimed at resolving any aspect of existential paradox. Thus, the cultivation of katastematic pleasure might require reigning in the need for perpetual movement while accepting that some movement is necessary. At the same time, given the frenetic pace of modern life, this would likely involve building the capacity to be comfortable with far less engagement excitement, and material possessions (Russell, 2015/1930; Svendsen, 2005).

Accordingly, the last aspect of living in existential paradox is discerning what kind of movement to engage in and when to engage in it. Here too, the Epicureans offer council. Besides the cultivation of katastematic pleasure and procuration of the basic necessities of life, Epicurean philosophy also advises a life dedicated to the classic ancient Greek virtues of practical wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance. However, unlike other Hellenistic schools, these virtues are not pursued as an end in themselves, but for the sake of katastematic pleasure for all (Cooper, 2012). The goal of these Epicurean virtues is to work toward katastematic pleasures for others in order to cultivate katastematic pleasure for one's self. In fact, Epicurus (trans. 1993) further implies this altruistic egoism when he reports that, "the wise man suffers no more pain by being tortured himself than by seeing a friend being tortured" (p. 82). Thus, the dedication to katastematic pleasure for others offers one possibility for tranquil movement and is like the existential therapeutic notion of dereflection.

For Frankl (2007) dereflection is the idea that happiness cannot be pursued; it can only ensue via diverting one's focus from themselves to others. However, this shift is not necessarily self-sacrificing. Instead one may be most able to help others achieve tranquility of the soul by pursuing their own interests, passions, and subjectivity as long as one keeps in mind the idea of tranquility for all (Campbell, 2004; Marcel, 1960). Thus, while the tranquility of the soul may still the ultimate drive in humans, it may be best achieved not only through focusing on the cultivation of one's own tranquility, but also promoting tranquility for others. Thus, the psychological kinesthetic pleasures a person enjoys may be used as a guide for how to best promote well being for the self and for others.

5.9. Summary and Conclusion

The intention of this paper was to establish an art of living in existential paradox based on the synthesis of existential and Epicurean philosophy. This synthesis is predicated on the idea that existential paradox is founded upon the will to tranquility rather than on the will to meaning as it is most often conceptualized in existential theory. However, rather than eschewing the different drives that are often theorized as propelling

human behaviour, I argued that the will to tranquility is inclusive of the common psychological drives in therapy (i.e., the will to power, will to meaning, and will to pleasure) but that the ultimate telos of these drives is the tranquility of the soul which is the fundamental tenet of Epicurean ethics. Thus, I explained how the will to power and the will to meaning are actually aspects of the will to tranquility. As such, I proposed that Epicurean ethics understood existentially and expanded to the will to power and meaning provides a useful template for living in existential paradox without engaging in personally or collectively destructive behaviours

5.10. References

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Chapter 6.

The Aesthetics of Paradox: Narrative Means to Sublime Ends

Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burden of the mystery
In which the heavy and weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened (Woodsworth, 1904).

To recognize life's paradoxes is to perceive its awe (Schneider 2004, p. 60).

Writing transforms the things seen or heard 'into tissue and blood' (Foucault, 1997, p. 213).

6.1. Abstract

Existential paradox, characterized by our unrequited desire for the fullness of life, has been one of the main topics of inquiry for existential theorists over the past two centuries. During this time, many of these thinkers have argued that not only is existential paradox a primary motivator of human behaviour, but also that human attempts to reconcile this paradox may result in individual, societal, and even planetary suffering. Hence, several "arts of living" with this paradox have been devised; however, because we now live in liquid times that may exacerbate our drive for reconciliation, I contend that we need to revisit ways of living with this paradox. As such, this paper explores how changing our view and experience of existential paradox may be a key component in a new art of living. To accomplish this, I explore the idea that because experiences of awe and the sublime are aesthetic experiences that seem to be catalyzed by existential paradox, they may provide a means of adapting to it. That is, if we view existential paradox as a means to aesthetic experiences that provide pleasure and tranquility, rather than suffering, then we may be more likely live within its tension. While an undeniably challenging endeavour, I propose that experiencing and creating of these aesthetic experiences

through narrative may offers ways forward. With this in mind, I propose combining aesthetics of paradox with narrative exposure therapy to gradually increase tolerance of, occurrence of, and sensibility to existential paradox. In turn, this may be invaluable for the art of living with existential paradox in liquid times.

6.2. Introduction

One of the main goals of existential philosophy over the past two centuries has been aimed at figuring out how to flourish as *beings-in-the-world*. Drawing largely from the works of Kierkegaard, Fromm, Camus, Tillich, May, Becker, Yalom, and Schneider, I suggest that this *being* is characterized by existential paradox. According to Kierkegaard, (2004/1849) existential paradox is the juxtaposition of the awareness of our finite nature with our ability to imagine infinite possibilities. Meanwhile, Becker (1997/1973) claims that the ability to imagine complete satiation of our instinctual drives without having such an ability, leads to an endless striving for reconciliation. Similarly, the authors above argue that our attempts to reconcile and deny this paradox may lead to destructive behaviours. For example, Camus (1991/1951) argues in *The Rebel* that the need for an absolute meaning system (a form of reconciling existential paradox) leads to the proclivity for revolution, which he describes as the annihilation of meaning systems that conflict with one's own. Similarly, Becker (1975, 1997/1973) observes that extreme reactions to this paradox may result in all sorts of mental illnesses.

Meanwhile, if we consider Bauman's conception of society, we find ourselves *in-the-world* of liquid modernity. Liquid modernity is characterized by the instability of meanings, categories, and frames of reference that once provided a sense of certainty and coherence. Instead, knowledge is always in flux and open ended. At the same time, Bauman (2015) claims that with the advent of globalization, individualism, and consumerism, we are seduced by an excess of meaning systems and offerings, each vying for our attention and promising relief from the search for certainty. As a result, there is a need to be quick and agile in a race to consume as many offerings as possible in our search for stability.

Thus, I posit that *being-in-the-world* is characterized by existential paradox in liquid times. Unfortunately, our drive to reconcile existential paradox may be exacerbated by liquid modernity. The excess of offerings combined with the instability of meaning systems results in an "existential vertigo" that sends us scurrying for reconciliation faster than ever before. If this is the case, then the behavioural consequences theorized by

Becker and Camus may be more severe than their original estimations. For this reason, there is a need to discover an art of living with existential paradox in liquid times.

Schneider (2004, 2009) argues that one way to remain at the dizzying crest of this absurd situation without reconciliation is to lean into existential paradox itself to rediscover awe, the sublime, and the mystical in our lives. Schneider advocates for this because even though these aesthetic experiences seem to be catalyzed by the same existential paradox that is problematic in other contexts, they are also characterized by tranquility, beauty, and pleasure (Carson, 2006; Kant, 2010/1790; Burke, 2014/1757). Thus, they represent a 'unique outcome[2]' of existential paradox. Accordingly, Schneider (2009) instructs us to "mine the terrors and wonders, uncertainties and majesties" of existential paradox to experience awe (p. 4). These experiences may lead to a change in our understanding and view of existential paradox that may allow us to live with it without attempts at reconciliation. However, because mining the existential realities of life often leads to dread and anxiety, a therapeutic approach of leaning into paradox may be warranted (Yalom, 1980).

One of the most effective interventions in counselling therapy is changing a person's view and thereby experience of a problematic and intractable phenomenon in her or his life (Archer & McCarthy, 2007; Bertolino & O'Hanlon, 2002; White & Epston, 1990). In cognitive and narrative therapy, this is achieved through a combination of rational reframing of the problematic phenomenon, exposure to it with the new attitude, and a *restorying[3]* of its influence. With this in mind, I suggest that changing our view and experience of existential paradox via narrative exposure therapy from one of dread to one of the paradox as a potential catalyst for sublime and aesthetic experiences, could be an invaluable contribution for an art of living in existential paradox. As such, this paper explores the process of leaning into the aesthetics of existential paradox as a means of increasing the likelihood of experiencing awe.

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[2] A unique outcome is a term in narrative therapy describing positive and unexpected outcome of an event that does not fit into the problematic narrative that runs an individual's life (White & Epston, 1990).

[3] Restorying is a therapeutic intervention in narrative therapy wherein an individual purposely reframes some aspect of their experience in preferred ways (White & Epston, 1990).

The first section will explore the behavioural consequences of existential paradox in liquid times to frame the importance of the present task. The second section will explore philosophical discourse on the paradoxical nature of awe and sublime experiences to provide a rational basis for reframing existential paradox as an integral part of sublime experiences. In addition, this section will contribute to the development of an aesthetic sensibility to existential paradox that leads to awe. This step is important because James, (1994, p. 414), Carson (2006), and Schneider (2009) suggest that we can foster an aesthetic sensibility to paradox that may "tune our ears" to these phenomena in our everyday experience and make the experience of them more likely. Once we begin to develop an aesthetic sensitivity to the paradoxical phenomena that led to sublime experiences (and hopefully begin to experience them), the last section outlines potential narrative techniques that could be employed not only to continue to develop a sensitivity for and constructive view of existential paradox, but also to turn existential paradox into our "tissue and blood[4]."

6.3. Existential Paradox in Liquid Times

6.3.1. The Existential Paradox of Tranquility

Existential paradox arises from human self-reflexivity that leads to our ability to imagine infinite possibilities for our lives and world, but also to the knowledge that we are finite and limited beings (Becker, 1997/1973; Kierkegaard, 2004/1849; Yalom, 1980). Consequently, there is always a gap between our reality and what we can imagine. While we can imagine any number of things, I hypothesize that much of our *infinitizing* [5] is focused on the complete satiation of instinctual desires. While there is no agreement across psychotherapeutic theory or philosophy regarding a single or dominant drive, the most common are the Epicurean and Freudian *will to pleasure*, Nietzschean and Adlerian *will to power,* and Frankl's *will to meaning.* Thus, I contend we are driven by the possibility of the perfect satiation of these drives. However, drawing from an earlier

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[4] Foucault (1997) argues that writing is an important technology of self that can be used to resist being influenced by dominant norms in society.

[5] This is Kierkegaard's (2004/1849) term for our ability to imagine infinite possibilities.

manuscript in this dissertation, I propose that all of these drives are aimed at reaching a state of psychophysical quietude that I have termed the *will to tranquility.* This term is inspired by Epicurean *katastematic* pleasure, which is a state of psychophysical tranquility (Yahalom, 2014).

The *paradox of tranquility* arises first from our ability to imagine a state of perfect tranquility without ever being able to reach it and second, from the fact that our striving to achieve this tranquility via satiation of the drives often results in psychophysical and societal disturbance rather than tranquility. In other words, while a certain amount of these drives is certainly required, our appetite for them is insatiable. Instead of attempting to satiate these drives, we must realize that at a certain point, the pursuit of them causes more pain than tranquility—hence the paradox of tranquility.

One 'solution' to this situation that was presented in chapter 5 is the promotion of awareness (and acceptance) of this situation coupled with Epicurean philosophy that would provide a way of life wherein one lives with the paradox and cultivates the bare necessities of meaning, power, and pleasure. However, this rational approach requires significant psychophysical discipline and likely the alteration of individuals core beliefs and habits. Moreover, I contend this task has become more difficult with the advent of liquid modernity that has 'stoked the fires' of the will to tranquility resulting in the increased speed and intensity of our drive for reconciliation and satiation. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to explore means of changing one's core beliefs about existential paradox though the promotion of aesthetic experiences of this paradox.

6.3.2. Liquid Modernity

Since Bauman is one of the leading sociological interpreters of our time, exploring the interaction of the paradox of tranquility and liquid modernity may further elucidate our current predicament (Palese, 2013). Thus, this section explores the potential consequences of the paradox of tranquility in liquid times since one's cultural context inevitably affects their way of being in the world.

Liquid modernity is a metaphorical concept used to describe the contemporary state of cultures in developed and capitalistic societies with the onset and continuation of globalization. While there is no formal definition for this term, there is a set of characteristics (Bauman, 2015). The first is *epistemological liquefaction*[6] wherein knowledge that was once seen as a faithful representation of the world is consistently either changing or challenged. Consequently, rather then settled meanings, categories, and frames of reference, knowledge is always in flux and open ended (Green & Gary, 2016). Thus, Bauman (2005, p. 303) explains that society is being transformed from the 'solid' to 'liquid' phase of modernity as all social forms melt faster than new ones can be cast. These forms are not given enough time to solidify and cannot serve as a frame of reference for human actions. In other words, the meaning systems that once guided individuals in their life choices are increasingly seen as 'offerings' rather than absolutes or norms (Bauman, 2009). Thus, a fundamental characteristic of liquid times is the edification of individual freedom of choice in an excess of offerings.

6.3.3. The Paradox of Tranquility in Liquid Times

The instability of any one meaning system in an excess of possibilities may intensify one of the fundamental aspects of the paradox of tranquility. Specifically, liquid modernity may complicate, obfuscate, and intensify the will to meaning by eroding the certainty of meaning systems on which individuals rely as a symbolic action system towards tranquility (Becker, 1997/1973). Besides lack of absolute meanings and norms, liquid modernity is fecund with many possible meanings or meaning offerings that tempt, seduce, and entice the individual. As a consequence, individuals may no longer move within meaning systems and identities, but between them, like tourists (Silverberg, 2013).

Meanwhile, it may no longer be a personal meaning or system that guides our actions, but rather, which offerings offer the surest way to tranquility. Inevitably, this leads to the need for some to "try out" different meanings as fast as we can, lest we run

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[6] This is a term derived from Bauman's (2015) work that asserts that knowledge is always in flux, like liquid. It is also meant to be metaphorical, implying the precariousness of wherever one happens to be standing.

out of time before discovering the perfect one. Thus, the knowledge of our finitude makes finding the right path a matter of urgency. Alternatively, due to the presence of so many offerings, individuals may feel threatened and go to extreme measures to protect the certainty of their own meaning systems. This is one of the main tenets of *terror management theory* wherein individuals and societies protect their meaning systems from perceived outside threats via extreme measures (Solomon, 2011).

Consequently, for the individual in liquid times, the anxiety of existential freedom, guilt, and death may become debilitating and paralyzing. That is, in our attempt to find perfect tranquility and security in liquid times, we may instead be filled with anxiety and dread. In this way, the paradox is exacerbated.

This freedom of choice in an excess of offerings leads Bauman (2009) to conclude:

> this society of ours is a society of consumers, and just as the rest of the world as-seen-and-lived by consumers, culture turns into a warehouse of meant-for-consumption products – each vying for the shifting/drifting attention of prospective consumers in the hope to attract it and hold it for a bit longer than a fleeting moment (p. 157).

Thus, unlike the solid culture of what Bauman calls the nation-building era, there are no people or ideals to cultivate, but rather clients to be seduced.

According to Epicurean philosophers and Freud, humans are driven to seek the increase of pleasure and decrease of pain (Epicurus, trans. 1993; Freud, 2011/1920). While not all pleasures are consumptive in nature, they do seem to be the quickest and easiest route to immediate yet temporary satisfaction. Thus, the seduction and excess of offerings available for consumption intensifies the will to pleasure and makes it difficult to reign in one's drives. However, because the will to pleasure can never be satisfied, we may jump from offering to offering in a continuous search for satiation.

In this vein, Bauman (2005) uses the hunter as a metaphor for individual behaviour in liquid times. Bauman suggests that we are like game hunters whose sole

task is to continuously pursue "kills" and "fill our game bags to capacity" with offerings (p. 306). Bauman continues that,

> Hunting is a fulltime task: it consumes a lot of attention and energy; it leaves time for little else; and so it averts attention from the infinite task and postpones *ad calendas graecas* the moment of reflection in which the sheer impossibility of the task at hand needs to be faced point blank (p. 310).

However, the pursuit of prey or offerings turns into a compulsion and each successive hunt and kill makes the hunter obsessed with the hunt itself. Accordingly, Bauman (2009) writes that liquid modernity is not only characterized by the accumulation of offerings, but also by the quickening pace of their disposal because of the rapid dissipation of their seductive power. Thus, the individual in liquid times is led by the drive for ever-increasing seductive offerings that are being produced faster than they can be consumed. Bauman (2005) writes,

> the hopes that accompanied the pursuit seem in retrospect to have been the most delightful (the only really satisfactory) gain of the affair." As such, speed, movement, and being "light on one's feet" are viewed as the most efficient ways to live with satisfaction in liquid times. Moreover, in liquid times where "salvation seekers are advised to move quickly enough not to risk over testing any spot's endurance learn that…walking is better than sitting, running is better than walking and surfing is better yet than running (p. 310).

In addition to intensifying the will to meaning and pleasure, Bauman (2005) argues that liquid modernity is characterized by a state of instability and insecurity that may intensify the will to power. Bauman argues that the breakdown of social safeguards results in the sole responsibility for life circumstances falling on the shoulders of the individual. He adds that this leads to the breakdown of relatively stable and solid societies and requires individuals to ceaselessly keep up with the pace of change and reorient themselves to short-term plans and projects. Bauman describes this kind of life as nomadic since individuals need to be on the move to find the power and security they seek. This insecurity undermines the individual's will to power and again sets them off on a race against time to find security as fast as they can.

This synthesis of existential paradox and liquid modernity would seem to place the modern individual in a potentially precarious and volatile situation that could lead to an intensification of our need to reconcile the paradox. That is, liquid times are so fecund with offerings and temptations to reconcile existential paradox that individuals may become fulltime "hunters" of reconciliation. Thus, perhaps more than ever there is a need for an art of living with existential paradox in liquid times.

6.4. The Nature of Awe, Sublime, and Mystical Experiences

Up to this point of the exploration, I have largely cast existential paradox in a negative light. Ironically, however, Schneider (2004, 2009) argues that one method of living lucidly with existential paradox without attempting to reconcile it may be to purposefully lean into it. This is because "mining the terrors and wonders" of existential paradox seems to lead to aesthetic experiences of awe that result in tranquility (Carson, 2006). In this way, we may come to associate paradox with and view it as an aesthetic experience that leads to this quietude. Additionally, the knowledge gained through awe may transfer to everyday experience making it easier to live with existential paradox. While experiences of awe often occur spontaneously, and no certain formula exists to increase the likelihood of their occurrence, I will explore one possible method of instigating the experiences. The first step in this process is to examine philosophical discourse on the paradoxical nature of awe to provide basis for understanding.

6.4.1. Linguistic Considerations

The irony of attempting to define and categorize what is by its nature ineffable seems like an absurd task. Therefore, Wittgenstein concluded that exploring abstract aspects of the human experience, to a large extent, lies outside the realm of ordinary factual and descriptive language (Matlack, 2017). Katz (1978) agrees that the language used to describe what he calls mystical experiences is often mired in layers of culturally bound contexts making it difficult to discern if these words (awe, the sublime, mystical experiences, wonder, mystery, the God beyond God) are seeking to describe the same

phenomenon. However, while Wittgenstein (2001) laments that pinning down the truth of abstract concepts or words such as these is likely impossible, he suggests that we should not be concerned with absolute truth or the synthesis of such concepts, and instead concern ourselves with *family resemblances*[7] so that we can engage in philosophical inquiry. Thus, because these words seem to bare a *family resemblance* to each other and fixed meanings are often necessary in social discourse, I will use the aforementioned words interchangeably throughout this exploration (Green & Gary, 2016). While I will use various authors' words when directly referring to their work, I will use awe or the sublime otherwise. Additionally, while the language of the philosophical discourse on experiences of awe often seems to imply the possibility of total tranquility, it may be important to note that these experiences are only temporary. Also, the purpose of instigating these experiences in this exploration is to change a person's view of existential paradox through awe rather than reconciliation. Thus, while individuals may feel moments of tranquility though awe, these experiences do not reconcile existential paradox.

6.4.2. Philosophical Discourse

In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* Burke (2014/1757) writes, "terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime" (p.84). Thus, according to Burke, the sublime is the possibility of pain and annihilation without the immediate danger of it. He writes,

> The passions which belong to self-preservation, turn on pain and danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances; this delight I have not called pleasure, because it turns on pain, and because it is different enough from any idea of positive pleasure. Whatever excites this delight, I call the *sublime* (p. 84).

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[7] Family resemblance is the idea that concepts that may be connected by one essential common feature may in fact be connected by a series of overlapping similarities depending on the context (Wittgenstein, 2001).

In addition to terror, Burke argues the sublime includes features such as obscurity, power, privation, vastness, infinity, succession and uniformity, and magnificence.

Kant (2010/1790) also discusses the sublime in *The Critique of Pure Judgment.* He divides Burke's sublime into the mathematical, which encompasses magnitude, vastness in size, or the seeming limitlessness or infinitude in number; and the dynamic, which includes the objects conducive to terror at our helplessness as long as the terror is rendered pleasurable by the safe situation of the observer. Kant writes,

> The feeling of the sublime is, therefore, at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgment of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense (p. 501).

Thus, the sublime is a feeling that combines the frustration of knowing the object considered is too limitless to be understood and the pleasure that the mind is aware of this inability (Carson, 2006). For example, Kant's (2010/1790) sublime is often associated with nature such as the "broad ocean agitated by storms, shapeless mountain masses, towering one above the other in wild disorder, with . . . pyramids of ice, the Milky Way . . . and the immeasurable host of such systems known as nebulae" (p. 501).

Alternatively, Longinus (trans. 2006) defines the sublime as the form and content of great writing and speaking that has a certain superiority and pre-eminence in discourse. Its features include loftiness, dignity, grandeur, and eloquence. However, its most essential characteristic is its ability to transport the reader and hearer to the plane of great thoughts and passions. According to Carson (2006), for Longinus, the sublime is epitomized in speeches by orators such as Cicero, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King, and John F. Kennedy. More specifically, Longinus' sublime arises from several sources: boldness and grandeur in thoughts, the power to raise the passions to a violent and even enthusiastic degree, skilful application of figures of sentiment, and language with noble and graceful manner of expression.

Schneider (2009) claims that the power of these experiences is in the paradox that he explains as "terror yet wonder, uncertainties yet majesties" that are our fundamental

connection to mystery, vastness, and amazement. Ironically these paradoxical experiences of self-annihilation seem to result in a sense of wholeness and unity. Idel (1988) concludes that a sense of emptiness, vacuum, void or *no-self* corresponds with the experience of 'oneness." Similarly, Zigler (1999) explains that in these experiences individuals often have a tacit understanding of a broader and more inclusive pattern of meaning and harmony that is ineffable and lacking when we submerge ourselves in the details of life. During a mystical experience one feels a sense of the oneness of everything and one's typical dualistic stance toward the world diminishes into a sense of unification (Ataria, 2014). According to Stace (1960), the fact that mystical experiences "involve the apprehension of an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things, a oneness which neither the senses nor the reason can penetrate," is the most significant and unique distinguishing characteristic of this kind of experience (p. 14).

Similarly, James, (1994) in *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* explores the nature of mystical experiences and concludes that humans can access an unseen and ineffable order. He concludes:

> It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a presence of what we may call something there, more deep and more general than any of the special or particular senses by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed (p. 67).

He continues that the experience of this unseen order may result in "the loss of all worry, the sense that all is ultimately well with one, the peace, the harmony, the willingness to be, even though the outer conditions remain the same" (p. 272).

Several others also cite this quietude of the soul. Cochrane (2012) argues that while the ontology of the emotional experience remains a mystery, the sublime are aesthetic experiences of attraction, admiration, and pleasure. Moreover, Budd (2009) asserts that sublime experiences result in an individual forgetting their petty struggles. Similarly, Kant (2010/1790) argues that the sublime may summon "our power…to regard as small those things of which we are inclined to be solicitous" such as worldly goods, health, and life (p.501). Zuckert (as cited in Cochrane, 2012, p. 138) claims "the emotion

with which one feels oneself to be smaller than the sublime is not the gnawing of envy but a heavenly breeze that lifts us up and strengthens us." Likewise, Koestler (1954) describes his own sublime experience as a "process of dissolution and limitless expansion which is sensed as the 'oceanic' feeling, as the draining of all tension, the absolute catharsis, the peace that passeth all understanding" (p. 352).

Thus, the most salient and common feature of experiences of awe seems to be a sense of terror, annihilation, *no self*, insignificance, transport, ineffability, transcendence, and even nothingness in response to an 'object' of perception that is perceived as vast, powerful, sweeping, inconceivable, or infinite. However, instead of causing anxiety, these experiences may simultaneously result in feelings of oneness, connectedness, transcendence, peace, tranquility, and pleasure (Ataria, 2014).

What is important for the present task is that in addition to being experiences of peace and tranquility, awe also seems to have a noetic quality. According to James (1994) they are "states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance of importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule carry with them a curious sense of authority afterwards" (p. 414). That is, a person may be forever changed by these experiences. For example, after experiencing a sense one "oneness" he or she may continue to have this sense even after the experience is over.

For most individuals, the experiences of paradox might be terrifying, but instead they often result in "a peace that passes all understanding" (Koestler 1954, p. 352). This begs the question of whether the tacit knowledge that results in this peace can be brought back to our everyday experience. That is, can the knowledge that "the power is in the paradox" be integrated into everyday experience?

6.5. Tranquility and Awe in Liquid Times

What is paradoxical about experiences of awe is that they may result in feelings of peace, tranquility, and pleasure despite rendering the drives we think will lead to satisfaction completely impotent and irrelevant (Carson, 2006).

Specifically, with the paradox of tranquility in mind, these experiences seem to make our insignificance and powerlessness stand out in sharp relief against the vastness of sublime objects such as oceans, volcanoes, grand vistas, the vast expanse of space, unfathomable mystery, the God beyond God, and even the grand sweep of history. As a result, the drive to gain more power and security via the will to power in the face of these phenomena seems to be rendered impotent and dormant.

Similarly, sublime experiences also seem to belie our fundamental desire to have certain and absolute meaning. Because these experiences of awe are largely ineffable, they defy the fixed and certain meanings that make up the will to meaning. While there is a sense that meaning exists, it is indefinable, ineffable, and perpetually out of our reach. However, these seem to be the very factors that make these experiences sublime (James, 1994). Finally, the fact that experiences of awe are wrought by the potential for pain and suffering, yet result in pleasure and tranquility, belies the will to pleasure. While the ontology of this phenomenon may be unknowable in a rational sense, the tacit and noetic qualities seem to provide knowledge that may transfer to 'regular' experiences.

In my own words, this knowledge seems to force us into a place of psychophysical quietude: a place where we completely let go of our drives, a place where our egos are held in abeyance, where the crying wolves of our instincts are hushed. These experiences seem to be a powerful reminder that trying to satiate our instinctual desires is not the royal road to tranquility like many of us seem to believe.

Recalling that liquid modernity may intensify the drives that constitute the will to tranquility, experiences of awe wrought by leaning into paradox seem to offer an antidote, especially if our sensitivity to and experiences of awe increase. Thus, not only might these experiences acclimatize us to existential paradox as an aesthetic phenomenon, they may also produce the feelings of tranquility that we seek and carry with them tacit and noetic qualities that carry over to 'regular' life. However, because directly confronting the existential realities of life may lead to anxiety, dread, depression, and several mental health concerns, I suggest easing into paradox through narrative exposure (Yalom, 1980).

6.6. Narrative Means to Sublime Ends

Since experiences of awe seem to lead to peace and tranquility, it may be prudent to increase their occurrence and our sensibility to them. In doing this we may become more comfortable with the existential paradox that leads to them. However, the epistemological issue is that "vague impressions of something indefinable are largely contrary to methods of inquiry commonly used in the rationalistic system that is dominant in our world today" (James, 1994, p. 84). Thus, mystical and sublime experiences are looked upon (with few exceptions) by the dominant scientific and rational disciplines as being nothing more than superstition from a bygone age and not worth attention. Consequently, those individuals who have these experiences may rationalize them away, rather than integrate them into their narrative. On the other hand, if we are able to privilege and develop these epistemologically alternative experiences, then we may be able to amplify them and their effects.

While James (1994) admits that humans are largely powerless to catalyze these experiences, there are certain practices such as yoga and meditation in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism that are often employed not only to increase practitioners' sensitivity to them, but also the likelihood of their occurrence. Thus, to accommodate this task of "thickening[8]" these experiences in our lives while at the same time developing our sensitivity to them, I suggest narrative therapeutic reading and writing as one of the practices.

6.6.1. Narrative Exposure

Narrative therapy holds that our lives, identities, and realities are largely socially constructed through language and narratives that we internalize and participate in (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). Understandings of self and our world are mitigated through language and we ascribe meaning to our experience and constitute our lives and

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[8] This is a term in narrative therapy referring to expanding the influence of a phenomenon in our lives (White & Epston, 1990).

relationships through language (White & Epston, 1990). Thus, according to these authors, changing a person's view of a problem should also occur through narrative.

Dominant discourse, that is, the narratives that seem to hold weight and power in our world, problematic or otherwise, form the basis of our identity and experience (White & Epston, 1990). However, according to narrative theorists, these dominant narratives that seem to run our lives are only one of many possible interpretations of our lives and world. In fact, some narratives define reality in a significantly restrictive manner so that certain life options are unavailable to individuals (Richert, 2010). Accordingly, in addressing problems in our lives, narrative therapists advocate for developing alternative narratives that exist but may not be privileged.

Similarly, because narratives are crafted from only one possible interpretation of events based on selective editing, narrative counsellors see their task as helping individuals construct new narratives that encourage future growth and change (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). Thus, if our task is to construct a new view of existential paradox that allows us to live with it more readily, then perhaps reading, writing, and even creating aesthetic experiences of paradox is a way forward.

For narrative therapy to allow the thickening of paradox and awe in an individual's life, implementing a narrative exposure modality may be necessary. This is because exposure therapy assists in gradual acclimatization to a phenomenon that one fears by weakening previously learned associations between feared objects, activities, or situations and bad outcomes. Most often this is achieved through *in vivo* exposure, facing the real phenomenon, or *imaginal exposure,* which can take on many forms such as imagery or writing (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). In this way, gradually increasing an individual's exposure to existential paradox through narrative may aid in the process of changing her or his view and experience of it. For example, creating fictional narratives with paradoxical and sublime elements may eventually incline an individual to open up to existential paradox. In this way, an individual can gradually thicken and intensify narratives of paradox and awe in their lives.

6.6.2. Components of Sublime Narratives

One of the most common therapeutic tools in narrative therapy is the creation and reading of narrative documents. These documents are any form of writing that is used for therapeutic purposes (White & Epston, 1990). In this exploration, these narrative documents are any form of writing used to help change our view and experience of existential paradox.

An initial step in the process of creating these narrative documents is to become familiar with the philosophical and psychological discourse of awe since the most transformative experiences combine both rational and experiential knowledge. Therefore, the author of narrative documents can purposely include both philosophical discourse and their personal experiences. While it may seem like a contrivance to purposely include the features of sublime experiences in the narratives, Carson (2006) suggests that concept formation and utilization for interpreting our everyday experiences are necessary components in developing sensitivity to awe. He suggests that explicating the concept and components of the sublime allows the individual to reflect on and express the sublime in their everyday lives. Therefore, when creating or reading narrative documents, one should contemplate and apply the characteristics of the sublime explored previously.

While rational awareness of the benefits and characteristics of paradox that lead to awe seem to be a necessity, they must be accompanied by experiences that corroborate rational knowledge (Schlitz, Vieten, & Amorok, 2007). In this way, while not being first hand, the reading and writing of sublime narratives may provide the necessary experiential encounters. Bruner (1986) concludes:

> There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality…. a good story and a well formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used as a means for convincing another. Yet what they convince of is fundamentally different: arguments convince of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness. The one verifies by eventual appeal to procedures for establishing formal and empirical truth. The other establishes not truth, but verisimilitude (p. 11).

Furthermore, while awe can occur without any provocation, developing these narratives may also develop an individual's sensitivity to paradoxical phenomena and increase the likelihood of experiencing awe. In fact, Cochrane (2012) argues that we can actively enhance sublime experiences by engaging in imaginative interaction and recreation of the context. He contends that such imaginative projects actually seem to amplify the sublime. Thus, imagining and recreating sublime experiences in narrative documents may amplify the effects on our lives as well.

With the need for the rational, experiential, and imaginative documents, I propose a kind of narrative exposure therapy involving the accumulation of these various types of narrative documents. While there may be many ways to collect and organize these narrative documents, I propose that an ancient Greek method known as *hypomnemata* may be an ideal since they were specifically used to for self cultivation and transformation (Hardot & Davidon, 1995).

6.7. Tying It All Together: Hypomnemata

Foucault (1997) claims "writing transforms the things seen or heard 'into tissue and blood'" (p. 213). The form of writing that Foucault advocates as the most ideal *technology of the self* (specific actions designed to purposely cultivate one's self and identity) are as known as *hypomnemata.* Hypomnemata are one of many methods used by ancient Greeks and Romans as a form of philosophical exercise designed for reflection, self-cultivation, and self-creation (Hardot & Davidon, 1995). In the most basic sense, they were notebooks wherein one synthesizes what one has heard or read on a particular topic (Swonger, 2006).

Swonger claims that through writing the hypomnemata, the writer assimilates what has been learned, read, or experienced, not simply as an amalgamation of what has been learned, but as an integrated new whole. Thus, they are also meant as a book of 'digestion' that allows one to retain important information that can later be expanded on, reflected on, or revised without the information becoming scattered. In fact, what has been learned must not just be placed in a sort of memory cabinet, but deeply lodged in the

soul, "planted in it" so that they become part of the individual (Foucault, 1997). Foucault posits that in this way, the hypomnemata are a means of subjectivising[9] discourse and turning what has been seen or heard into "tissue and blood."

Similarly, Neilson (2014) describes the function of the hypomnemata quite poetically:

> The maxims within [hypomnemata] are internally inscribed on the soul and come to animate the person, flowing out from within and are applied creatively in various circumstances rather than functioning as external molds mechanically reproducing identical actions regardless of context (p. 191).

Finally, the hypomnemata are meant to be ongoing and cyclical. Their creator is not passive but continually incorporating the content of the hypomnemata into daily life, reflecting on its incorporation, and adding to its content. In fact, hypomnemata are meant to be read, reread, meditated upon, and revised in the continuous shaping of the self (Foucault, 1997).

The topic of hypomnemata is any phenomenon that a person may want to explore or investigate (Swonger, 2006). Similarly, Foucault (1997) writes that these notebooks centre on a specific issue, topic, or focus that one wants to explore and meditate upon. For example, he suggests that the quintessential topic of these notebooks is a particular aspect of human existence or human condition.

Thus, the hypomnemata seem like an ideal method for turning existential paradox into 'tissue and blood' since they can be used to incorporate the rational (philosophical discourse), experiential, and imaginative aspects of an inquiry into existential paradox and sublime. For example, one could investigate the paradoxical nature of an everyday experience that leads to the sublime. This could take the form of reflecting and meditating on the paradoxical and sublime aspects of a sunset, a tree that one sits under, or even one's place in history.

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[9] Subjectivising is Foucault's (1997) term for creating one's own identity via *technologies of self.*

In this way, the keeper of the hypomnemata who focuses on existential paradox and the sublime would collect discourses, experiences, and reflections from her or his daily life that would accumulate, compound, and aggregate, contributing to the thickening of existential paradox and awe in the narrative of their life.

While the philosophical discourse on awe was covered previously in this paper and is an essential and on-going component of the hypomnemata, the experiential imaginative can be addressed through more subjective narrative documents. In other words, once a person begins understanding of awe though philosophical sources, this should be augmented by more personal and creative readings and writings.

6.7.1. Aesthetics of Paradox: Narrative Documents in the Hypomnemata

In addition to the accumulation of philosophical ideas of the existential paradox and its connection to awe, the hypomnemata should also include more experiential, literary, and poetic narrative documents that help to thicken both the created and direct experiences of awe. While not all forms of narrative documents can be reviewed here, I will provide two examples. The first is a recounting of awe that I experienced in childhood that I have deliberately enhanced with the common characteristics of awe outlined previously.

The second is a passage from *Under Heaven*, a historical fantasy novel by Guy Gavriel Kay (2011) that I find particularly sublime and provides an example how literature can inspire awe though existential paradox. These two documents would only be the first step in an ongoing and hermeneutic process that would include reflections on the documents, updates, and revisions as well as continuous addition of new documents.

The following is what White and Epston (1990) call a *self story*, a remembering of an event in ones' life to thicken its influence in our present experience. Alternatively, it could be characterized as a *remembering conversation* that White (2007) describes as "a means of upgrading or reengaging with the status of a previous experience" (p. 129). The following is a sketch of a series of memories that occurred when I was a 10-year-old

lying awake in the middle of the night. This may have portended my obsession with paradox.

Picturing nothingness

If there were nothing, what would there be? Silence. If there were nothing, what would there be? …Well nothing but…. I squeeze my eyes shut as tightly as I can and try again. I see darkness now. But darkness is still something. Suddenly, frustrated, I see the planets in my mind. I try to make them disappear in my mind, one by one. There gone. I force the intention into my brain again—nothing, if there was nothing, what would there be?

My frustration overflows and it happens. Something snaps or rips, or is lifted and the veneer of the everyday retreats to the very edges of my consciousness, barely perceptible.

School, friends, homework, seem like they're not from this lifetime; perhaps a life lived thousands of years ago, with no more meaning attached to its events than one a thousand years from now.

There's meaning. There is *something* there, but it's indescribable.

I feel my own insignificance in sharp relief against the vastness of time and history and the empty universe. It's not painful. It's like that peaceful moment between sleep and waking when all you have is a sense of some existence, before all the thoughts and worries and checklists and chores rush in.

I'm here but I'm not. It's odd. I still have a sense of myself, but its completely bare and barely perceptible. It does not seek power or pleasure or even to make sense of itself. Like a random agglomeration of energy. It seems content to just be completely still.

I'm alone but not lonely; I'm small but secure. There is nothing more than this moment. I feel no rush to movement. Is there even movement at all? It lasts only a moment. It's gone.

A passage from Under Heaven

Seasons tumble and pass, so do human lives and ruling dynasties. Men and women live and are remembered—for so many different reasons that the recording of these would take seasons of its own.

Every single tale carries with it many others, noted in passing, hinted at, entirely overlooked. Every life has moments when it branches, importantly

(even if only for one person) and every one of those branches will have offered a different story.

Even mountains alter given enough time, why should not empires? How should poets and their words not become dust? Does not the true wonder emerge when something actually survives?

At Kuala Nor the seasons turned with sun and stars, and the moon lit green grass or made silver the snow and a frozen lake. For a number of years following the events recounted here (however incompletely, as with all such tellings) two men met there each spring, sharing a cabin by the lake, and laboring together to lay to rest the dead.

Birds cried in the mornings, wheeling above the water, the ghosts cried at night. Sometimes a voice fell silent. Both men knew why that was.

Then there came a spring when only one of the two arrived by the shores of the lake. This one worked alone that season, and the next spring, and then the next, but the following springtime no one came to Kuala Nor.

The ghosts remained. They cried at night under a cold moon or stars, winter, spring, summer, fall.

Time passed in sweeping arcs of years.

And, finally, because not even the dead can grieve forever, forgotten, there came a moon lit night when there was no lost spirit crying at Kuala Nor, and there was no one by the lake to hear the last one's final cry. It drifted into that night, within the ring of mountains, above the lake, rising there, and gone (Kay, 2011, pp. 709-710).

These two passages are examples of aesthetics of paradox. That is, they are creations that are aesthetic (beautiful and pleasurable) in nature precisely because they contain elements of existential paradox without any hint of reconciliation. In this way, they resemble Camus' (2000/1942) notion of absurd creation that "that does not give any explanations or solutions to the problems of live" but that may help us to live a little bit more comfortably in existential paradox (p. 70). These narratives are also meant to tie together the experiential, imaginative, philosophical discourse in a triangulation of awe that may contribute to an art of living in existential paradox.

6.8. Summary

According to many existentially influenced thinkers, the unrequited human desire for perfect satiation and fruition of our instinctual drives forms one of the main characteristics of the human experience. While this existential paradox has led to great advances and human flourishing in many spheres, our attempts to deny our limitations and satiate our infinite imaginations, may also contribute to destructive behaviours. Moreover, I proposed that with the advent of liquid modernity, the human drive to reconcile this paradox has increased resulting in the possibility of even more destructive behaviour. As a result of this reality, I suggested that the need for an art of living in existential paradox in liquid times was needed. To accomplish this, I explored how humans might develop this art of living by purposely exposing themselves to existential paradox to experience awe and the sublime, which seem to be aesthetic experiences that calm the negative reactions to existential paradox. However, because confronting the existential realities may result in mental and emotional distress, I proposed a form of narrative exposure therapy via aesthetics of paradox to acclimatize individuals to this phenomenon. Once an individual is more comfortable with existential paradox they can continue to deepen and expand its influence and live "in the sheen of awe" (Schneider, 2009, p. 4).

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Chapter 7.

Applications to Counselling

This dissertation has been a philosophical inquiry into different facets of living in existential paradox without appeal. While each of the manuscripts was a discrete exploration, they were meant to contribute to an art of living that would help humans come to terms with and even flourish with the fact that we are limited beings with unlimited horizons. This is an important and ongoing task since many existential theorists have concluded that existential paradox and the attempts to reconcile it are fundamental motivators of human behaviour. As a result, my inquiry has implications for many disciplines. While in the previous manuscripts I did not apply my conclusions to any field in particular, in this conclusion I will synthesize and apply my findings to the field of counselling. The purpose of this focus is not only to enrich my own practice as a clinical counsellor, but also in the hopes that the offerings herein will contribute new therapeutic possibilities to the field of counselling.

There are numerous counselling theories (an estimated 400+) that have been developed over the past century, each providing a lens though which to view human experience and problems (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). Admittedly, none of these theories is scientifically or empirically proven to be significantly more effective than another; instead the efficacy of a theory is often related how well it matches an individual's specific needs. That is, there is no one-size-fits-all therapeutic modality. Nevertheless, theories of counselling are necessary and very useful lenses through which to understand and change the suffering individual's experience. In this way, I view counselling theories as myths in the sense that they guide therapists' actions and help them to conceptualize an individual's life experience. Therefore, it may benefit the field of counselling to continue to develop new lenses through which to view human experience. Thus, this conclusion, rather than drawing absolute truths about therapy, is an imaginative speculation of what the ideas explored in the previous manuscripts have to offer to

counselling practice. Accordingly, this conclusion is a series of therapeutic offerings that I have gleaned from the explorations in this dissertation. Additionally, rather than developing a new therapeutic approach, the offerings that follow are meant to be integrated with other methods of therapy to facilitate enrichment.

While the previous essays dealt specifically and directly with living in existential paradox, what follows in this conclusion is not only for those individuals dealing directly with existential dread, but also those whose problems may only be peripherally related to it. That is, because the guiding myth of my offerings is that most of human behaviour may be, at its core, related to how an individual deals with existential paradox, even an individual's so-called "everyday problems" may be alleviated by therapeutic interventions inspired by this lens. In this way, much of this conclusion is dedicated to exploring how this therapeutic lens (I will refer to it as awe-based counselling) with existential paradox of tranquility as its core understanding of human nature and behaviour treats common mental and emotional issues.

This conclusion is modeled after the structure and format that is common for chapters in counselling theories textbooks. I use this approach so that I can explore how my findings apply to the different aspects of counselling theory and also so that I can begin to conceptualize where my offerings might need more development for use as a counselling theory. Most often, these chapters begin with an outline of a view of human nature that guides the rest of the counselling theory. Thus in the first section, I will explore my tentative conclusions about human nature gleaned from the previous manuscripts. From this base most counselling texts then explore the nature of mental illness, the goals and process of therapy, the counsellor-client relationship, and specific therapeutic techniques. Accordingly, I will proceed to outline how this view of human nature may apply to the different aspect of therapy listed above.

7.1. View of Human Nature and Context

7.1.1. The Self-reflective Animal

Awe-based counselling is an interdisciplinary approach to counselling that is grounded in Existential and Epicurean philosophy. This dual grounding stems from the assumptions made largely by Kierkegaard (1941, 1954, 2004/1989), Becker (1997/1973, 1975) and Camus (1991/1951, 2000/1942) that humans are a synthesis of animalistic (creaturely) instincts and self-reflective, symbolic, and infinitizing abilities that allow us to ponder our existence and metaphysical context.

In this counselling approach, I assume that humans are motivated by pleasure and pain. Epicurus (trans. 1993), through his own observations of human nature and influence from other Hellenistic schools of philosophy, came to believe that the achievement of pleasure (*ataraxia*) and absence of pain was the guiding force (and natural good) in the behaviour of humans. This perfect state is known as *katastematic* pleasure (perfect tranquility) and can be imagined by humans because of our ability to infinitize (Cooper, 2012; Kierkegaard, 2004/1849).

However, Epicurus (trans. 1993) also realized that this perfect pleasurable state was ultimately unachievable and that attempting to fully satiate this desire was vain and would cause an increase in psychophysical pain. Nevertheless, the creaturely aspect of the human synthesis tries to achieve full satiation of this drive through the procurement of transitory and fleeting *kinesthetic* pleasures. As a result, much of human action is spent chasing after this full satiation without ever being able to achieve it. In other words, humans instinctually try to reach this imagined state of tranquility though the pursuit of kinesthetic pleasures. This is the *paradox of tranquility* that I have concluded is the most influential and pervasive form of existential paradox.

Instead, Epicurus (trans. 1993) argued that the best way to achieve the most pleasurable life approaching katastematic (tranquility) was not the procurement of transitory *kinesthetic* pleasures driven by our animal instincts, but through the reduction of as much psychophysical pain as possible. Meanwhile, because the pursuit of

kinesthetic pleasure as a means of achieving perfect tranquility actually caused more *disquietude*, Epicurus suggested to only satiate a 'bare minimum' of kinesthetic desires, those that he deemed natural and necessary. However, because he knew a perfect state of tranquility was itself unachievable and pains were necessary, he suggested that humans strive for *net pleasure*.

Moving forward two millennia, psychologists and philosophers theorized several other possible motivations for human behaviour such as Frankl's (2007) *will to meaning* and Nietzsche (1924) and Adler's (1956) *will to power*. However, as I have argued in previous chapters, the instinctual need for the satiation of these drives is also kinesthetic pleasure aimed at perfect tranquility, the full satiation of which is unachievable. Accordingly, I categorized the will to power and will to meaning as kinesthetic desires.

Thus, the categorization of these drives as kinesthetic desires provides the philosophical justification for their inclusion in an Epicurean framework that is one of the foundational elements for this counselling modality. Unfortunately, Epicurus believed that practical wisdom, the knowledge of how to achieve *net* and katastematic pleasure, was not something innate, but something that must be learned. Part of this learning requires accepting the disquietude of knowing that the creaturely instincts will never be fully satiated, and the imagined state of perfect tranquility does not exist. This requires an art of living in existential paradox.

Furthermore, because of the creaturely side's penchant for kinesis, or movement toward pleasure and our ability to imagine for perfect tranquility, humans always need to be "on the move" or engaged in psychophysical movement.

7.1.2. Awe and Mystery

Another consequence of the infinitizing aspect is our ability to wonder, imagine, and draw conclusions about our profound metaphysical context. However, Epicurus believed that humanity's rational abilities are not so far advanced as we think and that they are really just another animal power belonging to nature and thus limited (Cooper, 2012). Similarly, while Camus (2000/1942) did not eschew the possibility that there was

some sort of ultimate cosmic meaning, he believed that humans did not have access to it; hence, his description of the human situation as one of divorce between humans and the universe.

Despite this limitation, humans still strive to find absolute and certain metaphysical truths that will lead to the satiation of the animalistic and transmuted animalistic drives. Ultimately, this search for the ground of our own being and an absolute cosmic truth often found in religions, spirituality, and philosophy is aimed at finding the perfect answer that will finally lead to eternal bliss (katastematic pleasure).

Unfortunately, while many people find peace in absolute metaphysical beliefs, there are times when attempts to reconcile or deny existential paradox in this way may lead to personally and collectively destructive behaviours (Becker, 1997/1973, 1975; Camus, 1991/1951, 2000/1942). Thus, commensurate to the will to power or pleasure, the full satiation of the will to meaning via an absolute meaning system can be destructive. However, as Becker points out, humans seem to lack the ability to fully 'shrink down' our consciousness enough to block our mysterious metaphysical context from our thoughts. Furthermore, May (2011) argues that for optimal mental health, humans require a guiding metaphysical myth. Thus, Becker (1997/1973) writes that the ideal myth or metaphysical stance is one that "does not lie about death, life, and reality; one honest enough to follow its own commandments: I mean not to kill, not to take the lives of others to justify itself" (p. 204). Likewise, unlike Epicurus who believed that we should not concern ourselves with the gods, some existential thinkers (e.g., Becker, 1997/1973, 1975; Camus, 1991/1951, 2000/1942, May, 2011) argue that this would be impossible as well as a denial of an essential aspect of humanity. Thus, the challenge becomes how humans should engage with the metaphysical without attempting to pin it down to an absolute.

Schneider (2003, 2004, 2008, 2009) suggests that humans should try to develop what he calls an "enchanted agnostic" disposition toward the awe and mystery of the universe. This is described as a full acceptance and lucid awareness that 'this is as far as humans can go' and that we should not expect to fully understand our existence in the

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universe. In this way, it is also commensurate with the Epicurean-existential belief that that the will to meaning is an insatiable yearning. However, while this awareness, as with awareness of any of the aforementioned limitations, may be painful at first, it may ultimately lead to a better life. This is because the lucid awareness of the human condition may serve to liberate an individual from a restrictive view of self and world while at the same time provide clear and realistic existential limitations on what is possible. Meanwhile, in addition to providing a means of lucid awareness of our cosmic context, experiences of awe and mystery are often aesthetic experiences of pleasure that may have therapeutic benefits. Thus, an art of living in existential paradox would ideally involve engagement with awe and mystery. However, the first half of this conclusion will consider counselling implications for the "self-reflective animal" aspect, while the second will consider the therapeutic potential of awe.

7.2. View of Mental Illness

While no therapeutic model can explain the nature of all mental illnesses that an individual may suffer from, these modalities generally have a guiding myth that helps to conceptualize and work with a person's problem. In awe-based counselling, the foundation of mental illness is an individual's maladaptive means of achieving tranquility of the soul through the will to meaning, power, and pleasure. These disturbances of the soul often arise from how an individual attempts to reconcile existential paradox or from realizing that perfect reconciliation and tranquility is impossible. Put differently, Becker (1997/1973) conceived of mental illness as "not knowing what kind of heroics one is practicing, or not being able—once one does know—to broaden one's heroics from their crippling narrowness" (p. 251). Here, Becker is attributing mental illness to an individual's lack of awareness of how he or she may be attempting to reconcile paradox and his or her inability to alter his or her method of reconciliation once he or she becomes aware of it. Also, in this vein, mental illness may arise when person's chosen method of reconciliation is no longer as effective. Thus, mental illness is related to how individuals struggle with their inability to reach the fullness of life that they seek. The reasons for the methods one tries to reconcile existential paradox is too complex for the scope of this

dissertation, thus this counselling approach focuses on identifying the individual's "heroics."

7.2.1. Infinitizing and Finitizing

According to Kierkegaard (2004/1849), humans are a synthesis of the finite and the infinite. The infinite is the ability to imagine future possibilities that do not exist in the immediate moment while the finite is a narrower focus on concrete reality in the present. In the case of an awe-based view of mental illness, the possibilities that humans infinitize most often are the drives for meaning, power, and pleasure that are aimed at achieving tranquility of the soul. However, because these drives are insatiable, humans deploy various ways of dealing with this paradoxical predicament.

7.2.2. Possibility and Necessity

A closely related Kierkegaardian concept is that of the *possibility* and *necessity*. *Possibility* is the application of the infinitizing aspect of an individual's life. That is, possibility is the specific images one has of one's self for the future (Kierkegaard, 2004/1849; Mullen, 1981). Put differently, possibility is an individual's assessment of what is possible for their future. This perception of the possibility of that future is based on *necessity*. Necessity is the actual or perceived limitations of the individual and context in the present. Thus, necessity is a constraint on possibility

7.2.3. Mental Illness Related to Infinitizing

Humans can imagine a future full of pain, pleasure, or a combination of the two. Meanwhile, the possibility of any of these imagined futures is contingent on necessity, the perception of our current conditions and the possibility to influence the infinitized future. This is an individual's current reality as well as an assessment and perception of their own abilities, context, personalities, and potential.

Individuals who imagine a future of pleasure and tranquility without the corresponding belief in the possibility of achieving such a future may be prone to the

development of mental and emotional distress due to cognitive dissonance. Alternatively, an individual may believe in the possibility of achieving this imagined future but be deterred by the perceived amount of pain that may have to be endured to bring it to fruition. In these two situations, there is a perceived irreconcilable gap between what one imagines for their future and the possibility of achieving it.

On the other hand, individuals who imagine a future of mostly pain, and a corresponding perception and assessment that their current situation is likely to lead to those pains, may also suffer from mental illness. For example, a person who imagines nothing but loneliness for the future and lacks the belief they have the ability to change this situation (or believes that changing will be more painful) may experience depression and hopelessness.

Alternatively, an individual who infinitizes a future of pleasure and tranquility and believes in their ability to achieve such a future may also experience mental illness depending on the ability to assess the likelihood of achieving their vision. Becker (1997/1973) describes this: "if the lie that he attempts to live is too flaunting of reality, a man can lose everything during his lifetime—and this is precisely what we mean by psychosis" (p. 75). Put differently, an unrealistic assessment of achieving one's vision is synonymous with what Becker calls an overvaluation of the symbolic aspect of the human synthesis.

Also, some individuals may believe in the possibility of achieving their infinitized future by simply choosing the right path. In this situation, the individual must simply choose the correct path to achieve their future. However, with so many possibilities, the search for this future may become overwhelming and anxiety causing.

7.2.4. Finitizing Related Mental Illness

Finitizing, on the other hand, is the "shrinking down" of an individual's world to concrete and immediate concerns without imagining a different future. Becker (1997/1973) refers to this aspect as *partialization* because it is the limiting of one's scope of life. This finitization is also characterized by submission or restriction of possibility

(Schneider, 1990). Thus, a person suffering from too much finitizing may not be able to image a future with more tranquility. Alternatively, too much finitization may lead to an individual's tranquility being tied to a narrow focus of life. For example, Becker (1997/1973), writes about partialization wherein in order to protect one's self from the world, an one must narrow down one's focus allowing one to be oblivious to the terrors of the world and the human condition. He calls this creative self-restriction "When an object, idea, or person has become your all. When you put all your eggs in one basket, you must clutch onto that basket for dear life" (p. 178). This situation often leads to significant suffering, especially if one's narrow world is disrupted in some way.

7.3. Assessment and Case Conceptualization.

In counselling theories textbooks, methods of assessment and conceptualization of an individual's problems often follow from the view of the human condition and mental illness. As such the following section will explore how my conclusions from preceding chapters may affect the assessment and conceptualization of a client's problems.

7.3.1. Epicurean Philosophy and the Transtheoretical Model of Change

Part of assessment and case conceptualization is establishing and facilitating a client's readiness to change and deal with the issues in their life. The transtheoretical model of change is a theory that stipulates that individuals across all therapeutic modalities can be placed in one of five stages depending on their level of motivation and readiness for dealing with a problematic phenomenon in their lives. While there are five stages of change in this model, I suggest that the two most difficult to work with in my opinion, *pre-contemplation* and *contemplation,* would be greatly facilitated by viewing them through an Epicurean ethical lens. Pre-contemplation is characterized by an individual either not being aware a problem exists or not being willing to change it, whereas contemplation is a recognition of a problem but ambivalence to working on the problem (Miller, Duncan, & Hubble, 1997).

In an awe-based counselling modality, a person is unlikely to change unless there is enough pain involved in the experiencing of the problem, or they perceive that the change will lead to more net pleasure in the end. Accordingly, the understandings gleaned throughout this exploration may facilitate not only a new understanding of the motivational stages, but also help individuals progress past these initial stages.

With this in mind, a conceptualization of an individual's motivational stage of change would involve an exploration of one's perception of the pleasure and pain involved in change. For example, if persons perceive that they would experience net pain from the change, they are less likely to engage in that change. On the other hand, the perception of net pleasure would increase the likelihood of successful change. Accordingly, the counsellor would try to facilitate change in one's viewing from one of net pain to one of net pleasure.

While there are several therapeutic techniques a counsellor could use to facilitate this process, Miller, Duncan, and Hubble (1997) do not encourage pressuring individuals into change. While they encourage providing an individual with as much information about the possible detrimental effects of the problematic phenomenon as possible, I suggest that infinitizing the future possibilities of pain associated with not dealing with the problem may be enough to facilitate movement to the next stage of change. Alternatively, imagining and describing a person's ideal vision for the future may also help to facilitate motivation. Oftentimes, individuals may not even be entirely clear about the pleasures and pains involved in a change, or their perception of them may be distorted. In this case, discussion and clarification of the pleasures and pains associated with the change process may also make change more likely. Once a counsellor has assessed a client's readiness to change, then they can begin working toward whatever goals they may have. However, the next section will explore what I would consider to be the goals of an awe-based therapeutic lens.

7.4. Goals and Process of Therapy

7.4.1. Psychophysical Quietude

One of the fundamental goals of therapy that I have gleaned throughout this exploration is that of psychophysical quietude (katastematic pleasure). While the satiation of "necessary desires" such as food, water, shelter, and security are essential, one of the goals of therapy should also involve the realization that past a certain point trying to attain more of "necessary desires" is a vanity that may lead to net pain. However, Fatic (2013) writes about relative deprivation, which is the belief that the sufficient level of satiation of the drives and desires is relative to what type of culture and society one is living in. While ideally one may strive for as little satiation as possible, a counsellor must meet individuals where they are. Accordingly, discerning how much of these necessary desires is enough would be a subjective endeavour that could also be one of the main goals of counselling.

7.4.2. Tranquil Engagement (Movement)

The goal of this modality is the achievement of *tranquil movement*, that is, the ability to participate in the world without the disturbances of the soul caused by existential paradox. This is necessary since the creaturely aspect of the human synthesis seems to require this *kinesis,* or movement. While this is the goal that would remain in the back of the mind of the awe-based counsellor as an ideal to strive toward, this overarching goal will often require helping individuals overcome many day-to-day issues such as how do deal with difficult co-workers, or helping them through a painful loss. Alternatively, drawing from existential therapy, one of the main sources of pain is experiencing existential realities. Therefore, promoting quietude will often involve awareness and acceptance of the givens of existence because they are often cited as the cause of psychophysical disquietude (Yalom, 1980). Thus, a fundamental goal would be to alleviate as much disquietude as possible whether or not it is related directly to existential paradox.

7.5. Counsellor's Role & Therapeutic Relationship

In awe-based counselling, while the counsellor may be well versed in the human condition and human behaviour, the client is considered to be the expert of his or her own life and experience. Therefore, the goals of therapy are co-created through a combination of the counsellor's expertise and the client's assessment of their own needs. Accordingly, a counsellor must meet clients at their current situation and discern how to help bring the client to understand their personal concerns and begin to change them though an awe-based lens.

7.5.1. Attachment Style

How an individual deals with existential paradox may provide clues to early attachment styles that may, in turn, provide a possible way of moving forward therapeutically. Specifically, an individual's attachment style may be related to what type of mental struggles (infinitizing or finitizing) they are experiencing. Attachment theorists (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bowlby, 1982) posit four styles of attachment or typologies: secure, preoccupied, dismissive and fearful, which are derived from how individuals create a model of themselves and of others. These four typologies are also based on levels of avoidance and anxiety. Individuals who view themselves and others positively are defined as secure; people who perceive themselves negatively, but hold positive views of others, are referred to as preoccupied; individuals who perceive themselves positively, but hold negative views of others are referred to as dismissive, and those who hold negative views of self and others are deemed fearful.

Those individuals suffering from excessive infinitizing may fall into one of two attachment typologies. First, dismissive-avoidant individual holds a positive view of the self and their abilities, but a negative model of others. This could indicate they may rely on their own powers to reconcile existential paradox. Yalom (1980) refers to this as the *specialness defense* wherein one relies on their own powers to overcome the terror of meaninglessness and death. Working with this type of person would require the

counsellor to build a strong therapeutic bond before beginning to work through the individual problems.

The second attachment typology that may be associated with excessive infinitizing is the fearful-avoidant individual who finds solace neither in themselves nor in others. This individual may have positive visions for their future, but their negative view of self limits the perception of their ability to achieve such a future. Additionally, as with the dismissive avoidant individual, because this type of person may find it difficult to trust others, a primary focus on the establishment of a strong therapeutic bond would be paramount.

Mental health issues of excessive finitization may indicate that an individual falls into the anxious-preoccupied attachment typology. This typology is one in which an individuals view themselves negatively while viewing others in a positive light, thus believing that they need to merge with the positive other to feel secure (Hazan and Shaver, 1987). This type of individual may be far more likely to begin work on the problem quickly taking advice from the counsellor to heart, while not trusting their own instincts. Since part of awe-based therapy is the synthesis of the finitizing and infinitizing modes, it would be important to encourage those with anxious attachment styles to begin trusting their own experience and ideas, albeit in a safe therapeutic environment.

7.6. Therapeutic Interventions

7.6.1. Tuning into Existential Paradox

Since the assumption of an awe-based counselling modality is that many mental health concerns are, at their core, related to one's relationship with existential paradox, one of the core therapeutic interventions that this exploration has inspired is 'tuning one's ear' to how a person's presenting concerns may be related to existential paradox. Thus, in addition to listening to aspects the individual's story of the problem, an awe-based counsellor would carefully listen for how the person may be trying to reconcile the paradox of tranquility. This knowledge could then provide deeper insight into how the counsellor might approach the presenting issues. For example, in working with someone

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who is misusing drugs or alcohol, an awe-based counsellor may pay particular attention to if the individual is attempting to escape psychophysical pain related to existential paradox, such as the inability to feel secure and powerful in some aspect their life.

Drives and desires: natural, necessary, or vain?

In Epicurean philosophy, the desire for different types of pleasures are categorized as either vain, natural, or necessary (Cooper, 2012). Accordingly, part of an awe-based counselling approach would assess whether the problematic infinitizing (or finitizing) drives of an individual are natural, necessary, or vain desires. Thus, the counsellor could evaluate how the person's problem may be related to vain, natural, or necessary drives in their attempt to reconcile existential paradox. While natural and necessary drives for reconciliation may be relatively easy to secure, vain attempts of securing power, or satiation of any of the other drives, may contribute to psychological disturbances. For example, a person who believes that she or he needs to secure the highest position in a company to feel powerful and secure may have to contend with significant anxiety in the pursuit of such a position. Alternatively, a person's whose meaning system becomes in rigid and absolute may begin to alienate those around her or him who do not share her or his views.

Additionally, beliefs about what leads to happiness is heavily influenced by our culture and society; therefore, awareness of the Epicurean idea of false (empty) opinion coupled with practical wisdom (knowledge of vain, natural, and necessary drives) may help individuals sort out not only what dominant desires in society are worth pursuing or not, but also how the pursuing of those desires may affect their well being (Cooper, 2012). According to Fatic (2013), false or empty opinion is the unreflective adopting of an external view of what will lead to net pleasure that often originates from one's culture or other individuals. However, he argues that following false opinion in guiding one's desires is often a cause of unhappiness and mental illness. For example, mainstream media may distort one's idea of the types of actions and lifestyles that will lead to the most happiness and pleasure. Thus, individuals and their counsellors could discuss and explore the implications of mainstream media and cultural expectations through an awe-based lens. An individual's ability in discerning vain drives and false opinion are

especially important considering the excess of 'offerings' available that claim to lead to pleasure and tranquility in liquid times (Bauman, 2015).

In addition to exploration and conversations regarding false opinion and vain attempts at reconciling existential paradox, there are many other possible therapeutic interventions that may help to facilitate one's Epicurean practical wisdom. The Miracle Question is one of these.

Miracle question

One of the most common therapeutic techniques in solution-focused therapy is the miracle question (de Shazer, 1988). The miracle question is designed so that an individual describes, in detail, a future time when some phenomenon (either a problem or a desire) is either present or no longer present in their lives. It is used to elicit specific and concrete details about how their life would be different (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). Often the therapeutic conversation that occurs afterwards reveals for both the counsellor and client deeper and perhaps unconscious reasons and meanings for the desired future. However, to adapt this technique for ascertaining whether or not a desire is necessary or vain would require that the counsellor 'tune their ears' to existential paradox. That is, the counsellor would focus on whether or not it seems that the client is striving for reconciliation of one or all of the drives. In practice, an awe-based miracle question may start off as such:

> *Imagine that tonight as you sleep a miracle occurs in your life. A magical momentous happening that has made you the high-powered lawyer you've always dreamed of being and perhaps rippled out to improve other areas of your life too…Think for a moment and tell me…how is life going to be different now? Describe it in detail* (adapted from de Shazer, 1988).

As the individual describes a new future, an awe-based counsellor would listen for the possibility that the desires that the individual is envisioning are vain, or a result of empty opinion. The description would likely lead to further discussion of what may be influencing her or his problems as well as a refinement of what her or his ideal future would be. What would be most important is the individual's clarification of their desires

for the future and the possibility that these desires are based on false opinion that could lead to future pain.

7.6.2. Absurd Creation

Once a person begins to realize that full satiation of tranquility is unachievable, especially through the pursuit of kinesthetic pleasures (will to power, meaning, pleasure), absurd creation may help to maintain and strengthen this attitude. According to Camus (2000/1942), absurd creation is creation "for nothing" (p. 83). In other words, what one creates or does should not be aimed at reconciling any aspect of the paradox of the absurd. If this is extended beyond Camus to include the paradox of tranquility, absurd creation could be conceptualized as both a goal of and intervention in awe-based counselling. To briefly review, Camus (2000/1942) concludes:

> Of all the schools of patience and lucidity, creation is the most effective. It is also the staggering evidence of man's sole dignity: the dogged revolt against his condition, perseverance in an effort considered sterile. It calls for a daily effort, self-mastery, a precise estimate of the limits of truth, measure and strength. It constitutes ascesis. All that 'for nothing', in order to repeat and mark time. But perhaps the great work of art has less importance in itself than in the ordeal it demands of a man and the opportunity with which it provides him for overcoming his phantoms and approaching a little closer to his naked reality (pp. 83-84).

Accordingly, absurd creation may coincide with the ideal goal of tranquil engagement or movement wherein an individual is engaged in the world with as few psychophysical disturbances as possible while simultaneously not trying to reconcile paradox. In this way, absurd creation not only seems to epitomize this tranquil movement but can also be used as a therapeutic method of living with the paradox of tranquility. For example, Camus (2000/1942) writes that "the great work of art has less importance in itself than in the ordeal it demands of a man and the opportunity with which it provides him for overcoming his phantoms and approaching a little closer to his naked reality" (p. 84). That is, the artistic process itself may be more therapeutic than the artwork.

In this way, absurd creation can be used as a form of exposure therapy and experimentation that not only provides a means of acclimatizing an individual to the ideal

of absurd movement that is not aimed at reconciling existential paradox, but also as a means of working through personal beliefs and views that may be inhibiting their journey towards increased tranquility.

In many different therapeutic modalities, individuals are tasked with being aware of and recording their thoughts and feelings when dealing with a problematic phenomenon in their lives (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). Similarly, an individual engaged in absurd creation can be instructed to be aware of and track thoughts and feelings that can be 'worked through' and discussed in therapy. Additionally, the knowledge and experience gained through the experience of absurd creation can be transferred to other areas of their life.

7.7. Awe, the Sublime, and Therapy

The first half of this conclusion explored the possible therapeutic implications of synthesizing Epicurean and existential philosophy with my previous counselling knowledge to part of what I have called awe-based counselling. In this way, the first half has been focused on the "self-reflective animal" without considering how our profound metaphysical context may also affect counselling. Therefore, the second half, after which I have named this counselling modality, explores the possible therapeutic benefits and methods of pondering our profound metaphysical concept through engagement with awe and mystery.

7.7.1. Potential Benefits of Therapeutic and Extra-therapeutic Awe

Because humans have an innate yearning to wonder about and engage with our profound and mysterious context, exploring the therapeutic benefits of engaging with experiences of awe and the sublime is an important endeavour (May, 2011). While the earlier chapter, *the aesthetics of paradox*, explored how experiences of awe and the sublime may aid in living with existential paradox (the ultimate goal of this therapeutic modality) this section also explores how these experiences may be employed in counselling individuals with other concerns not directly related to living in existential

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paradox. For example, those individuals whose struggles are related to finitization may benefit from opportunities to expand their worldview.

Reducing the influence of the problem

While many of the implications thus far have focused on more rational means of therapy, this section explores the therapeutic benefits of and possible therapeutic applications of the sublime. The first and most obvious benefit of encouraging and facilitating experiences of awe is their potential to allay, at least momentarily, the influence of a problem in an individual's life. Recalling from an earlier chapter that experiences of awe seem to provide respite from one's worries, there is the potential for application in therapy. While the previous chapter explored how these experiences can be increased, this section will explore how these experiences may be used in therapy.

When people come for counselling, they often view problems as permeating their whole life. However, upon further investigation and exploration, it often turns out there are times when the problems are not as influential in their lives as they first expressed (Bertolini & O'Hanlon, 2002). Thus, because experiences of awe seem to provide this respite, counsellors can 'tune their ears' to listen for the sublime in individuals lives. Additionally, counsellors can ask specific questions that may elicit memories of the sublime. If these methods do not yield the sublime, then counsellors may purposefully facilitate experiences of awe through means explained later in this chapter.

Expanding worldview

In addition to reducing the influence of a problem in a person's life, another possible benefit of facilitating experiences of awe in therapy is the expansion of an individual's worldview. This may be beneficial since mental and emotional distress can often be a result of a too limited view of a problem (Fatic, 2013). Because experiences of awe may lead to feelings of transport, ineffability, inconceivable, the infinite, they belie fixed categories and thus may help to expand or change a person's perception of a problem (Carson, 2006). For example, a person who is experiencing anxiety in some aspect of their life may not only feel relief from such symptoms, but they may also change their view of the phenomenon causing the anxiety. In addition, the power that the

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phenomenon has in causing anxiety may be viewed as insignificant in comparison to the vastness of a person's life and their profound context.

While there are several ways that awe and sublime experiences could be incorporated into therapy, I will offer a few methods that I am most likely to use. These methods will include imagery, psychoeducation, bibliotherapy, narrative conversations, and awe-based absurd creation.

7.7.2. Awe-based Interventions

Imagery

Imagery is a therapeutic technique that is used across many counselling modalities that involves having an individual create mental images to engage with a particular phenomenon to aid therapy (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). While imagery is often used in exposure therapy to reduce fear about situations or objects, I suggest that it may be possible to use imagery to facilitate sublime experiences both inside and outside of therapy. For example, an individual may be asked to recall a time when she or he had a sublime experience in the past, or they may imagine an invented experience of awe with the aid of the common characteristics of sublime experiences explored in a previous chapter by Carson (2006). The resulting experience could then be used to reframe or change the view of a problem in the person's life. For instance, the stress of an upcoming exam may be allayed by the memory of the vastness and power of a stormy ocean vista.

Psychoeducation and bibliotherapy

Psychoeducation is another therapeutic intervention used across counselling approaches to provide individuals with knowledge essential in dealing with their problem (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). Recalling that Carson (2006) argues that forming a concept of the sublime facilitates the experience of awe, providing clients with knowledge of common characteristics of sublime experiences may increase the likelihood that they will experience them in their daily live. Additionally, this knowledge may be employed in the practice of imagery.

In addition to psychoeducation, *bibliotherapy*, which is the use of reading material for therapeutic and education purposes, can also be beneficial for therapeutic outcomes (Archer & McCarthy, 2007). For example, Schneider's (2009) book *Awakening to Awe: Personal Stories of Profound Transformation* is a series of narratives from Schneider's practice. The narratives detail how awe positively influences the experiences of people dealing with different types of problems as well as how their problems led them to experience awe.

Additionally, James's (1994) *The Variety of Religious Experience* may also offer a way for individuals to see how mystical experiences can transform a person's life. Furthermore, there are several books that explore personal experiences of dark nights of the soul that result in sublime moments of transformation that may be used in therapy.

Narrative conversations

In addition to psychoeducation, bibliotherapy, and imagery, using narrative techniques may help tie the previous interventions together to increase the therapeutic benefits of awe in a person's life. According to White (2007), unique outcome conversations assist people in focusing exceptions to the problems, drawing them to the fore. This allows them to use the exceptions in their struggle against the problem. These conversations give a voice to those aspects of experience that are not privileged but may be useful in dealing with the problem at hand. White suggests that simply identifying a unique outcome is not enough to have a significant effect on a person's life. Instead, he suggests that an in-depth exploration of these experiences is needed.

Thus, with the aid of imagery and psychoeducation, awe-based unique outcome conversations may be employed not only to help weaken the effect of the problem in a person's life, but also to change their view of the problem. Some of the questions that could be used to engage in this type of conversation may be: *Where is the problem when you are experiencing awe? What is awe saying about the problem? What aspects of awe were most important in making the problem insignificant?*

While there are numerous possible questions that could be used depending on the situation, these relative influencing questions are designed to help an individual map their

influence on a problem and the problem's influence on them. As a result, this may help individuals clarify just how their experiences of awe have helped them deal with their concerns (White & Epston, 1990). In turn, this knowledge may be expanded beyond the original experience to the rest of their life.

Absurd creation & awe

In addition to facilitating the ability to live with existential paradox without the need for reconciliation, absurd creation can also be employed to engage with the profound context of mystery and awe. Accordingly, by combining Carson's (2006) idea of sublime concept formation with hermeneutics and absurd creation, an individual may be more likely to engage with mystery and awe. Thus, awe-based absurd creation, that is, creation that is aimed at engaging with our profound and mysterious context without attempts to reconcile any aspect of the paradox of tranquility, is a potentially powerful therapeutic tool. To achieve this dual goal, I suggest that the practice of Gadamerian hermeneutic inquiry into everyday phenomena through the keeping of the hypomnemata as a means of absurd expression and description.

Gadamerian hermeneutic inquiry may be particularly well suited as a method of awe-based absurd creation since "Gadamer's aesthetic hermeneutics fosters an attentiveness towards the mystery of the given and its unexpected folds of meaningfulness" while never settling on any final meaning (Davey, 2016; Gadamer, 1989). Thus, hermeneutic inquiry may be an ideal way for engaging with our profound context through awe and mystery without attempting to define it.

To facilitate this hermeneutic inquiry into awe, the hypomnemata may be a useful tool because of the similarity in their purpose. As noted by Foucault (1997), the subject of the hypomnemata is a specific issue, topic or focus that one wants to explore and meditate upon. Similarly, "whiling" over a topic, which Jardine (2012) explains as "working at it, composing it, composing ourselves over it and cultivating one's memory of it," describes the work of hermeneutics (p. 175).

The practice of writing hypomnemata can be conceived of as "whiling" or hermeneutics in two different respects. First, Swonger (2006) explains that hypomnemata

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are investigations or inquiries into phenomena that piques one's interest, which is what Jardine (2012) means by something "worthwhile" (p. 175). Second, the hypomnemata are also a material record of things read, seen, heard, or thought that offer an "accumulated treasure for rereading and meditation" (Foucault, 1997, p. 213). Thus, the hypomnemata are a material record of a hermeneutic inquiry that can be returned to and reflected upon.

The practice of engaging in hypomnemata is also akin to the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is the idea that the understanding of any phenomenon is contingent on the understanding that came before and thus the process of understanding a phenomenon is a never-ending process (Kinsella, 2006). Likewise, Foucault (1997) states the hypomnemata is a continuous transformation and creation of self in reaction to the phenomena of the world. This is important because as soon as individuals stop revising phenomena, they inevitably get trapped in a regime of truth. Therefore, "whiling" over a topic of interest and the ongoing nature of the hermeneutic circle are also integral aspects of the hypomnemata.

A final similarity between hermeneutics and the practice of writing hypomnemata is the shared goal of problematizing the present understanding of any phenomenon. Smith (1991) believes that the practice of hermeneutics, and thus of the hypomnemata, is to call into question the dogmatic and normative traditions that promulgate the discourses that lead to many of the problems of modernity.

The practice of absurd creation via hermeneutic hypomnemata

The practice of hypomnemata, like the practice of hermeneutics, does not have a method as such. Rather, Jardine (2012) suggests that individuals ask: "What is (my) topic?" (p. 187). He continues that a method will not help a person to get their bearings and learn their way around because there is no place or topic to guide them. Thus, Gadamer (1989) suggests that for any inquiry into a phenomenon, "we can entrust ourselves to what we are investigating to guide us safely in the quest" (p. 378). Gadamer also suggests that people begin their understanding when they feel that something is being asked of them or when something addresses them.

Echoing these hermeneutists, Foucault (1997) instructs that the subject of the hypomnemata is any phenomena upon which the writer wants to focus. Thus, the hypomnemata can be a means to explore some aspect of the human condition, or for keeping in mind philosophical doctrine to help one live well. However, the hypomnemata can also be used to inquire about more mundane phenomena. Consequently, the topic of the hypomnemata can be any aspect of existence that a person may want to explore.

Absurd creation would take place as part of an inquiry into humanity's profound context. Thus, if awe and mystery is the topic of a hermeneutic hypomnemata, an individual must simply investigate, describe, and express their reaction to any phenomenon that may inspire awe. Alternatively, using the common characteristics of sublime phenomena as a base, an individual can view any event or object through that lens.

Gadamer (1975) believes that people have to trust the topic itself to guide them in their inquiry into a particular phenomenon. Therefore, the process of selecting "texts" (any source of information on a topic) seems to be a very organic and personal process that is likely to lead from one text to the next in an organic exploration of a topic's lineages.

This may also be an important step for absurd creation. As part of the hermeneutic hypomnemata, individuals may investigate and learn all sorts of disparate information about an area of inquiry. Simply learning the vastness of and multifariousness of any phenomenon may inspire awe. For example, one may focus awe-based absurd creation toward a tree of which one is fond. Thus, learning about the tree through multiple lenses (personal, culture, medicinal, botanical, and so on) may not only inspire awe via the sheer diversity of the tree's ontology, it may also inspire a multitude of descriptions and expressions that never settle on a final meaning. The process could be an ongoing inquiry into the awe and mystery inspired by a tree. This echoes Camus's (2000/1942) belief that absurd creation is the "great mime" and "a monotonous and passionate repetition of themes already orchestrated by the world" (p. 70). Thus, awe-based absurd creation

through the keeping of hypomnemata may be one of the most powerful tools one can use to live in existential paradox, experience awe, and "give the void its colours" (p. 83).

7.8. Summary and Conclusion

This conclusion has been a synthesis and application of ideas I explored in the previous five chapters. The first half outlined the therapeutic possibilities of viewing the existential paradox of tranquility as the fundamental motivator of human behaviour. I combined existential and Epicurean philosophy with my previous counselling knowledge to imagine concrete therapeutic methods and techniques. Meanwhile, in the second half of this conclusion, I explored the therapeutic potential of engaging with awe and mystery and proposed specific techniques that facilitate this engagement. The combination of these two have formed the preliminary musings for awe-based counselling which I view as only snap-shot of where I am now. Thus, because settling upon fixed and absolute meanings would belie the theme this entire dissertation, I will continue to lean into existential paradox and into the mystery and awe of existence and see where it takes me next.

7.9. Final Thoughts

All those years ago when I lay awake at night trying to picture nothingness led to a lifelong inquiry into human existence in this vast universe. As I sit here writing this conclusion, I cannot help wondering if this life long search was itself my way of trying to reconcile existential paradox, a way to figure out the best way to live.

Each of the chapters represented a foray into an aspect of existential paradox that might contribute to new ways of viewing and dealing humanity's absurd context. In this way, they are invitations to future research and possibly more quantitative corroboration. While they may seem disparate, they are all tied together by the hope that living with absurdity is possible and by practical suggestions for doing so. These manuscripts represent the progressing of my own inquiry into existential paradox, but have also brought me back to Ernest Becker and Albert Camus and their prescriptions that, for now,

all humans may be able to do is become aware of the void, then to "fashion something—an object or ourselves—and drop into the confusion" (Becker, 1997/1973, p. 285). We must "give the void its colours," and know that is enough and it is beautiful (Camus, 2000/1942, p. 83).

7.10. References

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