



# The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy

By Viktor E. Frankl

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Originally published in 1969 and compiling Frankl's speeches on logotherapy, *The Will to Meaning* is regarded as a seminal work of meaning-centered therapy. This new and carefully re-edited version is the first since 1988.

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## The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy By Viktor E. Frankl Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #67288 in Books
- Brand: Plume
- Published on: 2014-06-24
- Released on: 2014-06-24
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .40" w x 5.30" l, .30 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 176 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“Perhaps the most significant thinking since Freud and Adler.”—*The American Journal of Psychiatry*

“Frankl is one of the most famous and gifted of all psychiatrists... The incredible attempts to dehumanize man at Auschwitz and Dachau led Frankl to commence the humanization of psychiatry through logotherapy. Frankl is a professional who possesses the rare ability to write in a layman’s language.”—**Dr. Gerald F. Kreyche, professor emeritus at DePaul University**

“I regard this book as one of the outstanding contributions to psychological thought in the last fifty years.”—**Dr. Carl Rogers, author of *Client-Centered Therapy***

“Dr. Frankl’s contribution to psychotherapy has been great. He is perhaps the only non-behaviorist to have contributed a method to behavior therapy. The modesty with which he has put forward his important work has been remarkable.”—**Dr. Joseph Wolpe, author of *The Practice of Behavioral Therapy***

#### About the Author

**Viktor E. Frankl** (1905-1997) was Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Vienna. During World War II, he spent three years in Auschwitz, Dachau, and other concentration camps. He was the founder of the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy—the school of logotherapy—and President of the Austrian Medical Society of Psychotherapy. His twenty-nine books have been translated into twenty-one languages.

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#### A PLUME BOOK

### THE WILL TO MEANING

VIKTOR E. FRANKL was professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Vienna Medical School. For twenty-five years he was head of the Vienna Neurological Policlinic. His “Logotherapy/Existential Analysis” came to be known as the “Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy.” He held professorships at Harvard, Stanford, Dallas, and Pittsburgh, and was Distinguished Professor of Logotherapy at the U.S. International University in San Diego, California.

Born in 1905, Frankl received the degrees of Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Vienna. During World War II he spent three years at Auschwitz, Dachau, and other concentration camps.

Throughout four decades Dr. Frankl made innumerable lecture tours throughout the world. He received honorary degrees from twenty-nine universities in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia. He held numerous awards, among them the Oskar Pfister Award of the American Psychiatric Association and an Honorary Membership of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Frankl's thirty-nine books appeared in forty languages. His book *Man's Search for Meaning* has sold millions of copies and has been listed among "the ten most influential books in America" according to a survey conducted by the Book of the Month Club and the Library of Congress.

He died in Vienna in 1997.

## **THE WILL TO MEANING**

### **FOUNDATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF LOGOTHERAPY**

Expanded Edition

**VIKTOR E. FRANKL**

#### **PREFACE**

This book is the outcome of a series of lectures I was invited to give during the 1966 summer session of Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. The particular task assigned to me at that time was to explain the system that characterizes logotherapy. While it has often been pointed out by various authors that logotherapy, in contrast to the other schools of existential psychiatry, has developed a proper psychotherapeutic technique, it has scarcely been noticed that it also is the last psychotherapy that is conceptualized in a systematic way.<sup>1</sup>

Dealing with the *foundations* of the system, the chapters of this book set forth the basic assumptions and tenets underlying logotherapy. They form a chain of links interconnected with one another, in that logotherapy is based on the following three concepts: (1) the freedom of will; (2) the will to meaning; and (3) the meaning of life. (1) The freedom of will involves the issue of determinism versus pan-determinism. (2) The will to meaning is discussed as distinct from the concepts of the will to power and the will to pleasure as they are presented by Adlerian and Freudian psychology, respectively. To be sure, the term, will to power, was coined by Nietzsche rather than Adler, and the term, will to pleasure—standing for Freud's pleasure principle—is my own and not Freud's. Moreover, the pleasure principle should be seen in the light of a broader concept, the homeostasis principle.<sup>2</sup> While criticizing both concepts, we shall have to elaborate on logotherapy's motivational theory. (3) The meaning of life relates to the issue of relativism versus subjectivism.

The *applications* of logotherapy discussed in this book are also threefold. First of all, logotherapy is applicable as a treatment of noogenic neuroses; second, logotherapy is a treatment of psychogenic neuroses, i.e., neuroses in the conventional sense of the word; and third, logotherapy is a treatment of somatogenic neuroses or, for that matter, somatogenic diseases in general. As we see, all the dimensions of a human being are reflected in this sequence of subject matters.

In the introductory chapter of this book, logotherapy is placed in perspective with other schools of psychotherapy, and, specifically, with existentialism in the field of psychotherapy. The last chapter deals

with the dialogue between logotherapy and theology.

I have tried in this book to include the latest development of logotherapy with respect to both the formulation of the individual tenets and the material serving as an illustration. However, the attempt to offer a rounded picture of the whole system compels me to include some material which has been used in my previous books.<sup>3</sup>

What I term the existential vacuum constitutes a challenge to psychiatry today. Ever more patients complain of a feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness, which seems to me to derive from two facts. Unlike an animal, man is not told by instincts what he *must* do. And unlike man in former times, he is no longer told by traditions what he *should* do. Often he does not even know what he basically wishes to do. Instead, either he wishes to do what other people do (conformism), or he does what other people wish him to do (totalitarianism).

I hope that I shall be successful in conveying to the reader my conviction that, despite the crumbling of traditions, life holds a meaning for each and every individual, and even more, it retains this meaning literally to his last breath. And the psychiatrist can show his patient that life never ceases to have a meaning. To be sure, he cannot show his patient *what* the meaning is, but he may well show him that *there is* a meaning, and that life retains it: that it remains meaningful, under any conditions. As logotherapy teaches, even the tragic and negative aspects of life, such as unavoidable suffering, can be turned into a human achievement by the attitude which a man adopts toward his predicament. In contrast to most of the existentialist schools of thought, logotherapy is in no way pessimistic; but it is realistic in that it faces the tragic triad of human existence: pain, death, and guilt. Logotherapy may justly be called optimistic, because it shows the patient how to transform despair into triumph.

In an age such as ours, in which traditions are on the wane, psychiatry must see its principal assignment in equipping man with the ability to find meaning. In an age in which the Ten Commandments seem to many people to have lost their unconditional validity, man must learn to listen to the ten thousand commandments implied in the ten thousand situations of which his life consists. In this respect I hope the reader will find that logotherapy speaks to the needs of the hour.

VIKTOR E. FRANKL, M.D., PH.D.

*Vienna, Austria*

## INTRODUCTION

### *The Situation of Psychotherapy and the Position of Logotherapy*

The present situation of psychotherapy is characterized by the rise of existential psychiatry. In fact, one could speak of an inoculation of existentialism in psychiatry as a major contemporary trend. But in speaking of existentialism we must bear in mind that there are as many existentialisms as there are existentialists. Moreover, not only has each existentialist molded his own version of the philosophy, but also each uses the nomenclature differently from the way others use it. For example, such terms as existence and *Dasein* have meanings deviating from each other in the writings of Jaspers and Heidegger.

Nonetheless, the individual authors in the field of existential psychiatry have something in common—a common denominator. It is the phrase so often used by these authors—and all too often misused by them: “being in the world.” One gets the impression that many of these authors think it is a sufficient credential to be considered a true existentialist if they apply the phrase “being in the world” time and again. I doubt that this is a sufficient ground for calling oneself an existentialist, particularly since, as could easily be

demonstrated, in most cases Heidegger's concept of being in the world is misconceived in the direction of mere subjectivism—as though “the world” in which a human being “is” were nothing but a self-expression of the being himself. I venture to criticize this widespread misconception only because, as it happens, I once had an opportunity to discuss it in personal conversation with Martin Heidegger himself, and found that he agreed with me.

Misunderstandings in the field of existentialism may be understood easily. The terminology is sometimes esoteric, to say the least. About thirty years ago, I had to give a public lecture on psychiatry and existentialism in Vienna. I confronted my audience with two quotations and told them that one was taken from Heidegger's writings while the other was part of a conversation that I had had with a schizophrenic patient institutionalized in Vienna's state hospital where I was then on the staff. And then I invited my audience to vote on which one was whose. Believe it or not, an overwhelming majority thought that the passage quoted from Heidegger was the utterance of a schizophrenic patient and vice versa. However, we must not draw rash conclusions from the result of this experiment. By no means does it speak against the greatness of Heidegger—and let us take it for granted that he is as great as many experts believe. Rather it speaks against the capacity of everyday language to express thoughts and feelings hitherto unknown—be they revolutionary ideas created by a great philosopher, or strange feelings experienced by a schizophrenic individual. What unites them is a crisis of expression, as it were, and elsewhere I have shown that something analogous holds for the modern artist (see my book, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism, Selected Papers on Logotherapy*, Washington Square Press, New York, 1967, the chapter on “Psychotherapy, Art and Religion”).

As to the position of the method I have called logotherapy, which is the subject of this book, most authors agree that it falls under the category of existential psychiatry. In fact, as early as the thirties I coined the word *Existenzanalyse* as an alternative name for logotherapy, which I had coined in the twenties. Later on, when American authors started publishing in the field of logotherapy they introduced the term “existential analysis” as a translation of *Existenzanalyse*. Unfortunately, other authors did the same with the word *Daseinsanalyse*—a term which, in the forties, had been selected by the late Ludwig Binswanger, the great Swiss psychiatrist, to denote his own teachings. Since then existential analysis has become quite an ambiguous word. In order not to add to the confusion which had been aroused by this state of affairs, I decided to refrain more and more from using the term existential analysis in my publications in English. Often I speak of logotherapy even in a context where no therapy in the strict sense of the word is involved. What I call medical ministry, for example, forms an important aspect of the practice of logotherapy but it is indicated precisely in those cases where actual therapy is impossible because the patient is confronted with an incurable disease. Yet, in the widest possible sense, logotherapy *is* treatment even then—it is treatment of the patient's attitude toward his unchangeable fate.

Logotherapy has not only been subsumed under the heading of existential psychiatry but has also been acclaimed, within this province, as the only school which has succeeded in developing what one might be justified in calling a technique. However, this is not to say that we logotherapists overrate the importance of techniques. One has long ago come to realize that what matters in therapy is not techniques but rather the human relations between doctor and patient, or the personal and existential encounter.

A purely technological approach to psychotherapy may block its therapeutic effect. Some time ago I was invited to lecture at an American university before a team of psychiatrists who had been assigned the care of the evacuees after a hurricane. I not only accepted this invitation but even selected the title, “Techniques and Dynamics of Survival,” a title that obviously pleased the sponsors of my lecture. But when I started this lecture I frankly told them that as long as we actually interpret our task merely in terms of techniques and dynamics we have missed the point—and we have missed the hearts of those to whom we wish to offer mental first aid. Approaching human beings merely in terms of techniques necessarily implies manipulating

them, and approaching them merely in terms of dynamics implies reifying them, making human beings into mere things. And these human beings immediately feel and notice the manipulative quality of our approach and our tendency to reify them. I would say, reification has become the original sin of psychotherapy. But a human being is no thing. This *no-thingness, rather than nothingness, is the lesson to learn from existentialism.*

When, on the occasion of another lecture tour, I was asked to address the prisoners at San Quentin I was assured, afterward, that in a way it was the first time they really felt understood. What I had done was nothing so extraordinary. I had simply taken them as human beings and not mistaken them for mechanisms to repair. I had interpreted them in the same way they had interpreted themselves all along, that is to say, as free and responsible. I had not offered them a cheap escape from guilt feelings by conceiving of them as victims of biological, psychological, or sociological conditioning processes. Nor had I taken them as helpless pawns on the battleground of id, ego, and superego. I had not provided them with an alibi. Guilt had not been taken away from them. I had not explained it away. I had taken them as peers. They learned that it was a prerogative of man to become guilty—and his responsibility to overcome guilt.

What did I implement when addressing the prisoners at San Quentin if not phenomenology in the truest sense? In fact, phenomenology is an attempt to describe the way in which man understands himself, in which he interprets his own existence, far from preconceived patterns of interpretation and explanation such as are furnished by psychodynamic or socioeconomic hypotheses. In adopting the phenomenological methodology, logotherapy, as Paul Polak<sup>1</sup> once put it, tries to couch man's unbiased self-understanding in scientific terms.

Let me again take up the issue of technique versus encounter. Psychotherapy is more than mere technique in that it is art, and it goes beyond pure science in that it is wisdom. But even wisdom is not the last word. In a concentration camp I once saw the body of a woman who had committed suicide. Among her effects there was a scrap of paper on which she had written the words: "More powerful than fate is the courage that bears it." Despite this motto she had taken her life. Wisdom is lacking without the human touch.

Recently, I received a telephone call at three in the morning from a lady who told me that she was determined to commit suicide but was curious to know what I would say about it. I replied with all the arguments against this resolution and for survival, and I talked to her for thirty minutes—until she finally gave her word that she would not take her life but rather come to see me in the hospital. But when she visited me there it turned out that not one of all the arguments I offered had impressed her. The only reason she had decided not to commit suicide was the fact that, rather than growing angry because of having been disturbed in my sleep in the middle of the night, I had patiently listened to her and talked with her for half an hour, and a world—she found—in which this can happen, must be a world worth living in.

As far as psychotherapy is concerned, it is mainly to the credit of the late Ludwig Binswanger that the human being has been reinstalled and reinstated in his humanness. And more and more the I-Thou relation can be regarded as the heart of the matter. Yet even beyond this is another dimension still to be entered. The encounter between I and Thou cannot be the whole truth, the whole story. The essentially self-transcendent quality of human existence renders man *a being reaching out beyond himself*. Therefore, if Martin Buber, along with Ferdinand Ebner, interprets human existence basically in terms of a dialogue between I and Thou, we must recognize that this dialogue defeats itself unless I and Thou transcend themselves to refer to a meaning outside themselves.

Insofar as psychotherapy—rather than merely being psychological engineering and technology—is based on encounter, what encounter one another are not two monads but rather human beings, of which one confronts the other with logos, that is, the meaning of being.

By placing an emphasis on an encounter I to Thou, *Daseinsanalyse* has made the partners of such an encounter truly listen to one another and thus freed them from their ontological deafness, one could say. But we still have to free them from their ontological blindness, we still have to make the meaning of being shine forth. This is the step taken by logotherapy. Logotherapy goes beyond *Daseinsanalyse* or (to adopt the translation by Jordan M. Scher) ontoanalysis, in that it is not only concerned with ontos, or being, but also with logos, or meaning. This may well account for the fact that logotherapy is more than mere analysis; it is, as the very name indicates, therapy. In a personal conversation Ludwig Binswanger once told me that he felt that, compared with ontoanalysis, logotherapy was more activist, and even more, that logotherapy could lend itself as the therapeutic supplement to ontoanalysis.

By way of a deliberate oversimplification, one could define logotherapy by the literal translation as healing through meaning (Joseph B. Fabry).<sup>2</sup> Of course we must keep in mind that logotherapy, far from being a panacea, is indicated in certain cases and contraindicated in other ones. As will be seen in the second section of this volume, when the applications of logotherapy will be dealt with, it is applicable in cases of neurosis, to begin with. Here another distinction between logotherapy and ontoanalysis becomes apparent. One could epitomize Binswanger's contribution to psychiatry in terms of a better understanding of psychosis, more specifically, the particular and peculiar mode of psychotic being-in-the-world. In contradistinction to ontoanalysis, logotherapy does not aim at a better understanding of psychosis but rather at a shorter treatment of neurosis. Another oversimplification, to be sure.

In this context, those authors deserve to be mentioned who contend that Binswanger's work boils down to an application of Heideggerian concepts to psychiatry, while logotherapy is the result of an application of Max Scheler's concepts to psychotherapy.

Now—after speaking of Scheler and Heidegger and the influence of their philosophies on logotherapy—what about Freud and Adler? Is logotherapy less indebted to them? By no means. As a matter of fact, in the first paragraph of the first book of mine the reader finds an expression of this indebtedness when I invoke the analogy of a dwarf who, standing on the shoulders of a giant, sees a bit farther than the giant himself. After all, psychoanalysis is, and will remain forever, the indispensable foundation of every psychotherapy, including any future schools. However, it will also have to share the fate of a foundation, that is to say, it will become invisible to the extent to which the proper building is erected on it.

Freud was too much of a genius not to be aware of the fact that he had limited his research to the foundations, to the deeper layers, to the lower dimensions of human existence. In a letter to Ludwig Binswanger he said himself: "I have always confined myself to the ground floor and basement of the edifice" called man.<sup>3</sup>

In a book review<sup>4</sup> Freud once expressed his conviction that reverence before a great master is a good thing, but should be surpassed and exceeded by our reverence before facts. Let us now try to reinterpret and reevaluate Freud's psychoanalysis in the light of those facts which only came to the fore after Freud had died.

Such a reinterpretation of psychoanalysis deviates from Freud's own self-interpretation. Columbus believed that he had found a new way to India, when what he had discovered was a new continent. There is also a difference between what Freud believed and what he achieved. Freud believed that man could be explained by a mechanistic theory and that his psyche could be cured by means of techniques. But what he achieved was something different, something still tenable, provided that we reevaluate it in the light of existential facts.

According to a statement once made by Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis rests on the recognition of two



concepts, repression as the cause of neurosis and transference as its cure. Whoever believes in the importance of these two concepts may justifiably regard and call himself a psychoanalyst.

Repression is counteracted by growing awareness. Repressed material should be made conscious. Or, as Freud put it, where id had been, ego should become. Freed from the mechanistic ideology of the nineteenth century, seen in the light of the existentialist philosophy of the twentieth century, one could say that psychoanalysis promotes self-understanding in man.

Similarly, the concept of transference can be refined and purged. The Adlerian psychologist Rudolf Dreikurs once pointed to the manipulative quality inherent in the Freudian concept of transference.<sup>5</sup> Freed from its manipulative quality, transference could be understood as a vehicle of that human and personal encounter which is based on the I-Thou relation. As a matter of fact, if self-understanding is to be reached, it has to be mediated by encounter. In other words, Freud's statement, where id is, ego should be, could be enlarged: Where id is, ego should be; *but the ego can become an ego only through a Thou*.

As to that material which had fallen prey to repression, Freud believed that it was sex. In fact, in his time, sex was repressed even on a mass level. This was a consequence of puritanism, and this puritanism was predominant in Anglo-Saxon countries. Small wonder that it was these countries that proved to be most receptive to psychoanalysis—and resistant to those schools of psychotherapy that went beyond Freud.

To identify psychoanalysis with psychology or psychiatry would be as great a mistake as to identify dialectical materialism with sociology. Both Freudianism and Marxism are single approaches to sciences rather than the sciences themselves. To be sure, indoctrination—Western as well as Eastern style—may blur the difference between what is sect and what is science.

In a way, however, psychoanalysis is irreplaceable. And the place still reserved to Freud as far as the history of psychotherapy is concerned reminds me of a story they tell at the oldest synagogue of the world, Prague's medieval Alt Neu Synagogue. When the guide there shows you the interior, he tells you that the seat once occupied by the famous Rabbi Loew has never been taken over by any of his followers; another seat has been set up for them, because Rabbi Loew could never be replaced, no one could match him. For centuries no one was allowed to sit down on his seat. The chair of Freud should also be kept empty.

## PART ONE

### FOUNDATIONS OF LOGOTHERAPY

#### Metaclinical Implications of Psychotherapy

The metaclinical implications of psychotherapy refer mainly to its concept of man and philosophy of life. There is no psychotherapy without a theory of man and a philosophy of life underlying it. Wittingly or unwittingly, psychotherapy is based on them. In this respect psychoanalysis is no exception. Paul Schilder called psychoanalysis a *Weltanschauung*, and only recently F. Gordon Pleune said that "the psychoanalytic practitioner is a moralist first and foremost" and "influences people in regard to their moral and ethical conduct."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the issue cannot be whether or not psychotherapy is based on a *Weltanschauung* but rather, whether the *Weltanschauung* underlying it is right or wrong. Right or wrong, however, in this context means whether or not the humanness of man is preserved in a given philosophy and theory. The human quality of a human

being is disregarded and neglected, for example, by those psychologists who adhere to either “the machine model” or “the rat model,” as Gordon W. Allport<sup>2</sup> termed them. As to the first, I deem it to be a remarkable fact that man, as long as he regarded himself as a creature, interpreted his existence in the image of God, his creator; but as soon as he started considering himself as a creator, began to interpret his existence merely in the image of his own creation, the machine.

Logotherapy’s concept of man is based on three pillars, the freedom of will, the will to meaning, and the meaning of life. The first of them, the freedom of will, is opposed to a principle that characterizes most current approaches to man, namely, determinism. Really, however, it is only opposed to what I am used to calling pan-determinism, because speaking of the freedom of will does not in any way imply any *a priori* indeterminism. After all, the freedom of will means the freedom of human will, and human will is the will of a finite being. Man’s freedom is no freedom from conditions but rather freedom to take a stand on whatever conditions might confront him.

During an interview, Huston C. Smith of Harvard (then at MIT) asked me whether I as a professor of neurology and psychiatry would not concede that man is subject to conditions and determinants. I answered that as a neurologist and psychiatrist, of course, I am fully aware of the extent to which man is not at all free from conditions, be they biological, psychological, or sociological. But I added that along with being a professor in two fields (neurology and psychiatry) I am a survivor of four camps (that is, concentration camps), and as such I also bear witness to the unexpected extent to which man is, and always remains, capable of resisting and braving even the worst conditions. To detach oneself from even the worst conditions is a uniquely human capability. However, this unique capacity of man to detach himself from any situations he might have to face is manifested not only through heroism, as was the case in the concentration camps, but also through humor. Humor, too, is a uniquely human capacity. And we need not feel ashamed of this fact. Humor is said even to be a divine attribute. In three psalms God is referred to as a “laughing” one.

Humor and heroism refer us to the uniquely human capacity of *self-detachment*. By virtue of this capacity man is capable of detaching himself not only from a situation but also from himself. He is capable of choosing his attitude toward himself. By so doing he really takes a stand toward his own somatic and psychic conditions and determinants. Understandably this is a crucial issue for psychotherapy and psychiatry, education and religion. For, seen in this light, a person is free to shape his own character, and man is responsible for what he may have made out of himself. What matters is not the features of our character or the drives and instincts per se, but rather the stand we take toward them. And the capacity to take such a stand is what makes us human beings.

Taking a stand toward somatic and psychic phenomena implies rising above their level and opening a new dimension, the dimension of noetic phenomena, or the noological dimension—in contradistinction to the biological and psychological ones. It is that dimension in which the uniquely human phenomena are located.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Robert Hay:**

This book untitled The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy to be one of several books that best seller in this year, this is because when you read this publication you can get a lot of benefit on it. You will easily to buy this specific book in the book retail store or you can order it via online. The publisher with this book sells the e-book too. It makes you more easily to read this book, as you can read this book in your Touch screen phone. So there is no reason to you personally to past this e-book from your list.

**Peter Wright:**

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