

LOGOTHERAPY DISCOVERING MEANING



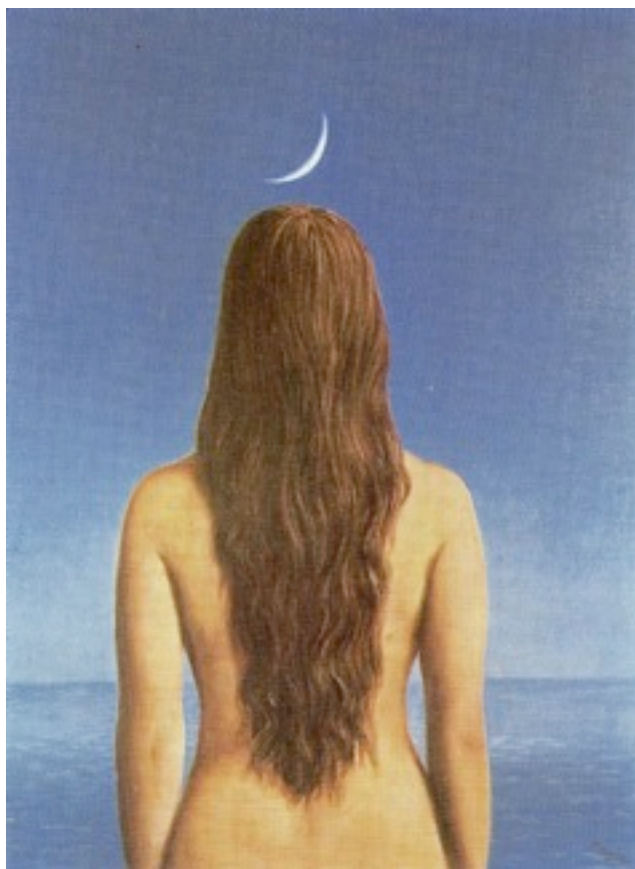
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Logotherapy was developed by neurologist and psychiatrist **Viktor Frankl**. It is considered the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy" after Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual psychology. It is a type of existentialist analysis that focuses on a *will to meaning* as opposed to Adler's doctrine of *will to power* or Freud's *will to pleasure*. Rather than power or pleasure, logotherapy is founded upon the belief that it is the striving to find a meaning in one's life that is the primary, most powerful motivating and driving force in humans. A short introduction to this system is given in Frankl's most famous book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which he outlines how his theories helped him to survive his Holocaust experience and how that experience further developed and reinforced his theories.

Basic principles

The notion of *Logotherapy* was created with the Greek word *logos* ("meaning"). Frankl's concept is based on the premise that the primary motivational force of an individual is to find a meaning in life. The following list of tenets represents basic principles of logotherapy:

- Life has meaning under all circumstances, even the most miserable ones.
- Our main motivation for living is our will to find meaning in life.
- We have freedom to find meaning in what we do, and what we experience, or at least in the stand we take when faced with a situation of unchangeable suffering.



“It is the very pursuit of happiness that thwarts happiness.” *Viktor Frankl*

“Life can be pulled by goals just as surely as it can be pushed by drives.” *Viktor Frankl*

“Ever more people today have the means to live, but no meaning to live for.” *Viktor Frankl*

Discovering meaning

According to Frankl, "We can discover this meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering" and that "everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances". On the meaning of suffering, Frankl gives the following example:

"Once, an elderly general practitioner consulted me because of his severe depression. He could not overcome the loss of his wife who had died two years before and whom he had loved above all else. Now how could I help him? What should I tell him? I refrained from telling him anything, but instead confronted him with a question, "What would have happened, Doctor, if you had died first, and your wife would have had to survive you?:" "Oh," he said, "for her this would have been terrible; how she would have suffered!" Whereupon I replied, "You see, Doctor, such a suffering has been spared her, and it is you who have spared her this suffering; but now, you have to pay for it by surviving and mourning her." He said no word but shook my hand and calmly left the office."

Frankl emphasized that realizing the value of suffering is meaningful only when the first two creative possibilities are not available (for example, in a concentration camp) and only when such suffering is inevitable - he was not proposing that people suffer unnecessarily.



"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." *Viktor Frankl*

"Each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible." *Viktor Frankl*

"The meaning of our existence is not invented by ourselves, but rather detected." *Viktor Frankl*

Philosophical basis of Logotherapy

Frankl described the metaclinical implications of logotherapy in his book *The Will of Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy*. He believed that there is no psychotherapy apart from the theory of man. As an existential psychologist, he inherently disagreed with the “machine model” or “rat model”, as it undermines the human quality of humans. As a neurologist and psychiatrist, Frankl developed a unique view of non-determinism to coexist with the three basic pillars of logotherapy (the freedom of will).

Though Frankl admitted that man can never be free from every condition, such as, biological, sociological, or psychological determinants, based on his experience in the Holocaust, he believed that man is “capable of resisting and braving even the worst conditions”. In doing such, man can detach from situations, himself, choose an attitude about himself, determine his own determinants, thus shaping his own character and becoming responsible for himself.



“Being tolerant does not mean that I share another one’s belief. But it does mean that I acknowledge another one’s right to believe, and obey, his own conscience.” *Viktor Frankl*

Logotherapeutic views and treatment

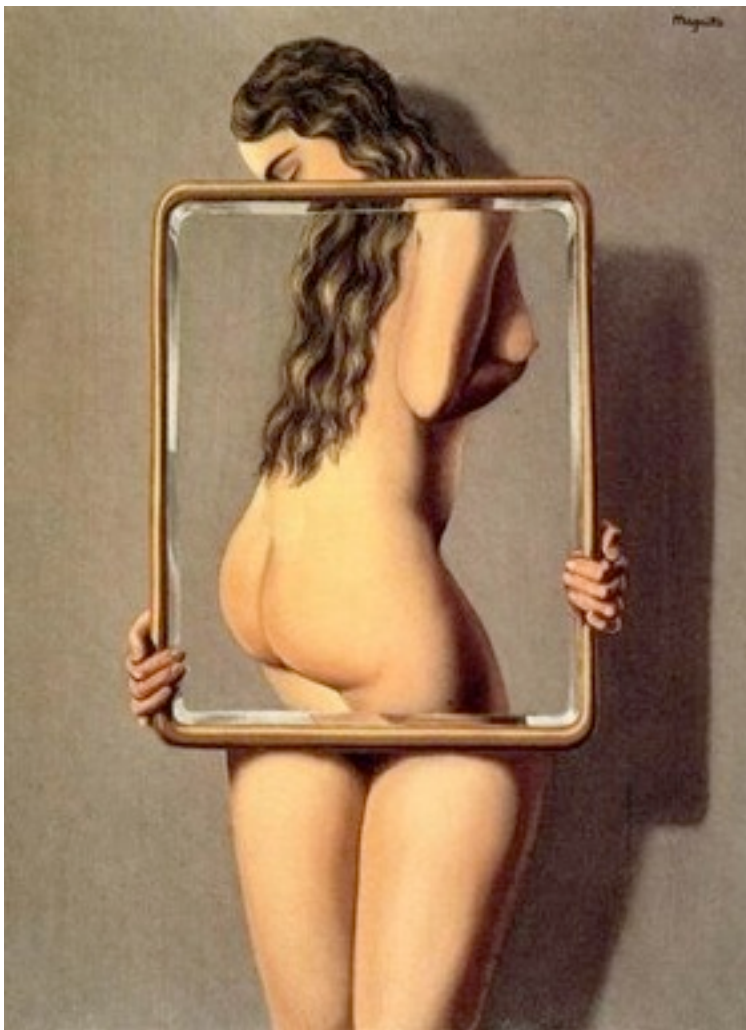
Overcoming anxiety

By recognizing the purpose of our circumstances, one can master anxiety. Anecdotes about this use of logotherapy are given by *New York Times* writer Tim Sanders, who explained how he uses its concept to relieve the stress of fellow airline travelers by asking them the purpose of their journey. When he does this, no matter how miserable they are, their whole demeanor changes, and they remain happy throughout the flight. Overall, Frankl believed that the anxious individual does not understand that his anxiety is the result of dealing with a sense of “unfulfilled responsibility” and ultimately a lack of meaning.

Treatment of neurosis

Frankl cites two neurotic pathogens: **hyper-intention**, a forced intention toward some end which makes that end unattainable; and **hyper-reflection**, an excessive attention to oneself which stifles attempts to avoid the neurosis to which one thinks oneself predisposed. Frankl identified anticipatory anxiety, a fear of a given outcome which makes that outcome more likely. To relieve the anticipatory anxiety and treat the resulting neuroses, logotherapy offers **paradoxical intention**, wherein the patient intends to do the opposite of his hyper-intended goal.

A person, then, who fears (i.e. experiences anticipatory anxiety over) not getting a good night's sleep may try too hard (that is, hyper-intend) to fall asleep, and this would hinder his ability to do so. A logotherapist would recommend, then, that he go to bed and intentionally try not to fall asleep. This would relieve the anticipatory anxiety which kept him awake in the first place, thus allowing him to fall asleep in an acceptable amount of time.



“A human being is a deciding being.” *Viktor Frankl*

“Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible.” *Viktor Frankl*



“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.”” *Viktor Frankl*

Depression

Viktor Frankl believed depression occurred at the psychological, physiological, and spiritual levels. At the psychological level, he believed that feelings of inadequacy stem from undertaking tasks beyond our abilities. At the physiological level, he recognized a lack of “vital low”, which he defined as a “diminishment of physical energy”. Finally, Frankl believed that at the spiritual level, the depressed man faces tension between who he actually is in relation to what he should be. Frankl refers to this as the “gaping abyss” (Frankl; page 202). Finally Frankl suggests that if goals seem unreachable, an individual loses a sense of future and thus meaning, resulting in depression. Thus logotherapy aims “to change the patient’s attitude toward her disease as well as toward her life as a task” (Frankl, page 200).

Obsessive-compulsive disorder

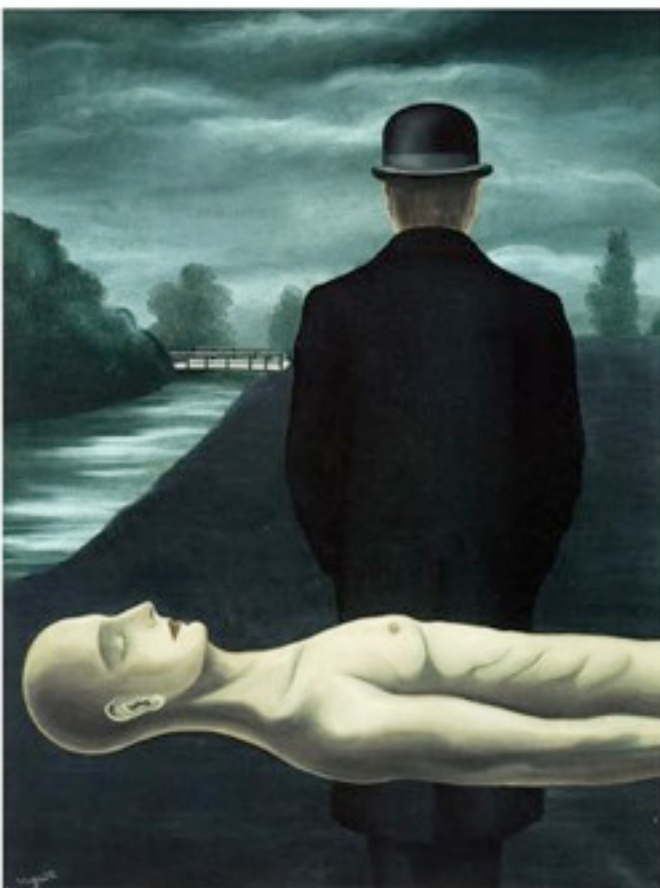
Frankl believed that those suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder lack the sense of completion that most other individuals possess. Instead of fighting the tendencies to repeat thoughts or actions, or focusing on changing the individual symptoms of the disease, the therapist should focus on “transform[ing] the neurotic’s attitude toward his neurosis” (Frankl; page 185). Therefore, it is important to recognize that the patient is “not responsible for his obsessional ideas”, but that “he is certainly responsible for his attitude toward these ideas” (Frankl; page 188). Frankl suggested that it is important for the patient to recognize his inclinations toward perfection as fate, and therefore, must learn to accept some degrees of uncertainty. Ultimately, following the premise of logotherapy, the patient must eventually ignore his obsessional thoughts and find meaning in his life despite such thoughts.

Schizophrenia

Though logotherapy wasn't intended to deal with severe disorders, Frankl believed that logotherapy could benefit even those suffering from schizophrenia. He recognized that roots of schizophrenia in physiological dysfunction. In this dysfunction, the schizophrenic "experiences himself as an object" rather than a subject (Frankl; page 208). Frankl suggested that a schizophrenic could be helped by logotherapy by first being taught to ignore voices and end persistent self-observation. Then, during this same period, the schizophrenic must be led toward meaningful activity, as "even for the schizophrenic there remains that residue of freedom toward fate and toward the disease which man always possesses, no matter how ill he may be, in all situations and at every moment of life, to the very last" (Frankl, page 216).

Terminally-ill patients

In 1977, Terry Zuehlke and John Watkins conducted a study analyzing the effectiveness of logotherapy in treating terminally-ill patients. The study's design used 20 male Veterans Administration volunteers who were randomly assigned to one of two possible treatments - (1) group that received 8-45 minute sessions over a 2 week period and (2) group used as control that received delayed treatment. Each group was tested on 5 scales - the MMPI K Scale, MMPI L Scale, Death Anxiety Scale, Brief Psychiatric Rating Scale, and the Purpose of Life Test. The results showed an overall significant difference between the control and treatment groups. These results confirm the idea that terminally-ill patients can benefit from logotherapy in coping with death.



"We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement. 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." *Viktor Frankl*

What is Logotherapy?

a) Definition

Literally, logotherapy means 'therapy through meaning'. It's an active-directive therapy aimed at helping people specifically with meaning crises, which manifest themselves either in a feeling of aimlessness or indirectly through addiction, alcoholism or depression. Logotherapy also employs techniques useful for phobias, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorders and medical ministry. Other applications include working with juvenile delinquents, career counselling and helping all of us find more meaning in life.

b) Foundations

i) Existentialism

It's existentialist because it emphasises the freedom of the will and the consequent responsibility. It also, of course, asserts the importance of the meaning of life. Whilst Freud said human's have a will to pleasure and Adler the will to power, Frankl says we have a will to meaning. If it is frustrated, spiritual (noogenic) neuroses result. Frankl argued that the spiritual (noetic) dimension of man should be added to the physical and psychological dimensions. For Frankl, ultimate meaning does exist and is unique to each person and each situation. Each moment offers "a sequence of unrepeatable situations each of which offers a specific meaning to be recognised and fulfilled". Meaning cannot be invented but must be discovered.

ii) Stoicism

It's Stoic, because it holds that no matter what the state of the world, our attitude can always help us. The Stoic Epictetus held that 'Men are not moved by events but by their interpretations'. Even in facing death and suffering, by showing courage we can turn a situation into a supremely meaningful one.

iii) Frankl's own experiences, in concentration camps and as a psychiatrist

"This was the lesson I had to learn in three years spent in Auschwitz and Dachau: other things being equal, those apt to survive the camps were those oriented toward the future - toward a task, or a person, waiting for them in the future, toward a meaning to be fulfilled by them in the future" . But Logotherapy was also the result of Frankl's own ideas and improvisations, not all of which are very obviously connected with his experiences in the camps or the meaning of life.



“For the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person’s life at a given moment.”
Viktor Frankl

Techniques of Logotherapy

Paradoxical Intention

The therapist encourages the patient to intend or wish for, even if only for a second, precisely what they fear.

1. Used for obsessive, compulsive and phobic conditions (not for suicidal or schizophrenic patients).
2. Useful in cases of underlying anticipatory anxiety, often works very quickly.
3. Mobilises the human capacity for self-detachment, often with a sense of humour.
4. Hans Gerz claims that paradoxical intention is successful in 80-90% of cases.

An example is the case of the sweating doctor (from Psychotherapy and Existentialism). A young doctor had severe hydrophobia. One day, meeting his chief on the street, as he extended his hand in greeting, he noticed that he was perspiring more than usual. The next time he was in a similar situation he expected to perspire again, and this anticipatory anxiety precipitated excessive sweating. It was a vicious circle ... We advised our patient, in the event that his anticipatory anxiety should recur, to resolve deliberately to show the people whom he confronted at the time just how much he could really sweat. A week later he returned to report that whenever he met anyone who triggered his anxiety, he said to himself, "I only sweated out a litre before, but now I'm going to pour out at least ten litres !" What was the result of this paradoxical resolution ? After suffering from his phobia for four years, he was quickly able, after only one session, to free himself of it for good.

You are the logotherapist

In the following cases, what paradoxical intention, if any, would you recommend ?

- i) A man is fearful that he will die from a heart attack. Physical check-ups reveal him to be in good health.
- ii) An obsessive-compulsive comes to you because she is concerned about the number of times she washes her hands each day.
- iii) A young man comes to you for help with stuttering. What do you advise ?
- iv) A schizophrenic is anxious that the people he sees on the tube are out to get him.



“What is to give light
must endure burning.”
Viktor Frankl

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

Dereflection

The therapist diverts the patients away from their problems towards something else meaningful in the world.

1. Used specifically for sexual dysfunction. Deflection indicated because (e.g.) the more you think about potency during sex, the less likely you are to achieve it.
2. No use just telling them to stop thinking about something - need to substitute something positive (e.g. insomniac -don't just tell them to stop trying to sleep, tell them to count sheep).
3. More generally, logotherapy can be seen as dereflecting the patient away from their presenting problem towards searching for meaning. Patient is dereflected from their disturbance to something other than themselves.

Frankl's advice to Anna, 19-year old art student who displays severe symptoms of incipient schizophrenia. She considers herself as being confused and asks for help.

Patient: What is going on within me ?

Frankl: Don't brood over yourself. Don't inquire into the source of your trouble. Leave this to us doctors. We will steer and pilot you through the crisis. Well, isn't there a goal beckoning you - say, an artistic assignment ?

Patient: But this inner turmoil

Frankl: Don't watch your inner turmoil, but turn your gaze to what is waiting for you. What counts is not what lurks in the depths, but what waits in the future, waits to be actualised by you....

Patient: But what is the origin of my trouble ?

Frankl: Don't focus on questions like this. Whatever the pathological process underlying your psychological affliction may be, we will cure you. Therefore, don't be concerned with the strange feelings haunting you. Ignore them until we make you get rid of them. Don't watch them. Don't fight them.

Imagine, there are about a dozen great things, works which wait to be created by Anna, and there is no one who could achieve and accomplish it but Anna. No one could replace you here in this assignment, They will be your creations, and if you don't create them, they will remain uncreated forever...

Patient : Doctor, I believe in what you say. It is a message which makes me happy.



“Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual.”

Viktor Frankl

“Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life... Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone’s task is as unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it.”

Viktor Frankl

Orientation towards Meaning

The therapist tries to enlarge the patient's discernment of meaning - in the past, present and future, and creatively, experientially and attitudinally.

1. Meaning through creative values

Frankl says that "The logotherapist's role consists in widening and broadening the visual field of the patient so that the whole spectrum of meaning and values becomes conscious and visible to him". A major source of meaning is through the value of all that we create, achieve and accomplish.

2. Meaning through experiential values

Frankl (The Doctor and the Soul) writes "Let us ask a mountain-climber who has beheld the alpine sunset and is so moved by the splendour of nature that he feels cold shudders running down his spine - let us ask him whether after such an experience his life can ever again seem wholly meaningless".

3. Meaning through attitudinal values

Frankl argued that we always have the freedom to find meaning through meaningful attitudes, even in apparently meaningless situations.



“What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for some goal worthy of him. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost, but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him.” *Viktor Frankl*

“Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality.” *Viktor Frankl*

For the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment.

[Viktor E. Frankl](#)

Case study of Harold (Chris Wurm)

Harold was a middle-aged Australian whose life was rapidly spiralling out of control. As well as a drinking problem, he had financial problems - not helped by the amount he spent on drink - and was under considerable stress at work. His wife's sympathy was running out - no wonder he was also having trouble sleeping at night. He went to see Chris Wurm, a GP as well as a logotherapist. Wurm combined a medical approach - for example giving information about the damage drink was doing - with logotherapy. In very few sessions Harold's life was turned round, partly by the clarification of the role of alcohol in his life and the alternatives. Wurm says "It was possible to discuss the notion that he could make choices and live his life in a variety of ways" (there we see logotherapy's emphasis on responsibility) "some of which would be more meaningful than others. He was then able to reflect on the choices he had been making (this is the orientation towards meaning and values), and the possibilities available in the future. It was dramatic to see how determined and effective he became, once he saw how his old strategies were backfiring".



“The existential vacuum manifests itself mainly in a state of boredom.” *Viktor Frankl*

“The last of the human freedoms is to choose one’s attitudes.” *Viktor Frankl*

“We can discover this meaning in life in three different ways: 1. By doing a deed; 2. By experiencing a value; and 3. By suffering.” *Viktor Frankl*

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

[Viktor E. Frankl](#)

