

2221 Theory & Practice 1: Lecture 11

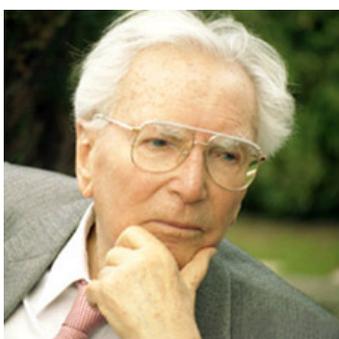
VIKTOR FRANKL (1905-1997)

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He who has a *why* to live for can put up with almost any *how*¹.
Friedrich Nietzsche

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Introduction



Viktor Emil Frankl, the middle of three children, was born to Gabriel and Elsa, in Vienna. Bright and highly intelligent Viktor already knew at 4 that he wanted to be a medical doctor (Boeree, 1998: n. p.)!

After becoming a doctor he met both Freud (1925) and Adler, even publishing an article in Adler’s journal whose ideas suited him better. After working in various contexts, he opened his own practice ‘in neurology and psychiatry’ in 1937 (Boeree, 1998). In 1938, German troops invaded Austria (the *Anschluss*) and Frankl was concerned enough to obtain a visa to go to the U.S. but he let it expire because he was concerned for his elderly parents² (Boeree, 1998).

¹ A favourite saying of Frankl’s, which he changed somewhat. See final quotes..

² At this point, Frankl had struggled with the question of whether to leave Germany. One day, arriving home from visiting the U. S. consulate, he found a tablet his father had recovered from a synagogue

He married in 1942 but in the same year, he was arrested with his wife, father, mother, and brother and placed in a concentration camp in Bohemia. His father died there of starvation. His mother and brother died in Auschwitz in 1944 and his wife in Bergen-Belsen in 1945. [Frankl did not find out about these deaths until after the war.] Only he and his sister Stella were to survive with the latter immigrating to Australia!

Frankl kept himself alive by thoughts of seeing his family and wife again. He had begun a book *The Doctor and the Soul* before arrest and hid his manuscript hoping to finish it at war's end. However, it was discovered and taken from him. Nevertheless, he began to reconstruct the MS in his mind and on stolen scraps of paper *and lived for the day when he would see his family again and publish his book.*

He was liberated in April, 1945, but he was a broken man on finding that his family had virtually all been killed, including his wife. He was finally appointed director of the Vienna Neurological Policlinic and stay there for 25 years.

He published his book which earned him an appointment at the University of Vienna Medical School (Boeree, 1998). Over 9 days, he dictated another book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, which sold 5 million copies in the U. S. alone. His *logotherapy*³ earned itself the title as *The Third*⁴ *Viennese School of Psychotherapy.*

He remarried and acknowledged Elly's part in his re-establishing of himself. He fell in love with her at first sight even though she was half his age. They had one son, Gabriel.

He became a full professor at the University of Vienna and was awarded many honours abroad. (Among these was the Oskar Pfister⁵ Prize awarded by the American Society of Psychiatry.) He continued to teach until 1990 (at 85 years of

destroyed by the Nazis. A piece from the tablet had the first letters of the commandment, 'Honour your father and mother that your days may be long in the land' (Scully, 1995).

³ The word contains *logos* which Boeree (1998) cites as meaning 'study, word, spirit, God, or meaning'. The last one is what he uses but the others, comments Boeree, 'are never far off'.

⁴ Freud's is the first and Adler's is the second. Both were from Vienna.

⁵ Pfister was Sigmund Freud's Protestant friend who critiqued Freud's views on religion.

age!). In 1995, he finished his autobiography and in 1997 published his final work, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*.

'Man's Search for Meaning'

Frankl's most popular book, *Man's Search for Meaning*⁶, has two parts: the first is titled, *Experiences in a concentration camp*. Frankl deals with the question of how 'everyday life . . . [is] reflected in the mind of the average prisoner' (Frankl, 1963: 3). He concentrates on the common, ordinary prisoner (not the heroic or famous). In reading this part, you get the impression that this is everyman's experience of a concentration camp not the unique experience of Frankl as such.

Camp life was not one mixed with 'sentiment and pity' but one in which there was 'an unrelenting struggle for daily bread and for life itself' (Frankl, 1963: 5). Certain prisoners were selected to act as overlords (*capos*) and brutalised their fellow 'numbers',⁷ even more than the SS. The struggle for existence was such that 'the best of us did not return' (Frankl, 1963: 7).

People first incarcerated experienced the **stage of shock**. In this stage all the distressing emotions of outrage, anger, grief, disgust, anxiety and fear, and deep, painful longing for one's loved ones were evident. Inmates acted to try to deaden these feelings. From this stage, a prisoner moved to **a stage of 'relative apathy'** which was like an 'emotional death' (Frankl, 1963: 31). He could now watch others being unfairly and brutally beaten and screaming in pain because they had reported sick at the wrong time without being emotionally affected. Emotional blunting was an adaptive and understandable defence against the severe conditions these prisoners endured.

The prisoners were systematically starved and yet expected to work in appalling weather conditions on heavy tasks. Food was a major topic of conversation for inmates (pp. 45-47); not sex, because prisoners tended to focus only on those things most needful for survival.

⁶ One singular feature of this book is that he never refers to himself as a Jew. This action brought criticism upon from Jewish activists.

⁷ Frankl's number was 119, 104.

Frankl observed that good and evil could be found among Nazis and prisoners. One is not able to say that because someone is a Nazi or a German Nazi that he is evil. Good and evil do not reside in one race or another. We are mixtures of good and evil. This stand of Frankl's has not found favour among some Jewish groups who have strong views about group guilt. Frankl believes that only individual guilt exists, that group guilt is nonsensical (Scully, 1995: n. p.).

Frank speaks of **a third stage**, which only the liberated prisoners entered. In this period prisoners have to go into a 'normal' world and this re-entry is not easy. The world of colour is not yet their world. Returned inmates found it hard to re-experience joy or the sense of being pleased, even at being liberated.

Frankl describes one beautiful experience he had where he outside on his own. He saw the broadness and expanse of the sky above the open fields; all he could do at that moment was to go onto his knees with these words on his lips, 'I called to the Lord in my narrow prison and he answered me in the freedom of space' (p. 142.).

The road of recovery for the prisoner is not easy for the bitterness of the torture leads him to want to exact revenge, to imagine that the world is without a righteous foundation. Frankl believed that prisoners had to be led to understand that they could not begin to do wrong because of the wrong done to them. He finishes this section with the tellingly significant words, 'The crowning experience of all, for the homecoming man, is the wonderful feeling that, after all he has suffered, there is nothing he need fear any more – except his God' (p. 148).

Out of these extremes of suffering Frankl observed that those men who had a meaning beyond mere survival were better able to endure the privations of the concentration camp.

‘Basic Concepts of Logotherapy’

Frankl was once challenged to give in a sentence the essential difference between psychoanalysis and logotherapy beginning with the challenger definition of psychoanalysis as ‘you lie on a couch and speak about things that are disagreeable to tell’. Frankl responded by saying that in logotherapy ‘the patient may remain sitting erect, but he must bear things that sometimes are very disagreeable to hear’ (Frankl, 1963: 152). Facetious as this definition is, logotherapy is ‘less *retrospective* and less *introspective*’ (Frankl, 1963: 152, emphasis his) than psychoanalysis.

Logos for Frankl means ‘meaning’. The patient is ‘confronted with and reoriented towards the meaning of his life’. Frankl regards this process as a way of breaking up the circular, self-centredness found in neurotic conditions because this meaning of life contains within it a **TASK**.

Frankl criticised both psychoanalysis (the *will to pleasure*), and Adlerian psychology (the *will to power*), as being too narrow. He does not disagree with what they had found. His central criticism is their failure to acknowledge the importance of the ‘spiritual’ dimension as a valid, *non-psychological* reality. He does not accept Jung’s *Analytical Psychology* for the same reason (Tweedie, 1961: 47-48). Jung, he believes, has reduced God to an immanent archetype and reduced the spiritual to an instinct, thereby, downgrading the importance of choice. For Frankl, God was transcendent and he cannot understand the wish of theologians to embrace Jung’s psychology.

Having said all that, Frankl believes that much can be learned from all three despite their entanglement in *psychologism*⁸. Although he reserves his sharpest criticisms for Freud, he believed him to be a ‘genius’. Pleasure and power are merely the by-products of a humanity motivated by a *will to meaning*. Humankind lives and dies for this meaning.

⁸ The reduction of all types of human functioning to the psychological.

Human existence is concerned to find a meaning for life, a meaning that is already given to life not a meaning *we* give to life⁹. Frankl says that this situation is somewhat like laughter. You cannot make yourself to laugh authentically. Laughter emerges from discovering that something is funny.

Frankl understands life to be a demand, an obligation, an ought, a summons. Hence, Frankl is critical of Freud's notion of 'the [individual] sublimation of instinctual drives', and Jung's archetypes as collective self-expression because as expressions of the self they are unable to act as external demands upon us which life appears to do.

He also disputes Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism in which humanity creates its own essence. Sartre believes we live in a meaningless, absurd universe and therefore, must create meaning. Frankl believes that the universe has a meaning that we must discover.

According to Tweedie (1961), logotherapy is not based on 'contemporary existentialism' (p. 37). Therefore, its basis should not be confused with that of other existential writers, especially not with the atheistic existentialism of Sartre and the French tradition. However, logotherapy is related to 'existential analysis'¹⁰.

Frankl contended strongly for the notion of freedom. Humans are free to choose what they will do, free to adopt an attitude to their situation or condition. They are not pushed by instincts alone whether of sex or power. **Nevertheless, freedom is not everything!** Frankl created a stir when he suggested to U. S. audiences that the Statue of Liberty on its east coast should be counter-balanced by a Statue of Responsibility of its west coast! Mere freedom without responsibility can descend into the chaos of arbitrariness. Our freedom is not a freedom from restrictions or constraints but a freedom to make a response to those conditions. Or

⁹ This viewpoint is unusual in today's phenomenologically-driven world. Compare the opening quote in week 12's lecture from Douglas Adams' *Mostly Harmless*. I believe it derives from Frankl's Judaist background but he does not refer to this background himself.

¹⁰ Tweedie (1961: 36) records that Frankl coined the word 'existential analysis'. Scully (1995), in apparent contradiction says that Frankl coined the word 'existentialism' in the early 1930s. Perhaps, both are correct.

put into another context, our freedom is not primarily a freedom *from* but a freedom *for*.

1. View of the person

Tweedie (1961: 51-52) mentions that Frankl was determined to accept both the oneness and the many-ness of humankind. Humankind is both individual but within that wholeness, diversity exists. He illustrates this one and many feature by instancing a drinking glass which can be described in terms of circularity and rectangularity. However, glasses cannot be understood as an addition of circularity plus rectangularity.

Frankl believes that humans *have* a body, and *have* a psyche but **are** spiritual beings. He does not regard himself as a trichotomist nor is he a ‘spiritualist’ (who collapses all distinctions into the spiritual). He accepts the drive theory of the psyche but refuses to allow that to be the final word about humankind. He illustrates the involvement of these three features in the case of hypothyroidism. The body factor is the ‘glandular disturbance’; the psychic area is made known in ‘perhaps, agoraphobia, or an intense anxiety state. The spiritual is revealed in the attitude of the person . . . to his psychophysical condition’ (Tweedie, 1961: 55).

Associated with the spirit of humankind are the *existentials* of spirituality, freedom and responsibility. These are irreducible and just are. Spirit distinguishes humans from animals and other creatures. Further, the spiritual is neither inside nor outside the psychophysicum¹¹ (the coordinated psyche and body); rather, the spiritual is “‘with” other objects and persons in the world’ (Tweedie, 1961: 58).

The existential of responsibility is made known in conscience. Frankl disputes any idea that conscience can be reduced to a ‘super-ego’ psychic reality. He does not believe that such a ‘conscience’ would gain from us the sense of obligation that we experience. No, the conscience we experience is before a higher court than we are. The claims of conscience only make sense based on there being a super person, God, standing behind it God is not a projection, nor is he a psychic archetype. ‘Only

¹¹ Frankl likens the body to a piano and the psyche to the pianist.

ontogenetically is the father first, ontologically God is the first' (Frankl, cited in Tweedie, 1961: 63).

2. Therapeutic strategy

Frankl contended that Freud (and Jung) laboured under the misguided idea that the unconscious was merely psychical.¹² Hence, psychoanalysis and analytical psychology sought to make conscious the (psychical or psychological) unconscious. However, Frankl believed that this procedure was not necessarily enough.

Frankl fully accepted the existence of the unconscious. But, he understood the unconscious to include more than the psychical. Depth psychologies failed to deal with the essential spiritual character of humanness itself which can not be restricted to the psychical. **Therefore, Frankl sought to make conscious the spiritual unconscious** (Tweedie, 1961: 49).

Frankl spoke of the *unconscious God*. This term does NOT mean that God exists in the unconscious alone. Frankl expressly denies Jung's notion of the god-archetype (Boeree, 1998). Boeree (1998) annoyingly obscures Frankl's ideas by making statements such as, 'his [Frankl's] God is not the God of the narrow mind, not the God of one denomination or another . . . not even the god of institutional religion God is very much a God of the inner human being, a God of the heart'.

Mercifully, we are saved from more of this post-modernist immanence and hear Frankl's own words, cited in Boeree (1998, my emphases):

This unconscious religiousness, revealed by our phenomenological analysis, is to be understood as ***a latent relation to transcendence*** inherent in man. If one prefers, he might conceive of this relation in terms of ***a relationship between the immanent self and a transcendent thou***. However one wishes to formulate it, we are confronted with what I should like to term "the transcendent unconscious" [sic]. This concept means no more or less than that man has always stood in an intentional relation to transcendence, even if only on an unconscious level. If one calls the intentional referent of such an unconscious relation "God", it is apt to speak of an "unconscious God."

¹² This criticism was one that Martin Buber, author of *I and Thou* levelled strongly at Jung.

This statement could come out of St Paul's first chapter to the Romans. Humankind has an unavoidable relationship to a transcendent God before Whom we are responsible.

3. Specific techniques

Tweedie (1961: 112-120) discusses two of Frankl's techniques: paradoxical intention and de-reflection. Interestingly, the first technique emerges from an understanding of the grief we can cause ourselves by not respecting the principle of *hyperintention*. Hyperintention becomes evident when we try to will what cannot be willed. Frankl was a great believer in freedom of will but he also respected its limitations. Have you ever tried by force of will to fall out of love with someone you are in love with? This cannot be done by force of will alone. Of course, we do fall out of love with others but it is more complicated than an act of will.

a) paradoxical intention

If one strains to achieve (say) happiness, one will almost certainly not achieve it. Happiness needs to happen, needs to ensue rather than being forced by a dwelling on what we (self-centredly) want and demand from life (as much, present-day counselling does).

The principle of hyperintention can be made useful in another context. For a nervous speaker, we can set her the task to get as nervous as she can the next time she speaks! If she says that she perspires copiously then challenge her to perspire as much as she can. She will be unable to do this because sweating is not under voluntary control. She paradoxically takes control of her worrying symptom by trying to do something she is unable to do! This *paradoxical intention* technique can also be used for stuttering by asking the person to try and stutter as much as she can particularly on those letters that give her the most trouble. Such efforts can bring humour into the situation that has become so serious that nothing funny can be seen in the situation. As soon as one sees the humour in it all then the grip of the condition is usually broken.

b) de-reflexion

Frankl cites the case of a woman who was having trouble achieving any sort of sexual pleasure with her husband. She had been sexually abused as a child but, as he observed, the abuse *per se* was not causing her present problems. These problems were being caused by her having anticipated that her past experiences would interfere with her married life and her becoming increasingly anxious about what was going to happen.

Short-term logotherapy directed her to focus her attention on her husband and away from herself. This therapy led to a satisfactory result. Frankl calls this re-direction, *de-reflexion*. While one focuses unduly on one's state one is anticipating a bad result. When one focuses away from oneself, a different dynamic is able to operate.

4. Self-transcendence and necessary suffering

Logotherapy is not concerned about self-actualisation. Logotherapy focuses on *self-transcendence*, that is, a going beyond one's self, a forgetting of the self, rather than being centred on the self. Our culture stresses happiness understood as 'pleasurable sensations'. We are bewildered when we encounter incurable disease that lays on us the burden of necessary suffering. We believe that in suffering there is no dignity because how can one be *happy* in suffering? However, Frankl urges us to find a meaning in our suffering and all successful sufferers, he contends, find that meaning to some extent.

For example, Frankl (1963: 178-179) tells the story of a widower, a GP no less, who comes to consult him because of the fact that he is severely depressed over the loss of his wife some 2 years ago. Frankl says to him, 'What would it have been like for her if you had died first and she had been left?' He replies that it would have been terrible for her; she would have suffered greatly. Frankl then presses home his point. Then you have been granted the privilege of saving her from that terrible suffering 'but you have to pay for it by surviving and mourning her' (Frankl, 1963: 179, emphasis mine).

In this example, we can identify both the importance of finding a meaning for our suffering and second, our being prepared to endure **necessary** suffering. Frankl does not advocate suffering for its own sake. He is not promoting masochism. But, he believes that to avoid legitimate suffering is to avoid what life gives us; avoidance will only lead to neurotic distortion in our lives. Thirdly, he invites this doctor into the self-transcendence mode because he gets him to imagine how his suffering has saved his wife from suffering. The doctor moves his gaze away from his suffering alone and understands his pain beyond his own distress.

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APPENDIX

Frankl and Religion

Boeree's (1998) has 'strong reservations' of Frankl in that 'Frankl attempts to insert religion into psychology, and does so in a particularly subtle and seductive manner'. His two issues seem to be that Frankl 'is asking us to base our understanding of human existence on faith, on a blind acceptance of the existence of ultimate truth, without evidence other than the "feeling" and intuitions and anecdotes of those who already believe'.

His second point is that Frankl claims to be an existentialist but is not because existentialism does not posit 'essences at the root of human existence' whereas, religion always does.

To take his last point first: all this argument suggests is that Frankl was not a consistent existentialist! One can hardly fault him on this for consistent existentialism invariably leads to atheism (see Hurding, 1985: 125 for Sartre's discussion on existentialism).

Concerning his first point, Frankl is being criticised because he is now acting like an existentialist! Existentialism is the belief that '*existence* come before essence - or if you will, that we must begin with the subjective' (Sartre, cited in Hurding, 1985: 125).

Boeree assumes that psychology can be religion¹³-free. I know that it is very unpopular to assert that this position is untenable but the statement of Sartre above bears this out. From where does this great thinker get his starting maxim that '*existence precedes essence*'? This axiom derives from the notion that there is no [transcendent] God. If God existed, Sartre argues, then humankind would have an essence, a nature, given it by God. But, since God does not exist, then humankind is the being in which existence precedes essence. In the centre of this argument is the assumption that there is no God.

From where does that idea come? It is an uncontested, unverifiable, control belief. I am not criticising Sartre or Boeree for believing it; I merely point out that their views begin with a leap of faith, 'on a blind acceptance of the existence of ultimate truth [in this case, that God does not exist], without evidence other than the "feeling" and intuitions and anecdotes of those who already believe'.

¹³ Others may prefer to use the word VALUE rather than religion. However, what I mean by religion is the heart commitment one gives to some value that one views as being ultimate. I do not mean by this statement that one can not distinguish between religion and psychology only that one cannot practise psychology without the presence of (usually) unconscious, implicitly held beliefs about what is (or is not) ultimate. Boeree illustrates this very point when he describes himself as 'not of a religious inclination' probably meaning that he does not believe in a personal God.

“Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of life is, but rather recognize that it is he who is asked.”

—Viktor Frankl

Quotes from Man's Search For Meaning by Viktor Frankl

When we are no longer able to change a situation - just think of an incurable disease such as inoperable cancer - we are challenged to change ourselves.

Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man - his courage and hope, or lack of them - and the state of immunity of his body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect.

It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future... And this is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence, although he sometimes has to force his mind to the task.

A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the "why" for his existence, and will be able to bear almost any "how."

Man does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment.