Mental health requires that the human will submit itself to something higher than itself.

But she wasn’t an Emmenberger, she was just Charlene and no one would mistake one for the other. Yet despite their obvious differences, they share the fifth characteristic of evil persons: both wanted to acquire and exercise power for its own sake. Power may be defined as the intent and the ability to actualize one’s wishes; the term implies potency. Since he decided over life and death in both the concentration camps and in his clinic, Emmenberger doubtlessly exercised the ultimate power. But to what end? His display of power remained utterly meaningless. As has been stated repeatedly, his actions did not enhance the lives of those in his purview, nor did they lead to his success, his fulfilment. Yet he attempts to convince Bärlach and also himself of the diametric opposite; “... this trembling, unconscious white flesh under my knife mirrors my triumph and my freedom and nothing but these.” (252)

Charlene, on the other hand, only wanted to terminate the relationship between her therapist and herself at the moment and in the manner she deemed acceptable. That goal she manages to achieve, but what she attains also proves “ultimately meaningless.” For it did not benefit her in any way, did not further, let alone accelerate, her healing. As Peck comments: “She did not want power in order to improve society, to care for a family, to make herself a more effective person, or in any way accomplish anything creative. Her thirst for power was unsubordinated to anything higher than itself.”

Contradictory though it may seem, even the forging and maintenance of successful interpersonal relationships depend upon the judicious use of power. Rollo May phrases this absolutely essential element in his inimitable way.

There is required a self-assertion, a capacity to stand on one’s own feet, an affirmation of one’s self in order to have the power to put one’s self into the relationship. One must have something to give and be able to give it. The danger, of course, is that he will overassert himself. ... But this negative side is not to be escaped by giving up self-assertion. For if one is unable to assert oneself, one is unable to participate in a genuine relationship. A dynamic dialectical relationship ... is a continuous give-and-take in which one asserts himself, finds an answer in the other, then
possibly asserts too far, senses a “no” in the other, backs up but does not give up, shifts the participation to a new form, and finds the way that is adequate for the wholeness of the other.

May’s observation does not speak of weakness, but of strength, not of self-negation to the point of total self-effacement, but of an assured, self-accepting individual, who with “sensitivity and tenderness” willingly assumes the risks inherent in relating to another.

Rollo May considers the appropriate use of power essential for the continuation of life-sustaining relationships; for to exert a significant amount of power tells us that we value ourselves and are valued in turn. Power may be considered synonymous with the “urge to reach out toward others, to increase life by way of sex, to create, to civilize; it is the joy and rapture, or the simple security of knowing that we matter, that we can affect others, can form them.”

Whether one desires to manage a business or a household, to create a work of art or raise a child, the end envisioned determines the legitimate use of power. If power realizes a negative or destructive result, the potency exercised is used perversely, or as Erich Fromm suggests that type of power remains nothing more than domination.

Who endeavours to dominate for the sake of dominating? Not a strong individual, as it might seem at first glance. Fromm concludes: “the lust for power is not rooted in strength but in weakness.” Such persons strive to dominate another for he or she essentially fears the other, the demands others may make, in essence all of life’s demands. Those who believe, more often than not only on a subconscious level, that they cannot subsist in the face of life’s essential unpredictability, cannot cope with the questions their days may ask of them, cannot stand on their own, these individuals feel compelled to minimize these risks at all costs. They do so in attempting to control every aspect of another’s behaviour, in forcibly limiting their options. For various reasons, however, undesirable as well as ineffective, domination clearly functions as a survival mechanism. Confident individuals, who are generally able to self-actualize, to develop their talents, to contribute while maintaining their integrity, these persons don’t exhibit the need for domination.

Domination or the misuse of power is unsubordinated to anything other than itself. Yet Peck asserts: “Mental health requires that the human will submit itself to something higher than itself.” Depending on their orientation, some define this governing principle as common sense or the needs of others. The religiously inclined would define it as God. In the Our Father, does a Christian not pray: “Thy will be done”? Consequently, an