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“THE READINESS IS ALL”
DEATH AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Anonymous, *Triumph of Death*, Plague tablet (Pesttafel), Augsburg, Germany (1607/1635)
I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.

I wish I didn’t work so hard.

I wish I’d had the courage to express my feelings.

I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.

I wish I had let myself be happier.
Death and ...

1. ... its omnipresence
2. ... psychotherapy orientations
3. ... strategies of avoidance
4. ... philosophy
   - Part of life or opposite?
   - My death or the death of the other?
5. ... person-centered perspectives
   - Death’s question to life
   - Is there anything questioning death?
   - Facilitating the relationship to death in therapy
1
THE HIDDEN OMNIPRESENCE OF DEATH
Peter F. Schmid

Life Management oder Die Ultimative Therapie

Ein Kick-Off Meeting
Media in vita in morte sumus.

Notker the Stammerer,
840-912
2

DEATH IN THE
PSYCHOTHERAPY
ORIENTATIONS
Death, not dying ...
- **Psychoanalysis**
  - death instinct

- **Behavior therapies**
  - fear of death is learned

- **PCE therapies**
- **Psychoanalysis**  
  death instinct

- **Behavior therapies**  
  fear of death is learned

- **PCE therapies**  
  ???

- **Existential therapies**  
  death as primary source of anxiety
Mors nobis timenda non est, quia, donec sumus, mors non est, et cum mors sit, non nos sumus.

Epicurus
3
STRATEGIES
OF
AVOIDANCE
... today the experience of death is rare.

... death is excluded from social reality.

... if it cannot be disguised.

this is considered as failure.
Strategies of avoidance

1 The defiance of death of the invulnerable.
2 The insouciance of the very sheltered.
3 The self-conceit of the arrogant ones.
4 The self-assurance of the generalizers.
5 The imperturbable coolness of the down-players.
6 The soul liberating ideas of the glorifying.
7 The self-redeeming phantasies of the immortals.
Strategies of avoidance

8 The doomsday commination of the prophets of disaster.
9 The perfectionistic control of the chance avoiding obsessives.
10 The blandishing sugarcoating of the idealizers.
11 The projection of guilty feelings of the demonizers and avengers.
12 The lecherous sensationalism of the voyeurs.
13 The sublime suppressing of the sexualizers.
4
DEATH IN PHILOSOPHY
To philosophize is to prepare for death.

Cicero
Plato: To philosophize is to anticipate death.

Seneca: Tota vita discendum est mori. (The whole life is learning to die.)

Augustine: Exercitium artis bene moriendi. (Exercising the art of having a good death.)

Marcus Aurelius: Do not fear death, but fear never begin to live.

Franz Rosenzweig: All knowledge of the universe begins with death.

Thomas Bernhard: Everything is ridiculous if you think of death.
4

DEATH IN PHILOSOPHY

Part of life or opposite to life?
Martin Heidegger

Life is „being towards-death“.
- Death is a central part of life.
- Authentic existence takes death into life.
Martin Heidegger

Life is „being towards-death“.
- Death is a central part of life.
- Authentic existence takes death into life.

Kierkegaard: Live gives meaning to death.
Life and death cannot be reconciled.

- Death is the absurdity as such.
- You cannot prepare for death.
Life and death cannot be reconciled.

Death is the absurdity as such.

You cannot prepare for death.

**Camus:** Death is an attack to freedom (Sisyphus)
Is death the finale of life
or
is it radically different from life?
DEATH IN PHILOSOPHY

My death or the death of the other?
Am I primarily considered with my own mortality or that of beloved people?
The death of the Other: Death is separation from those we love. But the dead person still fills the remaining person with love.
Fear of loss of the self (annihilation)  
substantial dimension of personhood

Fear of loss of relationship (isolation)  
relational dimension of personhood
5
PERSON-CENTERED PERSPECTIVES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substantial notion</th>
<th>Relational notion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>»Persona est sub-stantia.«</td>
<td>»Persona est ek-sistentia.«</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person = Being from oneself and for oneself</td>
<td>Person = Being from others and for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy Souvereignty</td>
<td>Interrelatedness Solidarity</td>
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</tbody>
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## Death of the person

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<tr>
<td>Ultimate Annihilation</td>
<td>Ultimate Isolation</td>
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</tbody>
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Fear of loss of the self (annihilation)
substantial dimension of personhood

Fear of loss of relationship (isolation)
relational dimension of personhood
The earnest of death is its question to life.

Fridolin Wiplinger
5
PERSON-CENTERED PERSPECTIVES

The fundamental contradiction
Love is strong as death.

*Song of Songs 8:6*
The contra – diction of death

... death questions love ...

("was it absurd?\")

The contra – diction of hope

(spes contra spem)

... love questions death ...

("you shall not die!\")
PERSON-CENTERED PERSPECTIVES

Therapy as empowerment of hope
... to co-facilitate unconditional acknowledgment of death (= comfort and confrontation)

... to co-facilitate realizing what life means (in the face of death)

... to co-facilitate the realization of the underlying We in the dialogue
If it be now, 'tis not to come;
If it be not to come, it will be now;
If it be not now, yet it will come –
The readiness is all.

William Shakespeare, Hamlet
Related PowerPoint Slides

„On the art of being anxious in the right way“

Person-centered, dialogical and existential perspectives on anxiety.