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EXISTENTIAL COUNSELLING
CONDENSED IN
FENELON'S SPIRITUAL LETTERS

Megan Levy
BA Psychology and Theology

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Counselling

The University of Notre Dame
Australia
School of Medicine
Counselling

November 2007

If we allow the world to hinder us,

then our professed freedom is only a word.

Letter 30

Francois de Fenelon

1651-1715

Abstract

The findings of this research suggest a compatibility between Fenelon's Spiritual Letters and Existential theories of personal growth. The Psychotherapy and Counselling Codes of Ethics in Australia, America, and England emphasize the importance of personal growth as an essential tool to ensure responsibility and quality in professional practice. Self-knowledge and self-development are consistent with the ethical principles of Fidelity, Autonomy, Beneficence, Non-maleficence, Justice, and Self-respect. Enriching self to deliver better quality and high ethical service in mental health should be seriously considered for both the trainee and the experienced psychotherapist. The similarities between Fenelon Spiritual Letters and Existential Psychotherapy may suggest them as a possible tool for inner development, subject of course to further empirical research.

Statement of own work

I declare that this dissertation paper is all my own work, except where duly acknowledged. Ideas taken from other sources are indicated using the appropriated APA referencing system, as well as reproduced works and passages taken from other sources which have been marked herein with quotations, italics, or indented and properly referenced. I have not previously submitted this paper as a whole for assessment in any other unit at The University of Notre Dame or any other tertiary institution.

Megan Levy
BA Psychology and Theology
November 12, 2007

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boring and long hours you have spent in solitude

and

to you Jesus, my Christ and Lord, for loving me always.

EXISTENTIAL COUNSELLING
CONDENSED IN
FENELON'S SPIRITUAL LETTERS

Introduction

In early 2002, looking through a pile of second-hand books at an outlet in Fremantle I found a little book entitled "Let Go", its price 1 dollar, but when I got to the counter, the price was wrong. The real cost? .50 cents. On the bus back home I began reading this anthology of letters written by someone called Fenelon (?) I did not have a clue who he was, but to my surprise he seemed to know me very well, as his words put in front of my eyes my shadowy ways, my character, and my weaknesses, as well as my love for God and a faith I believed was strong and well directed, how little did I know and still do. This unknown writer has become a cherished friend and mentor just like he was to others 300 years ago in his native France.

For the last 5 years I have read Fenelon letters on a daily basis, looking for peace, for support, for direction to make a decision, or for a little light among the darkness. I have opened the book at random or allowed the number of a letter or a page to come to mind, and once and again I have found not only answers but a call to responsibility, ownership, and self awareness. These readings along with a liking for Existentialism awoke the curiosity to explore the relationship between Fenelon's Spiritual Letters (FSL)

and the basic givens of Existential Counselling (EHΨ): (1) Self-awareness, (2) Freedom and Responsibility, (3) Existential Isolation, (4) Search for Meaning, (5) Existential anxiety, and (6) Death awareness (Yalom 1998, Van Deurzen-Smith, 1988).

Francois de Fenelon (1651-1715) was a French educator and writer, a Catholic prelate, and a liberal theologian whose theories and publications, despite the opposition of Church and State, eventually became the basis for profound political and cultural changes in France (Clarke, 1977). During his office as Archbishop of Cambrai, he became the spiritual counselor and director of various men and women, members of the corrupted court of Louis XIV, who sought to develop true spirituality and inner growth under his direction (Whitaker, 1973). As modern Counselling does today, in a respectful and empathic manner, Fenelon responded to these troubled men and women with letters where he shared his own experiences, encouraged, confronted, supported, or asked them for insight to find within the solution to their challenges.

Writing spiritual letters is a Christian tradition dating from the 1st century CE, New Testament writers like Paul, Peter, or John testify to this practice as a means for providing counsel and spiritual guidance. Other examples of Catholic and Christian spiritual directors writers are St Catherine of Sienna (14th C), St Teresa and St John of the Cross, Martin Luther, Calvin, and John Knox, (16th C) (Blanton, 2006). In the 21st century Narrative Therapy has incorporated secular letter writing into clinical practice with the purpose of creating and maintaining change as well as developing and emphasizing the

therapeutic relationship (Blanton, 2006). These Narrative "therapeutic letters" exhibit the following characteristics: (1) They reflect the unique relationship between the counsellor and the client. (2) The therapist is genuine and allows his/her personality to come through his/her writing. (3) The letters convey a world which is congruent with the clients' own perceptions and experiences (Moules 2003). (4) The therapeutic language of the letter is speculative and tentative so the client may accept or reject the counsellor's ideas. (5) Demonstrates regard and respect for the client (Blanton, 2006). Amazingly, Fenelon's Spiritual Letters display all of the above characteristics.

Considered by some as an "individualistic" approach Existentialism like Christianity focuses on insight and inner change to facilitate personal growth, both ask for compromise, and none of them offer an easy way nor a painless quest. Existentialism, as Jewish and Christian spiritualities do, advocates individual change to enable a better relationship with self and others. In this regard, Frankl (1959) proposes that when we can no longer change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves. While Rabbi Hayim of Zans, from the Jewish tradition, states: "I must work upon myself so that I may give true service to God (translated by Martin Buber, quoted by Besserman, 1994, 72)". And, Fenelon, based on St Augustine says: "We must be made to feel our weakness, our wretchedness, our inability to correct ourselves. We need to understand what kind of people we really are while waiting for God to change us (Letter 20)". Holmes (2005) approaches this line of thought as she states: "self is merely a conglomeration of all our biases and the implication that we can never be rid of them

(Holmes, 2005, p 110)". So if we cannot overcome our biases, because they are part of what we truly are, is there a way to develop our potential with what we already have? Could a combination of self-awareness and positive role modelling set us on the way to self-actualization?

The self-actualization concept comes from various thinkers including Carl G. Jung, Otto Rank, and Alfred Adler departing from Freud's classical psychoanalytic formulations emphasizing the importance of individuality. Jung has been credited with being the first to use the term self-actualization, based on his concept of Self (his most important archetype, equating God) and self-actualization as the peak life goal meaning a complete differentiation and harmonious blending of the many aspects of personality (Von Franz, 1982). In Existential Psychology, self-actualization is a process of growth and fulfilment of potentialities (Whitson, 1996). Maslow, from a secular perspective, describes a self-actualizer, compared to the average person, as one who has a perception of life less distorted by personal wishes or neurotic needs, a characteristic that enables the individual to be more tolerant and accepting of self, others, and nature. Also, they are spontaneous in thinking and behaviour, focusing their attention on problems outside themselves rather than within (self-centred) (Whitson, 1996). For Christians, the historical Jesus set through example the way to self-actualization as He demonstrated in deeds what Maslow describes in the self-actualized as an innate, directional positive force, showing high levels of empathy, full sympathy, social interest, identification with the oppressed, and compassionate care for humankind and nature (Maslow, 1987). This

can suggest that Christian spiritual letters propose and guide personal growth based on a self-actualized role model. Whitaker (1973) as he introduces us to Francois de Fenelon, writes: "Self is the only prison that can bind the soul. Every Christian who is really serious about living the Christ-like life craves freedom from bondage (Whitaker, 1973, i)". The Existential approach, in parallel, proposes our existence as not fixed but in constant transition, emerging, evolving, becoming and continually searching for freedom (Corey, 2001). Christian principles, as Existential counselling, promote this freedom and aspire to accompany the client in a journey that is, by necessity, frightening and painful. Frankl (1975) states that for something to give light it must first endure burning; while Fenelon explains: "Self forced into the light, sees itself as it really is, in all its deformity and despair and disgrace (Letter 10)".

Aims

The goal of this explorative project is to illuminate Fenelon's Spiritual Letters with Existential Psychotherapy concepts that might theoretically support the compatibility of his writings with today's secular counselling and open the possibility of considering Fenelon's letters as a practical tool for personal growth. This research is an invitation for the heart and the mind to cross the threshold into another dimension in time. According to Ricoeur, and in reference to counselling, Lyall, states that new interpretations can lead not only to new thinking but to fresh praxis (Lyall, 2001). Whitaker (1973) writes that human cravings for freedom take the form of a pervasive

and intense inner battle born of our need to become new creations; and, as he introduces us to Fenelon, he recommends to read the letters in a devotional mood, "Consider turning to the letters not primarily to expose your mind to idea, but rather to seek to enter into companionship with this truly spiritual giant (Whitaker, 1973, i-ii)."

Literature Review

An ample literature review could not find specific information on Fenelon's spiritual letters in relation to Existential Counselling. What was found is an increasing demand to both consider spirituality as an important component in the therapeutic process (Blanton, 2006, Meyerstein, 2004; Smith, 1990; Compton, 2001; Hayes & Cowie, 2005; Eck, 2002; Tam, 2006; Roesch & Ano, 2003) and to include it as proper academic training in order to avoid potential misuse or abuse of power (Kelsey, 1983; Kahle & Robbins, 2004; Brooks & Matthews, 2000; Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971; Tisdale, 2003). Other authors have also proposed spirituality as a buffer for the counsellor against burnout and vicarious trauma (Kesler, 1990; Emerson & Markos, 1996; Brooks & Matthews, 2000; Nijs, 2006; Jenkins & Baird, 2002). Nijs (2006) states that counsellors and therapists who care for themselves have higher chances to serve their patients better and also to escape burnout, or manage vicarious trauma more effectively. In relation to this, he explains that the bearing capacity of anyone, including mental practitioners, is limited but that people can tolerate enormous amounts of physical and emotional pain when supported by significant others (Nijs, 2006). Accordingly, Yalom demonstrates through his

practice how empathy and true care for the client can help them survive the darkest times (Yalom, 1989). These ideas also resonate with Frankl who, prisoner at a World War II concentration camp, decided to survive based on the hope of seeing again his beloved wife (Frankl, 1959). In Fenelon's letters, this hope, based in faith and love, relates to a transcendental and personal relationship between self and God.

Method

The explorative character of this research aims to satisfy curiosity. The questions are focused on how, what, when and where can Existential psychotherapy concepts illuminate Fenelon's writings, and thus follows a rather informal structure. The 40 letters analysed here come from the book "Let Go" published in 1973 by Whitaker House. In his introduction, Robert E. Whitaker advises that these particular letters previously printed under the title "Spiritual Letters" (no date provided) were translated by Mildred Whitney Stillman and this, her English version, has been modern paraphrased for "Let Go" to offer the 20th century reader a more accessible language (Whitaker, 1973).

The exploration, analysis and findings in this project derive from a combination of methodologies: Hermeneutics, Thematic Analysis and Constant Comparison Analysis.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics, is the art of analyzing, understanding and interpreting texts and works of art, an analytical tool of Theology, that was born from the awareness of the ambiguities that a sacred text can present. In the 19th century Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) took the term from Theology into Philosophy and developed a science of interpretation or what Gadamer considers "a system, which is the basis of all human sciences". Two exponents of Hermeneutics with opposed points of view, Heidegger (1889-1976) who insists that meaning depends on the historical context, and, Gadamer, who argues that interpretation is situational and the meaning of a text unlimited (Livingstone, 1996; Bullock & Trombley,1999).

Hermeneutics was selected as a tool to analyse and compare Fenelon's Spiritual Letters to present day Existential givens, based on Gadamer's argument against historicism, as he emphasizes that past and present are strongly connected to each other being that past is the supportive ground from which present stems (Gadamer, 1975). Thus, he sees as unnecessary the need to capture the spirit of any specific era since the supposed gap between past and present is continuously filled up by custom, tradition and the human condition per se. Therefore, the process of understanding does not merely reproduce but produces interpretations based on a continuum of change (Gadamer, 1975). Also supporting our choice of method, Lyall, holds that spoken language takes place within a world that is already shared, while written narratives open the door to worlds which are new to us, and nevertheless can be reinterpreted by each reader as they find meanings

maybe not understood by others or not even intended by the author (Lyall, 2001). It is the hope of this author that the readers of this dissertation may delight in finding heartfelt meaning in Fenelon writings.

Thematic Analysis (TA)

TA was used to define the most prevalent ideas in FSL after systematic and multiple readings of the letters one by one, every day in random order, and then altogether one after the other. Following, they were read alternatively with Existential texts (Corey, Frankl, Friedman, Gelso, Graham, Holmes, Kelsey, Maslow, Rudin, Van Deurzen-Smith, Yalom). Reading times were followed by reflection and personal introspection looking for in-depth analysis to 'understand' the data. Sometimes understanding would come during the reading or comparison processes, other times it would take days to recognize the ideas, concepts, emerging themes, or intrinsic relationships.

Constant Comparison Analysis

Constant Comparison is a combination of inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning. Categorizing and coding was undertaken in order to develop a set of groups to parallel FSL to the EHΨ's six givens. The findings lead to the construction of Tables 1 and 2. This exercise was followed by systematic alternate readings between Fenelon and Existential authors to constantly compare the ideas or themes emerging from lines or paragraphs of his letters against the Existential texts as will be presented in the Results section.

Materials – Participants

Francois de Fenelon and his Spiritual Letters (FSL)

Forty Spiritual Letters (reproduced here as Appendix A), written by Francois de Fenelon during the first half of the 17th century, and addressed to men and women living in Louis XIV's court who submitted to Fenelon's spiritual direction in search of inner development. The letters published in 1973 by Whitaker House in a paperback edition entitled "Let Go" are a modern adaptation of the translation by Mildred Whitney Stillman, previously printed under the title Spiritual Letters (nd) (Whitaker, 1973).

Fenelon

Louis XIV was the most powerful ruler in Europe, during the 17th century, thus the education of his heirs, his son the Dauphin and his grandson the Duke of Burgundy, was of the utmost importance. The King appointed two men of outstanding ability to teach the French empire future monarchs, Jacques Bossuet (1627-1704) became the Dauphin's tutor, and Francois de Fenelon (1651-1715) then aged 38, was in charge of the Duke of Burgundy's education. After tutoring the Duke for six years, Fenelon was appointed Archbishop of Cambrai and although he continued to serve as the Duke's preceptor the King's favour toward Fenelon was waning as his religious views were being considered, by influential churchmen, as dangerous and heretical. In 1697, after being harshly criticized and condemned because of his association with Madame Guyon and the Quietist movement, Fenelon was confined to his diocese (Clarke, 1977).

Fenelon was spiritually enriched and deeply influenced by Madame Guyon, who, by the time they met, was already considered of dubious reputation because of her links with Quietism and his founder Miguel de Molinos (1640-1697). Quietism was a type of mysticism based on the belief that perfection lies in the utter passivity of the soul before God, allowing it to be absorbed by the divine spirit. Such passivity requires annihilation of the will, and all actions (whether good or bad) are viewed as hindrances. Molinos considered that even resistance to temptation, was a obstacle to spiritual growth (Livingstone, 1996). Condemned by the Inquisition, both Mme Guyon and Molinos were imprisoned, the former several times, the latter for the last eleven years of his life. Dupre and Saliers (1989) believe that the sin of Quietism was its dare to be genuine and able to make deliberate decisions away from the ordinary, and they suggest that instead of condemnation Quietism should be considered a courageous attempt to perpetuate Christian spiritual tradition in a time when the world had been hit by the Enlightenment, the Reformation, and secularity.

When Fenelon and Mme Guyon first met, she was already a "controversial devotee", while he was regarded as a "seriously religious priest gifted with a brilliant mind and moving within the highest social circles (Dupre & Saliers, 1989, p. 139). The salient points of Guyon's doctrine, compatible with Christian tradition, were: First, spiritual life is a process of "disappropriation", a growing detachment that allows God to gradually take possession of the soul. Second, spiritual life is a teleological process

involving design, purpose, and meaning, thus the spirit will move from lower to higher stages (Dupre & Saliers, 1989). Mme. Guyon summarized the above in two words "humble abandon". Her spirituality and state of mind is described by Delacroix (quoted by Dupre and Saliers, 1989, pp 137-138) as follows:

> Through patient interior work and through the fundamental richness of her creative unconscious Mme. Guyon replaces discursive thinking by an inexpressible intuition which filled almost her entire mind. And since we must act to remain in accordance with God, she substitutes to voluntary and personal action an involuntary an impersonal one – which she calls passivity and which appears to her as a creative infinity. Yet this passivity expresses itself not in confused and uncoordinated movements. It is coherent and intelligent, it displays unity and finality.

Beautifully written 300 years ago and highly influenced by Quietism, Fenelon's letters appeared to be consistent with Existential psychotherapy, in the way they direct, counsel, encourage, confront, support or demand inner encounter to find solutions and invite change. These letters reveal Fenelon's insight, spiritual wisdom, and deep-rooted conviction that only through total abandonment to God real peace of mind and change may be attained (Whitaker, 1973). Humble abandonment, as a personal religious experience for Fenelon, entails immediate, direct, and intuitive knowledge of God. This relationship with the Divine is translated into a life enhanced by vitality, productivity, serenity, and joy. For Fenelon and Mme Guyon, as well as for other mystics, Price (1992) writes, once this state is reached the outside world becomes superfluous and sin impossible. Mystics claim that this "intimate union with God" and "loving knowledge of the divine" is the point where consciousness is transformed and reconfigured (Price, 1992).

Existential Psychology (EHΨ)

Being human is being aware not only of our existence but of our inevitable death. How should I live my life? What does it mean to exist? Who am I? Why am I here? What is the purpose of living? These questions arise from our awareness or consciousness. Existentialism, considered particularly by Sartre as a "philosophy of action" aims at finding answers to these human insights in order to endow the person with the right to choose, to own and to respond to life challenges (Cass, 205; McGrath, 2002). Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55) believed that each individual has the capacity to create him/herself through their own choices. He stressed the importance of individual decision and of the awareness of the limits of human existence. Another important contributor to the existential movement was Martin Heidegger (1888-1976) who coined the concepts of "inauthentic existence" (absence of responsibility for one's own life) and "authentic existence" (recognition of one's life and choices as one's own responsibility). McGrath (2002) explains that these ideas found a creative reinterpretation in Bultmann who argues that New Testament recognizes two types of human existence. First, the unredeemed existence, which is an "inauthentic" form of existence, where individuals refuse to recognize themselves for what they really are and seek to justify their existence through moral actions or material prosperity. And, opposed to this way of being, he proposes, the "authentic" redeemed existence, in which the person abandons all security created by him/herself and trusts in God. He also points that the rise of Existentialism (after the atrocities and enormous suffering caused by the Second World War) is a reflection of the importance of the subjective human experience in the modern period.

This concern with human experience is not new but pervasive in Old and New Testament and mainly in the writings of St Augustine of Hippo, St Ignatius Loyola, Meister Eckhart and many other mystics (McGrath, 2002).

Another important aspect of Existentialism, Friedman (1967) explains, is Heidegger's argument about how a common person's usual understanding is dictated by the anonymous "public" or "them", and that the prospect of individual authenticity – experienced in a state of angst or anxiety – requires distancing oneself from "them" and "resolutely" forging one's own projects and view of things. This sense of potential individuality is reinforced by the awareness of mortality, and the fact that each person's own death and the way he or she faces it, is essentially unique (Friedman, 1967). An interesting coincidence between Existentialism and Christian tradition are the various times in which Jesus distanced himself from the "public" or "them" (the crowds and even his most intimate friends) to be by himself (Mk 1:12-13, 35-37; 6:32, 46-47; 9:2-3, 30; 10:32; 14:32-42) possibly, as Heidegger expresses above, to "resolutely" forge his own projects, view things, find himself.

Apart from the awareness of death, Existentialism considers the following concepts as inherent to the human condition (Corey, 2001; Yalom 1989 & 1998, Frankl 1978)

1. Self-Awareness
2. Freedom and Responsibility
3. Existential Isolation
4. Search for Meaning
5. Existential Anxiety
6. Death Awareness

A constant comparison analysis found that Fenelon's letters can be matched with each of the above categories (See Table 2), which will be explained in the Results section.

Results

The initial investigations found six main recurrent themes in FSL:

1.	Suffering (the cross)	(10 letters)
2.	Humility and death of self	(16 " ")
3.	Hope and Faith	(3 " ")
4.	Knowledge	(5 " ")
5.	Love and Relationship with Others	(5 " ")
6.	God's will	(9 " ")

Accordingly, the forty letters were grouped under these categories, as can be seen in the first part of Table 1. However, trying to find Fenelon's specific categories within Existential texts was not highly successful. Therefore, a new approach was taken and more alternate readings of the letters and existential writers were done looking for basic similarities. A detailed constant comparison analysis of individual FSL lines or paragraphs was made again existential texts by Corey (2001), Frankl (1959, 75, 78), Friedman (1967), Graham (1986), Gelso (2004), Holmes (2005), Kelsey (1983), Maslow (1987), Oldham, Key & Yaro (1978), Rudin (1968), Van Deurzen-Smith (1988), and Yalom (1989, 1998), after which the letters were regrouped under the six Existential givens they seemed to match (see in Table 1).

Table 1

Fenelon Spiritual Letters (FSL) and Existential Psychotherapy (EHΨ) Themes and matching letters by number

Amounts of letters matching each Fenelon Theme or EHΨ's proposition					
Suffering/cross 10	Humility/Death 16	Hope & Faith 3	Knowledge 5	Love/Relationships 5	God's will 9
Self awareness 6	Freedom/Respon 6	Exist. Isolation 7	Meaning 12	Existential Angs 14	Death aware 4

Fenelon Themes	FSL #	E-H Ψ Themes	FSL #
Suffering / cross	2, 3, 4, 7, 12, 19, 26 35, 36, 37	Self awareness	4, 8, 13, 15, 20, 23, 29,
Humility / death	1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 20, 22, 23, 24, 27, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36	Freedom & Responsibility	5, 11, 23, 24, 30, 40
Hope & Faith	14, 18, 38	Existential Isolation	4, 10, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24
Knowledge	8, 15, 17, 29, 30	Meaning & Purpose	1, 9, 12, 17, 26, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 39
Love & Relationships	13, 16, 21, 28, 40	Existential anxiety	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 14, 17, 19, 22, 25, 27, 32, 37, 38
God's Will	5, 6, 17, 25, 31, 33, 34, 38, 39	Death awareness	10, 22, 35, 36

Table 1. First two columns show Fenelon most recurrent themes by letter. Second two columns show Existential Psychology givens and the corresponding Fenelon letters by number.

Once the letters were ordered by number into their corresponding FSL theme or EH Ψ given, the title of each letter was included, see Table 2. For the sake of clarity it most be said that it is not the title per se which parallels the Existential given but the content of the corresponding letter. A complete set of the letters is herewith included as "Appendix A".

Table 2

Cross-referenced FSL Themes and EH Ψ principles by letters' number and title
-NB: It is not the FSL title but the content with matches THE EH Ψ given

Fenelon Themes	FSL # & Title	E-H Ψ Themes	FSL # & Title
Suffering/Cross (SC)	2. How to bear suffering peacefully (ea) 3. The Beauty of the Cross (ea) 4. The Death of Self (sa) 7. True goodness if only reached by abandonment (ea) 12. Living by the cross & by faith (mp) 19. The cross the source of our pleasure (ea) 26. Absolute trust is the shortest road to God (mp) 35. Bearing dying takes the place of final death (da) 36. Suffering belongs to the living not to the dead (da) 37. God gives grace in proportion to our trials (mp)	Self awareness (sa)	4. The Death of Self (SC) 8. Knowledge puffeth Up; Charity edifyeth (K) 13. Despair at our imperfections is a greater obstacle than the imperfection itself (LR) 15. Our knowledge stands in the way of our becoming wise (K) 20. Do not be distressed by the revelation of self or the absence of feeling (HD) 29. Weakness preferable to strength, and practice better than knowledge (K)
Humility/Death (HD)	1. The Advantages of Humility (mp) 5. Peace comes true simplicity and obedience (fr) 6. The true source of peace is in the surrender of the will (ea) 9. We are not to choose the manner in which our blessings shall be bestowed (mp) 10. The discovery and death of self (ei) 11. The sight of our imperfections should not take away our peace (fr) 20. Do not be distressed by the revelation of self or the absence of feeling (sa) 22. The fear of death is not taken away by our own courage but by the grace of God (ea) 23. Sensitivity to reproof is the surest sign we needed (sa) 24. Only imperfection is intolerant of imperfection (fr ir) 27. The time of temptation and distress is no time to make decision (mp ea) 32. Poverty and deprivation are Jesus' way (mp) 33. The will of God our only treasure (mp) 34. Surrender is not a heroic sacrifice, but a simple sinking into the will of God (ea) 35. Bearing dying takes the place of final death (SC dn) 36. Suffering belongs to the living not to the dead (da)	Freedom & Responsibility (fr)	5. Peace comes true simplicity and obedience (GW) 11. The sight of our imperfections should not take away our peace (HD) 23. Sensitivity to reproof is the surest sign we needed (HD) 24. Only imperfection is intolerant of imperfection (HD) 30. Beware of the pride of reasoning; true guide to knowledge is love (K) 40. The circumcision of the heart (LR)
Hope & Faith (HF)	14. Pure faith sees God alone (ea) 18. True friendships are founded only in God (ei) 38. Resisting God, an effective hindrance to grace (ea)	Existential Isolation & (ei)	4. The Death of Self (sa) 10. The discovery and death of self (HD) 16. Those who injure us are to be loved and welcomed as the hand of God (LR) 17. Quietness in God our true resource (K) 18. True friendships are founded only

			in God (HF) 20. Do not be distressed by the revelation of self or the absence of feeling (HD) 21. The imperfection of others to be borne in love (LR) 24. Only imperfection is intolerant of imperfection (HD fr)
Knowledge (K)	8. Knowledge puffeth Up; Charity edifyeth (sa) 15. Our knowledge stands in the way of our becoming wise (sa) 17. Quietness in God our true resource (ei) (ea) 29. Weakness preferable to strength, (sa) and practice better than knowledge 30. Beware of the pride of reasoning; true guide to knowledge is love (sa)	Meaning & Purpose (mp)	1. The Advantages of Humility (HD) 9. We are not to choose the manner in which our blessings shall be bestowed (HD) 12. Living by the cross & by faith (SC) 17. Quietness in God our true resource (K-ir) 26. Absolute trust is the shortest road to God (SC) 27. The time of temptation and distress is no time to make decision (HD ea) 28. If you have Love, you have everything (LR) 31. The gifts of God are not to be rejected because of the channel that brings them (GW) 32. Poverty and deprivation are Jesus' way (HD) 33. The will of God our only treasure (GWHD) 34. Surrender is not a heroic sacrifice, but a simple sinking into the will of God (HD GW) 39. God speaks more effectually in the soul than to it. (GW)
Love/ Relationships (LR)	13. Despair at our imperfections is a greater obstacle than the imperfection itself (fr) 16. Those who injure us are to be loved and welcomed as the hand of God(ei) 21. The imperfection of other to be borne in love (ei) 28. If you have Love, you have everything (mp) 40. The circumcision of the heart	Existential anxiety (ea)	2. How to bear suffering peacefully (SC) 3. The Beauty of the Cross (SC) 6. The true source of peace is in the surrender of the will (HD - GW) 7. True goodness if only reached by abandonment (SC) 14. Pure faith sees God alone (HF) 17. Quietness in God our true resource (K, GW) 19. The cross the source of our pleasure (SC) 22. The fear of death is not taken away by our own courage but by the grace of God (HD) 25. We should listen to God and not to self (GW) 27. The time of temptation and distress is no time to make decision (HD ea) 32. Poverty and deprivation are Jesus' way (HD) 37. God gives grace in proportion to our trials (SC) 38. Resisting God, an effective hindrance to grace (GW)
God's Will CJG Neurosis (GW)	5. Peace comes true simplicity and obedience (fr) 6. The true source of peace is in the surrender of the will (HD) (ea) 17. Quietness in God our true resource (ea) 25. We should listen to God and not to self (ea) 31. The gifts of God are not to be	Death awareness (da)	10. The discovery and death of self (HD) 22. The fear of death is not taken away by our own courage but by the grace of God (ea) (HD) 35. Bearing dying takes the place of final death (SC HD) 36. Suffering belongs to the living not to the death (DH)

	rejected because of the channel that brings them (mp) 34. Surrender is not a heroic sacrifice, but a simple sinking into the will of God (HD GW) 38. Resisting God, an effective hindrance to grace (ea) 39. God speaks more effectually in the soul than to it. (fr)		

Table 2. To each Fenelon title was added a code to show where in the EHΨ's do they belong to and vice versa, eg letter 2. *How to bear suffering peacefully*, listed under Fenelon's theme "Suffering and the Cross", has an (ea) meaning that it is grouped under EHΨ's (Existential Anxiety). And if we looked in Existential Anxiety group for this same letter we will find the code SC meaning that it belongs under Fenelon's Suffering and the Cross theme.

-NB: It is not the FSL title but the content with matches THE EH Ψ given

Parallels between Existential Psychology (EH Ψ) and Fenelon Spiritual Letters (FSL)

Because of space limits not all the similarities found in each Letter compared to Existential thinking can be included here. Although discrepancies between the cores of FSL and EHΨ may exist, this research has concentrated in finding similarities between them, which, of course might render this investigation as partial or one-sided. Dissimilarities are all in all possible but to go in-depth them could take another study and would distract the focus of this research. Nonetheless, what seems to be the core difference between Fenelon and Existentialism will be presented in the Discussion section. Following are various examples where those Existentialist givens considered as inherent to the human condition seem to parallel lines or paragraphs from Fenelon letters:

1. Self-Awareness
   (FSL # 4, 8, 13, 15, 20, 29)
2. Freedom and Responsibility
   (FSL # 5, 11, 23, 24, 30, 40)
3. Existential Isolation
   (FSL # 4, 10, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24)
4. Search for Meaning
   (FSL # 1, 9, 12, 17, 26, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34, 39)
5. Existential Anxiety
   (FSL # 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 14, 17, 19, 22, 25, 27, 32, 37, 38)
6. Awareness of Death and Nonbeing
   (FSL # 10, 22, 35, 36)

Each concept will be explained and paralleled with similar ideas identified in FSL. Fenelon's texts are centered, written in a smaller font and followed by, what I have considered, their Existential parallel. Looking to respect and be as close as possible to the intention of each Existential author their writings have been copied verbatim and referenced accordingly, while paraphrasing has been kept to a minimum to avoid my own biases and hoping to keep the mirroring game as clear as possible.

1. Self-Awareness

Awareness is a subjective, inner state of being alert, conscious or cognizant of something. Awareness entails a diversity of mental processes which can go from allowing the person to be "aware" of the presence of a dim light to be "aware" of the underlying psychodynamic factors which motivate action (Reber, 1995), emotions or feelings . Self awareness, is the human capacity to discover ourselves, to understand the significance of our existence, and based upon reflection and knowledge of ourselves be

able to make choices, take responsibility of our actions, and own the consequences of who we are and what we do. This Self-awareness in Existentialism is for Fenelon the Death of Self. Fenelon's conception of "self" is very close to our present understanding of Ego and its needs, where the death of ego-centredness or neuroticism is painful and difficult but necessary to expand self-awareness and promote personal growth through self-knowledge and change.

> **Letter 4**
> **The Death of Self**
> Whatever spiritual knowledge or feeling we may have, they are all a delusion if they do not lead us to the real and constant practice of dying to self. And it is true that we do not die without suffering.

Parallel: "We learn to put death out of mind; we distract ourselves; we transform it into something positive (passing on, going home, rejoining God, peace at last) we deny it with sustaining myths. (Yalom, 1989, p. 5)."

> The death of self must be voluntary, and it can only be accomplished as far as you allow.

Parallel: "We can choose either to expand or to restrict our consciousness. (Corey, 2001, p. 146)."

> **Letter 8**
> **"Knowledge Puffeth Up; Charity Edifyeth"**
> It is not at all surprising that you have a strong ambition to move ahead in spiritual things, and to be closely acquainted with well-known Christians. It is very flattering to self when it can gain some esteem by being very religious, and it eagerly seeks such esteem. Oh, how careful we need to be about our motives! (…) Let's learn to talk less and do more without caring whether anyone sees us or not.

Parallel: "They begin to see that their identity is anchored in someone else's definition of them; that is, they are seeking approval and confirmation of their being in others instead of looking to themselves for affirmation (Corey, 2001, p. 146)."

> **Letter 13**
> **Despair at Our Imperfections Is a Greater Obstacle Than the Imperfection Itself**
> Do not be overly concerned about you defects. (…) When we look at our defects in peace through the spirit of Jesus, they vanish before the majesty of His love. But when we concentrate on our defects, forgetting that Jesus loves us, we become restless, the presence of God is interrupted, and the flow of God's love is hindered. The humiliation we feel about our own defects can often be a greater fault than the original defect itself.

Parallel: "They are able to accept their limitations yet still feel worthwhile, for they understand that they do not need to be perfect to feel worthy (Corey, 2001, p. 146)."

> **Letter 15**
> **Our Knowledge Stands in the Way of our Becoming Wise**
> Live in quiet piece, my dear young lady, without any thought for the future. For only God knows if you have a future in this world. (…) Keep on with the good things you are doing. (…) But be careful of distractions and the desire to do too many things at once. Above all things, be faithful to the present moment, doing one thing at a time, and you will receive all the grace you need.

Parallel: "They come to realize that they are failing to live in the present moment because of preoccupation with the past, planning for the future, or trying to do too many things at once (Corey, 2001, p. 146)."

> You will learn most in times of deprivation, deep meditation and silence. It is here where you will learn to renounce your own selfish spirit and to love humility, obscurity, weakness and submission. These things so despised by the world are the accomplished teacher of all truths.

Parallel: "Existentialists regard the development of the self as the responsibility of the individual. Through their actions, persons create their own distinctive identity. Existential isolation arises from an awareness that this task can only be carried out single-handedly and autonomously (Holmes, 2005, p. 104)."

> **Letter 20**
> **Do not be distressed by the revelation of Self or the absence of feeling**
> Back in those "good old days", nothing seemed impossible to you. You said with Peter, "It is good for us to be here!" But it is often with us as it was with him. We say this because we don't know what we are talking about (Matt 9:56). In our moments of enjoyment we feel as if we could do anything. And in times of temptation and discouragement, we think we can do nothing. And both ideas are wrong.

Parallel: "The assistance provided (*by the counsellor*) is aimed at finding direction in life by gaining insight into its workings. The process is one of reflection on one's goals and intentions and on one's general attitude towards living. The focus is therefore on life itself, rather than on one's personality (Van Deurzen-Smith, 1988, p. 21)."

> So do not be surprised at again finding yourself becoming sensitive, impatient, haughty, and self-willed. You must be made to understand that this is your natural disposition, and without God's grace, you will never be anything different.

Parallel: "(it) … endorse the idea that human beings never relinquish, or totally resolve, their childhood issues, and therefore, as adults, will continue to be neurotic to some degree or other (Holmes, 2005, p. 14)."

> **Letter 23**
> **Sensitivity to reproof is the surest sign we needed it.**
> The reproofs of others, harsh and unfeeling as they may be, seem to be less than we really deserve. If we find ourselves rebelling and getting irritable, we should understand that this irritability under correction is worse than our other faults put together. So the more correction hurts, the more we see how necessary it is.

Parallel: As we increase our awareness of the choices available to us we also increase our sense of responsibility for the consequence of these choices (Van Deurzen-Smith, 1988).

> **Letter 29**
> **Weakness preferable to Strength, and Practice better than Knowledge**
> But you need to understand that you cannot become strong until first you are aware of your weakness. It is amazing how strong we can become when we begin to understand what weaklings we are! It is in weakness that we can admit our mistakes and correct ourselves while confessing them. It is in weakness that our minds are open to enlightment from other.

Parallel: "Existentialist psychotherapy (…) is principally concerned with addressing and illuminating the client's subjective experience. (…) to offer the means for individuals to examine, confront, clarify and reasses their understanding of life (Holmes, 2005, p 106)".

> Yet, we must be patient with ourselves (but never flattering), unceasingly using every means of overcoming selfish thoughts and the inconsistencies we have within us. But we need to let this spiritual work be done in us quietly and peacefully, not as though it could all be accomplished in a single day

Parallel: "The experiential activity of *Befindlichkeit* is clearly salient to the phenomenological method. As Van Deurzen states, it is a tool, which she employs after the session to improve her

own self-understanding, I would add, presumably also to reconsider the relationship between her own biases and her clinical work, as a form of Existential self-analysis (Holmes, 2005, p 114)."

> And we will be as easily captured as a bird whose leg is tied to the ground. He might seem to be free. If the string is delicate enough, you might not even see it. And if it is long enough, the bird might be able to do a little flying. But, nevertheless, he is a prisoner. I hope you see what I am trying to say. Because the freedom that I will covet for you to enjoy is far more valuable than all you are fearful of losing.

Parallel: "Clients learn that in many ways they are keeping themselves prisoner by some of their past decisions, and they realize that they can make new decisions. They see how they are trading the security of dependence for the anxieties that accompany choosing for themselves (Corey, 2001, p. 146)."

2. Freedom and Responsibility

A core theme in Existentialism is freedom, life constantly presents us with multiple alternatives from where to choose and transform our destiny. However this freedom brings along responsibility over the way we direct our lives and the consequences (good or bad) of our choices (Yalom, 1989). It is also possible to avoid reality and responsibility through our own ego-defenses (eg., rationalization, displacement, sublimation, denial, etc.,) or "bad faith" a concept developed by the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) which refers to inauthenticity or the lack of accepting personal responsibility. Examples of statements of bad faith are: "This is the way I am and I cannot not change" or "Its not my fault, I do what I do because my

parents or family were this or did that to me". These examples seem consistent with the following letters:

> **Letter 11**
> **The Sight of Our Imperfections Should Not Take Away our Peace**
> There is something about your suffering which is very subtle and perhaps hard for you to understand. (…) in your inmost soul it is the old self which keeps causing you so much trouble. So if you would truly derive profit from the discovery of your imperfections. I would suggest two things. First of all, never try to justify yourself before God. And second, do not condemn yourself.

Parallel: "Existential guilt is being aware of having evaded a commitment, or having chosen not to choose. This is the guilt we experience when we do not live authentically. It results from allowing others to define us or to make our choices for us. Sartre said: "We are our choices" (quoted by Corey, 2001 p 147)."

> **Letter 30**
> **Beware of the Pride of Reasoning; the True Guide to Knowledge is Love**
> If we allow the world to hinder us, then our professed freedom is only a word.

Parallel: A free existence implies engagement and commitment in a never-ending line of alternatives that make us in Sartre's words "condemned to freedom" and constantly confronted by new choices as we stop being creations of others to become owners of ourselves. (Yalom 1989).

> Happy is he who is a free man, but only the Son of God can make us really free. He can do it by breaking every fetter. And how does He do that? By that sword that divides husband and wife, father and son, brother and sister. There is not a person in the world who can be allowed to hinder us from doing the will of God.

Parallel: "An inauthentic mode of existence consists of lacking awareness of personal responsibility for our lives and passively assuming that our existence is largely controlled by external forces. In contrast, living authentically implies being true to our own evaluation of what is valuable existence for ourselves (Corey, 2001)."

> I am giving you this advice because your most influential friends are such dry, reasoning, critical people that they hinder you in your inner life. Even though you may have resolved to not take spiritual advice from them, yet their endless reasonings about unanswerable questions would, ever so imperceptibly, draw you away from God and finally plunge you into the depths of unbelief. I am pointing out this danger because of the reasoning kind of person you were before your conversion. Habits of long standing are easily revived. And the subtle pressures which cause us to revert to our original position are very difficult to detect, because they seem so natural to us.

Parallel: "The therapist assists the clients in discovering how they avoid freedom and encourages them to take risks. Not to do so is to cripple clients and make them neurotically dependent on the therapist. Therapists need to teach clients that they can explicitly accept that they have choices, even though they may have devoted most of their life to evading them (Corey, 2001, p. 147-148)".

> **Letter 40**
> **The circumcision of the Heart**
> Our eagerness to serve others often arises from mere natural generosity instead of a real Christian love. Sometimes, serving others seems like a good way for self to convince itself of how good it really is. But service which does not come out of real love will soon turn sour.

Parallel: "While there is no solution to existential isolation, therapists must discourage false solutions. One's efforts to escape isolation can sabotage one's relationships with other people (Yalom, 1989, p 11)"

3. Existential Isolation

A realization of awareness is the fact that we are subject to loneliness, meaninglessness, emptiness and isolation. Paradoxically, our human nature compels us to live in relationship with others.

> **Letter 4**
> **The Death of Self**
> You must be willing to yield to the will of God whenever He decides to remove from you all of the props on which you have leaned. Sometimes you must give up even your most spiritual friends, if they are props

Parallel: "Human beings tend to find this realization too distressing to endure, and are prone instead to deny this state of affairs by immersing themselves in the illusory belief that their intimate relationships can protect them from knowing about the isolation that is firmly anchored to human existence (Holmes, 2005, p 104)."

> **Letter 24**
> **Only imperfection is intolerant of imperfection**
> It seems to me that you need to be a little more big-hearted about the imperfections of other people. (…) Nobody will deny that the imperfections of others cause us a lot of inconvenience! (…) But it will be enough if you are willing to be patient.

Parallel: "If we are unable to tolerate ourselves when we are alone, how can we expect anyone else to be enriched by our company? Before we can have any solid relationship with another, we must have a relationship with ourselves. We must learn to listen to ourselves. We have to be able to stand alone before we can truly stand beside another (Corey, 2001, p.149)".

> (…) Do not allow yourself to turn away from people because of their imperfections. (…) If there is one mark of perfection, it is that it can tolerate imperfections of others. It is able to adjust.

Parallel: "We must give of ourselves to others and be concerned with them. Existentialist writers discuss loneliness, uprootedness, and alienation, which can be seen as the failure to develop ties with others and with nature (Corey, 2001, p 147)."

> **Letter 16**
> **Those Who Injure Us Are to Be Loved and Welcomed as the Hand of God**
> Don't allow yourself to be upset by what people are saying about you. Let the world talk. All you need to be concerned about is doing the will of God. As for what people want, you can't please everybody, and it isn't worth the effort.

Parallel: "The trouble with so many of us is that we have sought directions, answers, values, and beliefs from the important people in our world. Rather than trusting ourselves to search within and find our own answers to the conflicts in our life, we sell out by becoming what others expect of us (Corey, 2001, p 148)."

> **Letter 10**
> **The Discovery and Death of Self**
> To expose self-love in this way without its mask is the most mortifying punishment that can ever be inflicted. We no longer see self as wise, prudent, polite, composed, and courageous in sacrificing itself for others. It is no longer the old self-love whose diet consisted in the belief that it had need of nothing, and deserved everything. It weeps from the rage that it has wept. It cannot be stilled, and refuses all comfort, because its poisonous character has been detected. (…) It says with Job, "For the thing I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me" (Job 3:25). For it is that which it fears most that will be its destruction.

Parallel: "We struggle to discover, to create, and to maintain the core deep within our being. One of the greatest fears of clients is that they will discover that there is no core, no self, no substance and that they are merely reflections of everyone's expectations of them. A client may say: "My fear is that I'll discover I'm nobody, that there really is nothing to me. I'll find out that I'm an empty shell, hollow inside, and nothing will exist if I shed my masks" (Corey, 2001, p. 149)."

> So you see why I rejoice in your state of weakness. This is what you needed – to behold a self-love defeated, sensitive, impure, and exposed for what it really is. And now all you have to do is quietly look at it as it is. The moment you can do this, self will disappear.

In a very Existentialist fashion Fenelon seems to be asking to "stay with the feeling, because "the problem is the solution" (Oldham, et al, 1978).

Parallel: "Existential therapists may begin by asking their clients to allow themselves to intensify the feeling. (…) Once clients have demonstrated the courage to recognize this fear, to put it into words and share it, it does not seem so overwhelming (Corey, 2001, 149)."

4. Search for Meaning

A constant search for meaning is a characteristic of human awareness, living with purpose based on this meaning is a feature of self-actualization. Frankl, as a concentration camp prisoner in WWII, learnt that everything can be taken from a human being, except the freedom to choose his/her attitude toward the realities of life. And that meaning can be found in our actions and values, and in the acceptance of suffering as a reality of life. In Christian Faith, and for Fenelon the concept of the Cross or suffering brings meaning and purpose when seen as a challenge and a victory over one-self, Soelle, declares: "The willingness to suffer is the utmost expression of human freedom (Soelle, 1992, p. 466)". Fenelon tells us:

> **Letter # 12**
> **Living by the Cross and by Faith**
> We have crosses to bear everyday. And it is sweet to know that the heaviest cross can be borne in peace.

Parallel: Frankl declares that Western cultures, especially the American, highly emphasize the importance of "being happy" and see "unhappiness/depression" as a symptom of maladjustment. "This misconception robs the sufferer from the opportunity to consider affliction ennobling rather than degrading, leaving him/her not only unhappy but ashamed of being unhappy (Frankl, 1959, p. 117)."

> However, there may be times when it seems that you do not have the strength even to bear it (the cross) or to drag it. All you can do is fall down beneath it, overwhelmed and exhausted.

Frankl, like Fenelon, believes that suffering is unavoidable, and that in accepting the challenge to suffer life yields a meaning that lasts until the end (Frankl, 1959).

> I pray that God may spare you as much as possible in proportioning your suffering, not that God delights in seeing us suffer, but He knows that we need this as much as we need our daily bread. And only God knows how much we need to accomplish His purposes in our lives. So what we must do is live by faith and live by the cross.

Similar to Fenelon, Frankl considers that man cannot live in "eternal homeostasis", free from tensions, but rather strive and struggle for a freely chosen and worthwhile goal (Frankl, 1959).

> For we are confident that God, with His true compassion, proportions our trials to the amount of strength that He has committed to us within. Living by this kind of faith demands the deepest kind of death to self.

Frankl tells us that to strengthen a frail arch, builders will join the parts together more firmly by increasing the laid on it. And, as Fenelon above, he advises therapists not be afraid to create some sound tension on the client when reorienting them in their search for meaning in life (Frankl, 1959).

> **Letter # 16**
> **Those Who Injure Us are to Be Loved and Welcomed as the Hand of God**
> I certainly sympathize with you in all of your troubles, but I can do nothing else for you except pray that God will comfort you.

Parallel: "… by refusing to give easy solutions or answers, existential therapists confront clients with the reality that they alone must find their own answers (Corey, 2001 p150)."

> **Letter # 16**
> **Those Who Injure Us are to Be Loved and Welcomed as the Hand of God**
> As to the letter regarding you family background, I think you should lay this matter before God alone, and ask Him to be merciful to the one who wants to hurt you. Even though this is a most humiliating experience to go through, it is best for you to allow yourself to be humble. Quietness and peace during humiliation are the manifestations of Jesus in the soul.

Parallel: Frankl stresses that: we are responsible for our lives, our actions, and our failures to take action and, like Fenelon, he believes that past events cannot determine what we freely choose to be. In this regard, Frankl tell us a little story: "Instead of possibilities, I have realities in my past, not only the reality of work done and of love loved, but of sufferings bravely suffered. These sufferings are the things I am most proud of, and these are things which cannot inspire envy (Frankl, 1959, p. 125)".

> **Letter 7**
> **True Goodness is Only Reached by Abandonment**
> Evil circumstances are changed into good when they are received with an enduring trust in the love of God, while good circumstances may be changed into evil when we become attached to them through the love of self. Nothing in us or around us is truly good until we become detached from the world and totally abandoned to God.

Parallel: "Creating new meaning, Logotherapy is designed to help clients find a meaning in life. The therapist's functions is not to tell clients what their particular

meaning in life should be but to point out that they can discover meaning even in suffering. This view holds that the tragic and negative aspects of life can be turned into human achievement by the stand an individual takes in the face of it)Corey, 2001, pp 150-1)."

> **Letter 17**
> **Quietness in God Our True Resource**
> As the saying goes, "Let the water flow beneath the bridge." You can't change men from being men. People will always be weak, vain, unreliable, unfair, hypocritical, and arrogant. The world will always be worldly. And you cannot change it. People will follow their own inclinations and habits. And since you cannot recast their personalities, the best course of action is to let them be what they are and bear with them.

Parallel: Frankl believes that people faced by pain, guilt, despair, and death can challenge their despair and overcome it by finding meaning and purpose (Frankl, 1959).

> Do not allow yourself to be troubled and perplexed when you see people being unreasonable and unjust. Rest in peace in the bosom of God. He sees it all more clearly than you do, and yet He permits it. So be content to do whatever you feel you should, quietly and gently and don't worry about anything else.

Parallel: Existential meaning is not something that we can directly search for and find. Paradoxically, says Yalom (1989), the more rationally we seek it, the more it will evade us. Meaning has to be pursued obliquely, by engagement and commitment to life, by creating, loving, working, and being authentic (Yalom, 1989; Frankl 1978).

5. Existential Anxiety

Existential Anxiety is an inherent part of being human, it stems from the individual's fight for survival. Existential therapists differentiate between normal and neurotic anxiety, normal anxiety is an element of life preservation and affirmation as well as the potential drive for inner growth (Yalom 1998). While, Rudin (1968) says, neurotic anxiety is a symptom of psychic stagnation, compensation mechanisms, denial and represion. Neurosis is an attempt to: live with a deeply hidden and nagging conflict, to master a life-situation, or to make up for what the individual senses as a weakness within (Rudin, 1968).

> **Letter 10**
> **The Discovery and Death of Self**
> Though it sounds strange to say it I am rejoicing that God has reduced you to a state of weakness. Your ego can neither be convinced not forced into submission by any other means; it is always finding secret lines of supply from your own courage' it is always discovering impenetrable retreats in your own cleverness. It was hidden from your eyes while it fed upon the subtle poison of an apparent generosity, as you constantly sacrificed yourself for others.

Parallel: "The neurotic seeks a way out of a psychic dead-end street. In his very depths he believes in an answer to his seemingly insoluble problem, and he tries desperately to find a way to freedom (Rudin, 1968, p. 203)."

> **Letter 19**
> **The Cross a Source of Our Pleasure**
> It is self which is always exaggerating our troubles and making us think that they are bigger than they are. But pay no attention to the complaints of self. A cross carried in simplicity, without the interference of self adding to the weight of it, is not really so bad.

Parallel: "Only one who views this exhausting strength-sapping struggle of the neurotic in a positive and understanding way and with the same attitude makes his first evaluations of it can hope to find access to the soul of the neurotic and to the deeply buried roots of his misery (Rudin, 1968, pp 203-4)."

> **Letter 2**
> **How to Bear Suffering Peacefully**
> But usually we want to drive a bargain with God. We would at least like to suggest some limits so that we can see an end to our suffering. (…) Because the stubborn clinging to life which makes the cross necessary in the first place, also tends us to reject that cross – at least in part. So we have to go over the same ground again and again. (…) We end up suffering greatly, but to very little purpose.

Parallel: "Neurosis by itself fails to give a satisfactory answer to the problem of the neurotic individual. (…) On the contrary drives him into a *circulus vitiosus* of instinct denial and ersatz satisfactions which shrinks more and more into a narrow, stiffling prison (Rudin, 1968, p. 204)."

On the other hand, Existentialism considers that normal anxiety is an appropriate response to a life events, and that this kind of anxiety should not to be repressed but use as the drive and motivation to change.

> **Letter 17**
> **Quietness in God Our True Resource**
> When it comes to accomplishing things for God, you will find that high aspirations, enthusiastic feelings, careful planning and being able to express yourself well are not worth very much. The important thing is absolute surrender to God.

Parallel: Neurotic anxiety, in contrast to existential anxiety, grows out of proportion and awareness, and it tends to immobilize the person through neurotic defensive reactions (Rudin, 1968).

> Living in this blessed way involves a continual death which is known to very few. (…) A single word spoken to another person from this restful, abandoned position will do more to change circumstances than all our most eager and carefully planned schemes.

Existential therapy builds up from the basis that human beings are driven toward actualization and growth, and that if they accept themselves for what they are in the present, without imposing judgments or 'shoulds' they can begin to think, feel and act differently (Corey, 2001). Thus, moving towards change and a maturity that makes the person take responsibility for what he/she is and does, and outgrow dependency in search of autonomy (Gelso, 2004).

> **Letter # 38**
> **Resisting God, an Effective Hindrance to Grace**
> Down deep in your heart I believe you know what Gods demands of you, but you are resisting Him. And this is the cause of all your distress.

Parallel: Resistance to contact is a defense that prevents the person from experiencing the present in a full and real way. Contact is necessary for change and growth to occur. (Gelso, 2004).

> You are beginning to think that it is impossible for you to do what God requires. But recognize this for what it is: a temptation to give up hope. So open up you heart to the riches of God's grace.
>
> (A) You are now so locked up within yourself that you only do not have the power to do what is required of you, but you do not even desire to have it.
> B) You actually seem to be afraid of what might happen if you open up to God's grace in this situation.

Parallels: This is Fenelon's approach to "unfinished business". A) Unfinished business seek closure, when this is not achieved the individual may suffer an oppression of energy which will bring in self-defeating ways. B) Or will keep the person stuck between anxiety and weariness (Gelso 2004, Oldham, Key & Starak,1978).

> **Letter 5**
> **Peace comes through Simplicity and Obedience**
> Learn to cultivate peace. And you can do this by learning to turn a deaf ear to your own ambitious thoughts. Or haven't you learned that the strivings of the human mind not only impair the health of your body, but also bring dryness to the soul. Do you think that God can speak in the midst of such inner confusion as you permit by that endless, hurrying parade of thoughts going through your mind? Be quiet, and he will soon be heard.

Parallel: "When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion (eg depression or anxiety), it is usually preceded by a number of unhelpful self-statements and thoughts. We call these "unhelpfull thinking styles". One of the things we have noticed is that people use unhelpfull thinking styles as an automatic habit. It happens out of our awarens. When a person consistntly and constantly uses some of these styles of thinking (mental filter, jumping to conclusions, personalisation, catastrophising, black & white thinking, shoulding and musting, overgeneralisation, labeling, emotional reasoning, magnificatioin and minimisation) they can often cause themselves a great deal of emotional distress (Nathan, P., Rees, C., Lim, L., & Smith, L., 2007)".

> **Letter 14**
> **Pure Faith Sees God Alone**
> Do not worry about the future. It makes no sense to worry if God loves you and has taken care of you. (…) There are two peculiar characteristics of pure faith. It sees God behind all the blessings and imperfects works which tend to conceal Him, and it holds the soul in a state of continued suspense. Faith seems to keep us constantly up in the air, never quite certain of what is going to happen in the future; never quite able to touch a foot to solid ground.

Parallel: "Many clients who seek counselling want solutions that will enable them to eliminate anxiety. Although attempts to avoid anxiety by creating the illusion that there is security in life may help us cope with the unknown, we are deceiving ourselves when we thing that we have found fixed security. (…) Opening up to new life, however, means opening up to anxiety (Corey, 2001, 152)."

> This moment by moment dependence, this dark, unseeing peacefulness of the soul under the utter uncertainty of the future, is a true martyrdom which takes place silently and without any stir. It is God's way of bringing a slow death to self.

Parallel: "Meaninglessness: The existentialists conceive of man having to create his own world in an otherwise unstructured universe, yet remain entirely alone within it then die. Such a process appears to be quite pointless, and herein lies the absurdity or meaninglessness of existence. Man, an apparently meaning-seeking creature, is unable to explain his own being, and this often gives rise to despair. (…) The problem of contemporary man is that the meanings formerly provided by religion, education, and family life have been eroded (Graham, 1986, p 71)."

6. Death awareness

Existentialists hold that awareness of death can enhance the person's life if on account of it the person assigns higher value to the present and decides to live in the hear and now, instead of remaining stuck in the past or longing for the future. Awareness brings the ability to grasp the reality of the future and therefore our unavoidable death. A confrontation with mortality can be a life changing experience which may bring meaning and purpose (Yalom, 1989). The paradoxical thinking of Fenelon is clear in his allusion to Death, as we see in the following excerpt:

> **Letter 36**
> **Suffering belongs to the Living not to the Dead**
> Many are deceived into thinking that the death of self is the cause of all the agony they feel. But that which is dead does not agonize. The more finally and completely we die to self, the less pain we experience. Death is only painful to he who resists it. (…) Self-love fights against death, like a sick man in his last struggle. But regardless of the protests of self, we must die inwardly as well as outwardly.

Parallel: "When we try to escape from the reality of our imminent death, life loses its meaning and becomes purposeless. But if we realize that we are mortal, we know that we do not have an eternity to complete our projects and that each present moment is crucial. Our awareness of death is the source of zest for life and creativity (Corey, 2001, p 163)".

> **Letter 22**
> **The Fear of Death is not taken away by our own courage but by the Grace of God**
> Nothing humbles us more effectively than trouble thoughts about death. And in the midst of such meditations, we often find ourselves wondering whatever happened to all the faith and assurance we thought we had.

> (…) This is the crucible of humiliation in which our faith is ground down and tested, in which we see again our own weaknesses and unworthiness.

Parallel: "The recognition of death plays a significant role in psychotherapy, for it can be the factor that helps us transform a stale mode of living into a more authentic one (Yalom, 1998, p. 184)".

> **Letter 35**
> **Bearing Dying takes the place of Final Death**
> We Christians must bear our crosses. In my opinion, self is the greatest cross of them all! (...) If we surrender and die to self every day of our lives, there won't be much to do on the last day of our lives. The uncertainties of death will cause no fear when our day comes, if we do not allow these uncertainties to be exaggerated by the worries of self-love. Be patient with your own weaknesses, and be willing to accept help from your neighbour. You will find out in the end, that these little daily deaths will completely destroy the pain of our final dying!

Parallel: "Those who fear death also fear life. If we affirm life and live in the present as fully as possible, however, we will not be obsessed with the end of life (Corey, 2001, p. 153)".

Discussion

Following we will discuss one by one each Existential given (Self-Awareness, Freedom and Responsibility, Existential Isolation, Meaning, Existential Anxiety, and Death Awareness) and their similarities with Fenelon's letters.

1. Self Awareness

Existential Psychotherapy's first goal is to help clients gain awareness of what and how they are, experience and do. This self-awareness is expected to promote change. A transformation based on difficult and painful work that demands insight, reflection, self-acceptance, knowledge of the environment, responsibility for choices, and the ability to make contact with self and others (Yalom 1989). As self-awareness expands so does freedom and the opportunities to develop potential, to take responsibility, and to own the consequences upon self, others, and the environment. For Fenelon self-awareness is gained through the "death of self", this is a process of self-knowledge which allows the individual to recognize and destroy egocentric/neurotic needs as well as ego-defenses (introjection, projection, confluence, etc.). This self-awareness is gained through self-examination, reflection, insight, and most importantly by "a humble surrender" of the will (ego-necessities and/or neurotic needs). It requires patience, courage, faith, humility, understanding and honest acceptance of ourselves and our human limitations. Deeply different from Existentialism, Christian tradition puts especial trust in a third agent, God. Through his letters Fenelon emphasizes once and again how recognizing and defeating self, through and with the agency (grace) of God, brings ownership, responsibility, and freedom as the person becomes a new creation.

2. Freedom and Responsibility

Existential therapists propose that by taking responsibility, living in the "here and now", and accepting who and how the person really is, the individual self-generates a freedom that brings along the drive and creative potential to self-actualize (Gelso 2004). This Existential understanding is similar to Fenelon's concept of spiritual growth characterized by enhanced vitality, productivity, serenity, joy, and inner freedom as a result of the death of the self.

Another similarity with Existential thinking is the idea that Yalom (1998) borrows from Heidegger to explain what Fenelon and Christian tradition define as "the world". Yalom tells us that Heidegger found two fundamentals ways of being, the first is a state of "forgetfulness", the second a state of "mindfulness". Forgetfulness is living in the world of things, immersed in the everyday distractions, where "the person is "leveled down" absorbed in "idle chatter", lost in the "they", his/her freedom surrendered to the everyday world (Yalom, 1998, p 186). In this line of thought, Fenelon, 300 years ago, writes: *If we allow the world to hinder us, then our professed freedom is only a word* (Let. 30).

Yalom (1998) explains "mindfulness" as a state where the individual is able to feel awe and to marvel at the existence of things, to be in a harmonious relationship with self, others, and nature; owning and being responsible for his/he actions, feelings and consequences. In Christian tradition and for Fenelon this idea describes a close relationship with God. Price (1992) writes that when this state is reached the outward

world becomes superfluous and sin is impossible, and that this "intimate union with God" and "loving knowledge of the divine" is the point where consciousness is transformed and reconfigured (Price, 1992). Freedom gained through ownership and responsibility is for Fenelon "renouncing to the world" and dying to self (ego necessities, neurotic needs).

3. Existential Isolation and Relationship with Others

Although our human nature compels us to live in relationship with others at the same time freedom and responsibility bring independence and an increased awareness of our loneliness, meaninglessness, emptiness and existential isolation. The individual responsibility to create and own him/herself digs an abyss between self and others, and a sense of isolation that not even in the company of the most loved and intimate ones can be filled up (Yalom, 1989; Graham, 1986). In Fenelon's thought this gap and this loneliness are requisites to spiritual growth.

Self-actualization whether from an Existentialist or Fenelon's point of view, can be a long and daunting journey, Christian theologian Paul Tillich (1952) states that it takes courage to learn how to live from within. Living from the inside is forgetting about "the world", is being mindful and authentic, is exchanging the egocentric need to control for the dare to be in faith and trust.

Faith and God are Christian concepts upon which Fenelon bases inner freedom. In Existential understanding faith could be considered as the "freedom to dare". To find or create our personal identity is a journey full of challenges and risks, it demands patience and courage and complete understanding that no one can make our life choices for us, no one can change us, and neither can we change anyone (Besserman, 1994). Frankl (1959) in a display of courage, surrender, and trust, after his experiences as a concentration camp prisoner, proposes that when an external situation cannot be changed then we are challenged to change ourselves. This attitude towards fate was his number one tool to rise above the fear, the isolation, and the aberrations of human cruelty. His weakness made him strong, and his death of self made him survive. The annulment of his ego-necessities is the source of his compassion, good faith, and love as he expressed in an interview: "no matter how much we have been hurt, nothing gives us the right to hurt others (Frankl, 1968)." This is the ultimate example of self-responsibility, self-ownership, and freedom.

Relationships with Others

A given of Existentialism is responsibility towards self and others. Buber believes that love is an *I* taking responsibility for a *you* and that people become authentic when they decide to take a stand for love in relation to others (Vermes, 1988). As a paradox of existence, and although alone in essence, we still are gregarious beings, seeking for

belonging, closeness, and connectedness with others, close to Buber's thought Fenelon suggests how to relate to others in his Letter 24,

> *It seems to me that you need to be a little more big-hearted about the imperfection of other people. (…) But it will be enough if you are willing to be patient with imperfections, whether they be serious or not so serious. Do not allow yourself to turn away from people because of their imperfections.*

4. Search for Meaning

Opposed to classical psychoanalysis, Existential therapists like Frankl, do not hold a deterministic view where the person is restricted by past events, irrational drives or unconscious forces, but they understand challenging situations and suffering as an opportunity in the here and now to find meaning and purpose in life (Aanstoos, 1996). As a prisoner in Auschwitz and Dachau concentration camps, Viktor E. Frankl observed and experienced suffering and challenges, and through them he realized that salvation (survival and growth) can be achieved by what he considers the highest goal a human being can aspire is inner freedom (Frankl, 1959). Frankl's personal suffering was never an obstacle to growth but the source of meaning and purpose which nurture his resilience and will to freedom within the worst of circumstances. His conception of suffering is clearly stated by Soelle. "The willingness to suffer is the utmost expression of human freedom (1992, p. 466)". This is a constant invitation that Fenelon makes to accept suffering (the cross) as a purposeful and meaningful to the death of self.

On the other hand, he also presents suffering as a consequence of selfish ego-needs, and states (Letters 10 and 11) that this kind suffering comes from the ego (neurosis) and therefore no matter how much pain the person goes through self-awareness or change are not attained. This is consistent with the idea of neuroticism, in regard to the inability that the neurotic has to let go, to take a leap of faith, and lose the secondary gains, eg self-victimization (Rudin, 1968).

5. Existential Anxiety

Existential angst is inherent to being human and stems from the individual's fight for survival. Existential therapists differentiate between normal and neurotic anxiety, and they see the former as a potential source of growth (Yalom, 1989). Fenelon equates existential anxiety to a life in faith and trust in God as he writes in his Letter 20:

> … pure faith (…) holds the soul in a state of continued suspense (…) constantly up in the air, never quite certain of what is going to happen in the future; never quite able to touch a foot to solid ground. (…) This moment by moment dependence, this dark, unseeing peacefulness of the soul under the utter uncertainty of the future, is a true martyrdom which takes place silently and without any stir. It is God's way of bringing a slow death to self.

Existentialism, in general, excludes the Divine from the picture, while Fenelon knows that change can only be achieved by willingly accepting the death of the self (neurotic needs) in a complete surrender of the will to God.

In contrast, for existentialists like Sartre or Camus, Graham (1968) tells us, "*death is something against which man can rebel, investing life with personal meaning and purpose and becoming committted to it (Graham, 1986, p. 204)*". So, in the existentialist approach the whole responsibility of change is placed upon the individual human being. The question is if the human being is left to change himself on his own, without nothing within, would not this lead to neurosis, being that human nature is so prone to failure? And then again why combat or try to defeat death when death is the most inevitable part of life?

6. Death Awareness

For the Existential therapist awareness of death or a brush with it may be the opportunity a person needs to enhance his/her life. Yalom (1998) states that self-awareness brings the ability to grasp the reality of the future and thus of how inescapable death is. Corey presents us with the following paradox: *Our awareness of death is the source of zest for life and creativity (Corey, 2001, p 163)".* Paradox is an event that we constantly find in Existentialism, and we also do in Fenelon, especially in his treatment of life and death.

This exploration of Fenelon letters has found close similarities with Existential therapy as they both focus on supporting clients as they discover who they are and how they

the things they value. Both as well encourage clients to develop a healthy awareness of death in order to value life and live it at its fullest.

For Fenelon death is at the core of his message, based in the Christian belief and wish of dying to self in order to be reborn and live in and through Christ. This is, to be a new and free creation.

Warning

The findings of this research propose that Fenelon's ideas of spiritual guidance and personal growth compared to Existential theories of actualization are not exclusive but compatible. Although, of course, this is a premature conclusion being that this investigation has focused on similarities, leaving the discrepancies to a minimum. Differences do exist which others better qualified than me will surely grasp or would like to search for.

According to Gadamer (1975) understanding and interpretation cannot be a detached process, "understanding is not an isolated activity of human beings but a basic structure of our experience of life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p 301)". Therefore the findings and conclusions I have made are, by necessity, affected by my personal biases. In this regard Denzin's and Lincoln's advice should be taken by the readers in that my understanding of the text can be exclusively reproductive (upon my own personal experiences).

Recognizing my biases and the partiality of this work, I still dare (*the death of self in me has not even begun*) to suggest some applications and relevance to counselling, which to be operational would certainly need the support of further less theoretical and more empirical research.

Relevance to Counselling

The findings of this research suggest a compatibility between Fenelon's Spiritual Letters and Existential theories of personal growth. The strongest connection is the idea of self-awareness, ownership and responsibility as fundamental to change and the development of a better way of living and relating to self, others and the environment.

Palmer (1983) thinks that Christian values highlight the quality of our relationships, and that in secular terms they are considered an ethical way of living. Counselling training and the Codes of Ethics in Australia, America, and England emphasize the importance of personal growth as an essential tool to ensure responsibility and quality in professional standards (PACAWA Psychotherapists and Counsellors Association of Western Australia; PACFA Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia; AMHCA American Mental Health Counselor Association; APA American Psychological Association; BACP British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy; JCRINC Joint Commission International Accreditation; accessed May 2007).

In practice, the counselor, as any other mental health practitioner, runs the risk of abusing professional power and also of being affected by compassion fatigue, burnout, or vicarious traumatisation. These factors can preclude or disrupt a well established therapeutical relationship. Therefore, a constant self-revision and reflection are essential to prevent unethical practice and thus secure both the quality of the therapeutic relationship and the mental and emotional health of the counsellor and the client as well.

Guggenbuhl-Craig (1989) in his book "Power in the Helping Professions" addresses the traps in which mental health practitioners may fall by abusing professional power. To avoid this risk he invites professionals to reflect and examine self. Van Deurzen-Smith (1968) and specially Holmes (2005) suggest Existential self-analysis (*Befindlichkeit*) as a healthy exercise after a difficult session in order to review the relationship between personal biases and clinical work. I would like to add, and to evaluate the consequences that these may have upon the client's emotional and psychological frailty, as well as the therapist's professional present and future. Guggenbuhl-Craig (1989) explains that:

> … the analyst cannot track down the patient's resistant shadow and its destructiveness for therapy without persistently being aware of his own shadow. (…) The patient's destructive resistances are linked to our own shadow problems and one cannot really be grasped without the other (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1989, p. 78).

Under this light, a lack of self-reflection, self-examination and self-awareness becomes an ethical risk that can impact upon the client. The therapist ought to be aware and prepared to deal with his/her own self before attempting to serve others in a profession as demanding of high ethical behaviour as counselling is. In crude terms the responsibility between the sanity and the suicide of a client could be the difference between ethical and unethical clinical practice.

Going back to Palmer (1983) comparing Christian principles to ethical living, and if we consider the strong parallels between Fenelon and Existentialist self-awareness, responsibility, and ownership to achieve personal development, then the use of Fenelon's Spiritual Letters could be suggested as a tool of reflection and self-analysis for the counsellor.

Reflection and self-analysis are inner conversations that might confirm, challenge or clarify personal experience and thus bring in new truths and meaning along with better decisions and change (Ault, 2004). One of the main purposes of Fenelon's letters is inviting self-reflection to achieve inner growth based on self-knowledge and self-acceptance. Similar to Existential thought Fenelon's "death of self" reinforces the idea that the individual can change self and his/her relationship to others through self-awareness, responsibility, and ownership.

Self-knowledge and personal development are also consistent with the ethical principles of Fidelity, Autonomy, Beneficence, Non-maleficence, Justice, and Self-respect ascertained by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), the American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA), the American Psychologists Association (APA), the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA), and the Psychotherapists and Counsellors Association of Western Australia (PACAWA) for the good practice of counselling and psychotherapy. These principles are summarized as follows:

> *Fidelity:*
> *Requires the practitioners to act in accordance with the trust placed in them.*
> *Autonomy:*
> *Opposes the manipulation of clients and respects their right to self-governing.*
> *Beneficence:*
> *Promotes the client's well-being, by working strictly within one's limits of competence based upon training, experience and systematic reflection.*
> *Non-maleficence:*
> *A commitment not to harm the client, avoiding any form of exploitation. The practitioner should not provide services when unfit due to illness, personal problems, or intoxication.*
> *Self-respect:*
> *Fosters the practitioner's self-knowledge and care for self, by seeking counselling or therapy and other opportunities for personal development.*

The emphasis that these principles put on the practitioner's self-awareness and self-responsibility is clear to see.

But how far from these principles can a therapist drift if lacking self-awareness? How can this affect a good management of transference and countertransference, and consequently invite irresponsible and harmful outcomes for both, counsellor and client? Guggenbuhl-Craig (1989, p 50) explains:

> … every conscientious analyst has been trained to recognize transferences and to prevent the occurrence of counter-transferences or to dissolve them as quickly as possible. (…) If the analyst has developed a certain relation to his patient –without which no analysis can proceed successfully –he will repeatedly have fantasies about him, which express his view of the patient and circle around the patient's potential. These fantasies have an influence, just as those of parents influence the child and those of the wife affect the husband.

This seems to be congruent with self-fulfilling prophecies which may, of course, influence therapeutic outcomes. Guggenbuhl-Craig (1989. pp. 50-51) claims that:

> At this point a destructive trait very often shows itself in the analyst. Strange, negative fantasies may crop up which persist and even give a certain kind of satisfaction. They may revolve around a possible suicide by the patient, or the outbreak of a psychosis' they may be destructive images of the patient's family or professional life, or his health. Such images exert a strange fascination on the analyst. Instead of a positive concern for the patient, they show an enthrallment with his negative potentialities.

Therefore, how scrupulously careful with his/her own feelings and reactions to the client ought the counsellor be? How high is the responsibility of holding a person's mental and emotional frailty on our hands? Or, what can the consequences of a therapist focusing on the negative potential of the patient be? Again, Guggenbuhl-Craig (1989, p 51) warns us:

> The psychological origins of this almost compulsive revolving around a patient's negative potential are manifold. Among them is the destructive charlatan shadow of the analyst, which is basically not interested in the patient's wellbeing. But such fantasies are often so destructive that they in fact harm the analyst himself, since an obvious failure in therapy will affect him as well.

Guggenbuhl-Craig's comments are a strong reminder of the importance of a faithful adherence to ethical principles, in order to ensure healthy and effective practice within a successful therapeutic relationship. Thus, suggesting the need for the counsellor to practice self-analysis becomes a must.

Enriching self to deliver better quality and high ethical service in mental health should be seriously considered for both the trainee and the experienced psychotherapists. For two main reasons: First, the need of reflection and self-examination could be not only a tool to prevent unethical practice, but, Second, a way to discover and nurture undeveloped talents and skills in the counsellor. According to Seligman (1998) "… psychotherapy is not just about fixing what is broken, but nurturing what is best within ourselves (Compton, 2001, p 486)". This statement merges and condenses both Existentialist aims and Fenelon's philosophy, inviting the idea of considering his Spiritual Letters as "good food" for the mind and the heart of the psychotherapist.

Unfortunately, at this point in time, Fenelon's Spiritual Letters would still need to undergo further empirical research to confirm their practical application as a

counselling tool to promote that personal growth so demanded by Australia's, America's and England's professional code of ethics. It is my hope that this dissertation may awake curiosity and the desire to foster future research in this area.

Although written more than 300 years ago, Fenelon's Spiritual Letters seem compatible with Existential therapy in stressing the fact that individuals can change themselves based on self-awareness, responsibility, ownership, and the absolute trust that the strength and drive to achieve transformation lays within us.

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