

Timo Purjo

The Spiritual Capabilities of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy



Guidelines for Successful Application

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PREFACE

What makes logotherapy and its practical applications as useful and necessary today as Viktor E. Frankl started developing it in the 1920s? We live in a rapidly changing world. People more or less all over the world have to face changes in our climate, depletion of natural resources, extinction of species, shortages of food, migration of peoples, increasing tension between nations, and perhaps also a rising number of wars. The global economic system based on growth, competition, and consumption results in the loss of connection to self, family, and the community that supports the excellent quality of life. Loneliness, alienation, as well as fear and hostility, will increase all the time. Frankl warned about the effects of an existential vacuum that follows from living a life without meaning. "Among the worldwide effects is what one might call the mass neurotic triad, which consists of depression, addiction, and aggression." (Frankl, 2011, p.99)

It is more and more evident that we have to start to rethink the way we live. No wonder that people of all ages seek a new perspective on how to fit in and survive in this world that seems to be heading in a new, challenging, and demanding direction. Towards a more complex and unpredictable future than ever. Our challenge is to find answers to the fundamental philosophical questions of a meaning in the world where nothing seems to make sense anymore. Or where it is tough to see the purpose of one's own life or the meaning in life at a given moment amid suffering.

The problem is that the idea of responsibility for the common good is eroding. Now is the time for us to develop ways of thinking in which all human activities have meaning and purpose. All people should aim at enhancing the common good. However, today more and more books are being published on finding meaning or purpose in one's personal life. The number of books and papers published with the title "meaning" or "purpose"

has entirely exploded. And what is the idea of most of the books? They encourage the readers to total egoism, to selfishness based on the belief that moral behavior should be directed toward one's self-interest only. In other words, they validate and strengthen such action that utilizes collective resources for selfish reasons, diminishes the common good, and leads to suffering. And, at its extreme, to the poverty of other people. The goal of that kind of ideology lies in mere personal wellbeing that aims to help one cope and thrive. Such an endeavor is in total contrast to Frankl's conception of the meaning and purpose of life.

Undoubtedly the best-known and most influential advocate for finding meaning and purpose in life is Viktor Frankl (Southwick & Charney, 2018, p.251). He used and refined his theories in clinical work and research on a large scale in the 1930s. He also wrote several articles and sketched his main work *Ärztliche Seelsorge* before World War II. He finalized it after being liberated from Nazi concentration camps, and it was published in 1946 (translated in English in a shortened form in 1955 with the title *The Doctor and the Soul*). In the same year, another book, *...trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen*, was also published. It is his autobiographical memoir chronicling his experiences as a prisoner in four Nazi concentration camps. The book didn't get almost any attention until it was published in the USA in 1959 with the title *Man's Search for Meaning*. After that, the book has sold more than 16 million copies in 50 languages.

Although *Man's Search for Meaning* is a most influential book that has made a difference in many people's lives, it is only one of his books, and from a theoretical point of view, it is not the most important one. Frankl describes his philosophical theory in 36 different books and almost 700 articles. Unfortunately, only 13—one third—of those books are available in English.

From current nonfiction book titles', one can quickly notice a growing interest in questions related to finding meaning and purpose in one's life. It

seems that there is a boom or even a movement around issues concerning life's meaning and purpose. In some of the books, Viktor Frankl is mentioned, in others not at all. It surprises me whenever I open a new book on this subject—written even by an academic—that the only book from Frankl referred to is *Man's Search for Meaning*. For me, this indicates that Frankl's lifework has been disregarded or even totally ignored by the author.

On the other hand, it seems fashionable to mention Viktor Frankl. That is good if genuine interest in his thought system increases; the concerns and suggested solutions that Frankl expressed do not depend on time and place. Frankl's thoughts are just as relevant—or even more current—today as they were in the 1900s. Especially when treating anxious, depressed, and suicidal persons in the 1930's, Frankl was wise enough to see the real phenomenon behind the symptoms. His profound understanding of tragedy, trauma, and resilience is unique (Southwick & Charney, 2018, pp.264-265).

While I am delighted about this new renaissance of Frankl's ideas, I am also worried, particularly about the increasing use of citations out of context. But my most significant concern is that the core of Frankl's theory may be lost while used in different applications and with multiple purposes. These interpretations and emphases can—and should—differ slightly, depending on the context. Each field has its issues and problems; however, the question addressed concerns the same human being. Therefore, we must not forget Frankl's conception of the person; if lost, the answer is about something else.

Viktor Frankl was a medical doctor who specialized in psychiatry and neurology. But he could be characterized as an inborn philosophical thinker, which was evident already in his early childhood. Frankl was the founder of logotherapy, which has come to be called the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy (after Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual

psychology). The anthropology of a therapeutic system profoundly influences the entire system. Frankl was firm in the importance of an explicit conception of the nature of humanity. That is why he frequently speaks of human beings' quality and presents well-developed anthropology in his writings. (Kimble & Ellor, 2000, p.9.) This philosophical-theoretical foundation prevalent in the logotherapeutic practice is called logotherapy (Frankl, 2000, p.75). In logotherapy, it becomes evident that the foundation of Frankl's system of thought is solidly grounded.

In Frankl's conception of the human being, the differences with those schools of psychotherapy, which constitute the psychological roots of logotherapy—Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual psychology—can best be distinguished. However, logotherapy's origins are not only psychological but, above all, philosophical. They lie in existential and phenomenological philosophies and an existential-phenomenological conception of the person. Within that framework, a human being is fundamentally understood as a spiritual person that cannot be reduced, explained to the level of being simpler. Concepts such as responsibility and will to meaning cannot be reduced to mere biological cerebral processes or psychological urges, instincts, and drives. Human beings are as spiritual beings transcendent, not only over the world but more importantly over self. (Kimble & Ellor, 2000, pp.9-10.) "*Self-transcendence*, I would say, is the essence of existence; and existence, in turn, means the specifically human mode of being (Frankl, 1967 p.74)."

Where does logotherapy (as a general concept for logotherapy and logotherapy) stand today? According to The Wiley World Handbook of Existential Therapy (Deurzen, 2019, p.321), logotherapy is organized through the International Association of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis. This society is active in 41 countries worldwide, with 134 accredited institutions (May 2019). That makes this organization the most widely spread existential organization in the world. There are ongoing

lectures at various universities and training programs in accredited institutions. There are biennial international congresses organized by the Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna with several hundred attendants, and between 10 and 20 local conferences in different countries around the world every year and an innumerable number of journals. Currently, there are almost 450 books and 400 master and doctoral theses on logotherapy in various languages. More than 600 empirical investigations have provided evidence for the effectiveness of logotherapy, including the development of 15 specific logotherapeutic instruments (2006). (Deurzen, 2019 p.321.) In Austria and Switzerland, logotherapy is also recognized by the state—in the USA by the American Psychology Association—as an approach to psychotherapy and counseling (Frankl, 2010 p.35).

I became interested in Viktor Frankl's thought system of logotherapy in 2004 after I had started planning my doctoral dissertation on youth education and nonviolence from the perspective of value education. After reading one of Frankl's books translated into Finnish, I became hungry and devoured all Frankl's works published in German, English, and Finnish.¹ Therefore, my dissertation used a logothetical viewpoint, which I have supplemented

¹ There are 31 German and five original English works and, also, seven works translated into English from German, five works translated into Finnish from German, and three works translated into Finnish from English. In German, a 14-volume edition of the collected works of Viktor Frankl is also in the plans. Five of it have been published so far (May 2019). I am happy to read Frankl's books in German fluently because I had a bilingual education in the German School Helsinki. According to my judgment, it is impossible to fully understand Frankl's thought system without having read all or at least a significant part of his books in the original language. For English-speaking people, it is noteworthy that several of Frankl's key works have not been translated into English at all. Besides, his two principal scientific works translations—*Ärztliche Seelsorge* (*The Doctor and the Soul*) and *Der unbewusste Gott* (*The Unconscious God*, and its expanded version *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*)—are heavily abridged. Thus, they are missing many philosophically and theoretically fundamental parts. The translations of the text itself are also partially misleading or downright incorrect.

with the Finnish philosopher Lauri Rauhala's thinking. I aimed for both a new proposal for an existential-phenomenological conception of the person and a basis for adolescents' educational work, focusing on life skills and ethics. Like Rauhala, I understand education broadly to refer to influences aimed at guiding and supporting adolescents' growth in homes and professional contexts in schools, counseling, social work, psychotherapy, and pastoral care. Education can, of course, take place in the work of physicians and other health professionals, but this was not an emphasis on my dissertation.

I obtained the final inspiration from the warm reception that my dissertation received among people who use logotherapy in their research and application work. To my surprise, many busloads of logotherapy students and professionals came to the public defense of my dissertation. Half of the attendees represented the field of logotherapy.

The attention that I received culminated in the World Congress on Logotherapy in Dallas, Texas, in June 2011 when, to my surprise, I was given "The Statue of Responsibility Award" for promoting Viktor Frankl's life work internationally through my dissertation.² The atmosphere of reciprocal recognition that I sensed from my colleagues strengthened my determination to develop further these ideas as part of an emerging community. For this purpose, I have presented my research findings and current interpretations at several international conferences. I have also earned the credential of Diplomat in Logotherapy from the Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy in the United States in 2012 and became an accredited member of the International Association of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis at the Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna in 2013. Viktor Frankl Institute Finland, which I have set up, was, for a long time, the only accredited training institute in the Nordic countries. Today, some of my

² The most renowned recipient of this award was Mother Teresa.

former students have established their own institutes, which also have been accredited.

So far, I have written six books and edited two books on logotherapy; one of them is translated into German, but this is my first book in English.³ I promised to write it finally because so many have asked for it, most recently after my presentation at the International Congress on Logotherapy & Existential Analysis in Moscow in September 2018. The focus of all my books on logotherapy has always been in making Frankl's philosophical principles more evident for all those with no philosophical background. I have done that by interpreting, clarifying, elaborating, and formulating so that his brilliant ideas can be applied comprehensively to self-education and self-development, as well as those in the helping and healing professions.

Thus, I aim to make the theory concealed in Frankl's thought system more visible by reconstructing the scientific-theoretical background prevailing in logotherapy and producing an explicitly, as clearly and in detail as possible, expressed form of logotherapy. Personally, research has only an instrumental value; through scientific or theoretical research, I seek knowledge that can help professionals while helping others discover their conditions for a good life. In my opinion, research has to justify itself through practice. For a researcher in the human sciences and philosophy, this means responsibility for the future of helping people, a duty to develop better procedures. I aim to help those in the helping professions to understand logotherapy in a manner that enables us—including myself—to apply it in our practices. This understanding will comprehend what is possible and what is essential—and even our duty—to do for the benefit of those we are helping. I hope that my work will be useful for all those who seek inspiration for their growth towards responsibility.

³ Altogether, this is the 21st book that I have written or edited. Most of those deal with youth education, value education, and nonviolence education.

This book belongs to a series dealing with what is unfolding for me as the real character of the theory of logotherapy and opportunities for application in the helping professions and individuals. I have heard several people say how simple and easily understandable the doctrine of logotherapy is. It is simple, in the sense that the logic of thinking is constructed on a limited number of axioms and *existentialia*.⁴ As far as its internal logic is concerned, it can thus be regarded as a relatively simple theory. However, as a philosopher I must question it and regularly ask what else is in it besides what I already understood. In my experience, Frankl's theory is not easy to understand; there is a danger of misunderstanding its central concepts. Viktor Frankl himself mastered all issues of logotherapy entirely, but, unfortunately, there are some areas where he refrained from giving detailed descriptions.

Besides research, I have also written this book with the understanding that I have formed during my quarter-century-long practical work in youth education in schools, child welfare clinics, and juvenile prisons. Frankl's works more and more influenced violent youth and young adults' education in life skills with particular ethical emphasis. The goal of such education is the responsibility of the person, or more precisely, a good existence, i.e., a life full of meaning and love. I have already retired from youth education activities. Still, I continue as a logotherapist for adults and a trainer of new logotherapists.

I am fully aware that it is impossible to include in one book all those topics that Frankl has described in his over thirty books and hundreds of articles. Moreover, I cannot insert everything that I have so far interpreted and understood of Frankl's doctrine in one single book. Therefore, this book is only one contribution to this pervasive and rich theme. This book's

⁴ In philosophy, an axiom is a premise which is evident without controversy. On the other hand, "existentialia" (plural *existentialia*) was defined by Heidegger, which expresses a person's fundamental way of being-in-the-world.

perspective is philosophical, and I have chosen as a central task to explain and argue why logotherapy is pure philosophy and why logotherapy—as a result of that—is essentially a philosophical therapy. Logotherapy, the praxis of logotherapy, is a form of philosophical practice regardless of its uses as psychiatry or psychotherapy method or to some other activity that aims to clarify one's life philosophy. My goal is specifically to elaborate and formulate Frankl's concepts on human's spiritual capabilities so that they are usable as practical and concrete tools for helping others or for one's personal use.

The process of developing my ideas has strengthened the belief that I have been allowed to start tracing a continuously opening truth that sheds light uniquely on the meaning of life. It has also reinforced the questions I have about the simplicity of the logotherapy. In these ultimate questions, a person's comprehension is limited. The truth appears slowly and with great effort. The search for real knowledge, actual truth, is like walking in a maze: one has to notice and acknowledge that there are several alternative routes. Some of them do not lead anywhere, and some lead astray; the road onwards opens only along with one of the ways. I continue striving to discover the right one. Therefore, I have decided to devote the rest of my life to researching logotherapy and promoting it in Finland and internationally. I am convinced that this will be the first of a whole series of books that I write in English. And I am also very pleased if my books are translated into other languages.

Timo Purjo

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ADDITION TO PREFACE

I wrote the preface to this book already some time ago. Since then, the world has changed dramatically. A pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19 or SARS-CoV-2) has spread worldwide. An enormous amount of suffering and death has been experienced near and far.

Many of my former students, who have not been in touch for a long time, have contacted me. They have expressed gratitude that they have been able to study logotherapy. That is as designed for this time and for the future to come.

Many people around the world have started talking about hope. As researchers of logotherapy and practitioner of logotherapy, we know, as Viktor Frankl teaches, that hope is a side effect that follows itself after we have found the subject of hope. Hope is an automatic side effect of something we can believe in and attach to, creating meaning and purpose in life.

In a situation like this, it is useful to look at the future. To reach out to a time when all of this is over. However, not everyone can survive at all, and survival is not self-evident or effortless for just about anyone. Survival, insofar as the opportunity is available, requires strong spiritual abilities. It even requires extraordinary capabilities, such as the defiant power of the human spirit that Viktor Frankl himself says he used while in concentration camps.

To find something in the future after this pandemic that will enable us to live a better, worthwhile, and meaningful life, we need all the lessons that logotherapy entails. I believe that beyond this pandemic, logotherapy is more valuable and necessary than ever, and I, therefore, hope that as many people as possible will have the opportunity to become acquainted with it.

The book is about human spiritual capacities that Viktor Frankl presents in his philosophy and their applicability to the daily lives of all of us. The book is divided into two parts, theoretical and practical. The focus of the first part of the book is to analyze Viktor Frankl's holistic conception of the person. In the second part, the person's fundamental abilities, such as self-distancing, self-transcendence, and the defiant power of the human spirit, are examined in depth. The book's perspective is on the existential-phenomenological philosophical nature of logotherapy and its consistent consideration, especially when it comes to helping other people alleviate their suffering.

The author of the book, Timo Purjo, Ph.D. and Diplomee in Logotherapy, is the founder and director of the Viktor Frankl Institute Finland. He is a researcher, writer, lecturer, and an accredited trainer and practitioner of logotherapy and existential analysis. This is Purjo's 21st book, yet the first in English.



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