

Essential Logotherapy
An Introduction to the work of Viktor Frankl

Course Notes
Part 4

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An Overview of Logotherapy

Welcome back! We find meaning in our own framework of existence, realising that what we perceive is only a part of the whole, and can only ever be a part of the whole.

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) stated that this existential dilemma has become quite common in our days. Meaninglessness, he wrote, should be considered as a form of illness:

Absence of meaning in life, plays a crucial role in the etiology of neurosis. A neurosis must be understood, ultimately, as the suffering of a soul, which has not discovered its meaning. About a third of my cases are not suffering from any clinically definable neurosis, but from the senselessness and aimlessness of their lives.

This new type of neurosis cannot be attributed to such causes as repressed sexual drives (as Sigmund Freud might have described it), a frustrated yearning for power (as Alfred Adler might have diagnosed it) or some external changing conditions of living. It is mainly caused by the absence of purpose and meaning in life and it manifests itself in boredom, indifference, inner emptiness, apathy, a lack of goal orientation, despondence, a feeling of meaninglessness and dissatisfaction with life.

Viktor Frankl invented the term “Logotherapy” himself. In the Greek logos is often translated as “word”. However, its meaning was much deeper than that. There is no suitable and reasonably easy English word to translate the concept. In the Greek logos really referred to concepts rather than being a single word. It referred to concepts such as language, talk, conversation and story; but also to principles such as thought, reason, and even meaning and wisdom.

Frankl coined the term “existential analysis” to describe the work he wanted to do with Logotherapy. He did not regard it as a stand-alone therapy. In fact Frankl was a medical doctor and psychiatrist first and foremost. However, he was also convinced that medicine, by working with the body to a large extent and psychology, working with the mind or psyche was not addressing the full extent of what it means to be a human being.

The existential approach is first and foremost philosophical. It is concerned with understanding of the person’s situation in the world and with the clarification of how an individual constructs meaning in his or her life. It focuses on the relation of an individual with their own mortality, their personal identity, their social relationships, their understanding of the natural world and their spirituality – what they in their deepest heart believe to be important.

The existential approach regards human nature as open ended, flexible, and capable of an enormous range of experience. In this approach the assumption is that we each have the potential to create our lives with our wide range of free attitudes and behaviours.

It is important to understand that existential analysis, another name for Logotherapy, is not intended to be religiously based. Frankl intended it to be a secular therapy. However, it does challenge both therapist and client to think

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*deeply about life and its purpose. What was meant or intended for **your** life? In what do you find meaning?*

(Source Abrahami, L.M. Arizona Institute of Logotherapy)

The Principles of Logotherapy

Every therapy is founded on some axioms, that is foundations or assumptions that might be disputed and may not be able to be proved. For instance Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) might be defined as “a type of psychotherapeutic treatment that helps people learn how to identify and change destructive or disturbing thought patterns.” This is not complete, but already can be disputed – we can ask “who defines whether particular thought patterns are destructive?” for instance.

Logotherapy is founded on three basic principles:

- Every life has meaning
- Our greatest desire is to find meaning in life
- We have choices we can make to find that meaning.

Unlike some existential approaches, logotherapy believes that meaning is there, always, in every life circumstance. It can always be found.

Meaning can be found everywhere, in the smallest of life’s activities. We find meaning in:

- What we do or create. This is our gift, what we give to the world. For many it is our work or career, our family or our business.
- Our experience of the world. This is this world’s gift to us. It can be the beauty of nature itself, the wonder of music or art created by another. At its deepest level it is found in the love and understanding of our relationship with another.
- The attitude we take to unavoidable circumstance. We cannot determine what life brings to us, but we can always determine our attitude to that circumstance.

Many therapies look inwards. The task is to help you quell anxiety, overcome grief and so on. The posture of Logotherapy is always outwards, towards a task to fulfil or another to be loved or a stance to take in unavoidable situations. It is often about looking at circumstance through a different lens for instance:

- Work is not a daily grind but a contribution to society, as well as a way to support my family.
- A loving relationship is not about what I receive but about the welfare and satisfaction of the other.
- One can find meaning in even the most unbearable suffering. One always has the ability to choose an attitude, and with that he or she can transform tragedy into triumph.

The rocks of life are often unavoidable. Much of good fortune is what I have been spared from facing in my life. Frankl believed that psychiatrists might well spend more time to study the ordinary person in the street because most people seem to know instinctively how to respond to life’s challenges. Therapy is required for those who have hit a rock of life and fail to recover.

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Now it is time to have a brief overview of Logotherapy. Take time to watch the video presentation.

Video 2 – Logotherapy – A Pathway to mental stability

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/cr9vl8lzxwhoxxu/Essential%20Logotherapy%20Course.mp4?dl=0>

About Viktor Frankl

Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) was a medical doctor, a psychiatrist and a survivor of the holocaust and the concentration camps of World War II.

He had drafted his seminal work, *The Doctor and the Soul* before being sent to Auschwitz. He believed that both medicine and psychology addressed only limited dimensions of the human being. He always believed the whole person must be treated.

His psychiatric credo maintained that even behind the tragedy of brain damage or severe mental disability, the human person, the essence of the human, remained. Frankl held that all psychotherapy must be underpinned by a philosophy of the human being and life itself. He founded the Third Viennese School of psychotherapy, Logotherapy, on these principles.

Logotherapy is the third Viennese school of Psychotherapy, founded by Viktor Frankl (1905-1997).

Logotherapy addresses the deepest of human needs, to find meaning in life itself. It is not given, but it must be found by each person. As you have already seen the founding principles of Logotherapy are:

- Life always has meaning, at all times, even under the most difficult of circumstances.
- The greatest human desire is to find that meaning, which is unique to each individual.
- The human being always has a choice, to take a decision that leads to meaningful living.

Logotherapy is an adjunct to virtually all other psychotherapies, providing the foundation of living a meaningful life, so that presenting symptoms do not recur.

Viktor Frankl accepted the tenets of Freud (the First Viennese school, psychoanalysis), that human beings do seek for pleasurable experiences and avoid painful ones (The will to pleasure) and that much information resided and was repressed into the subconscious. In fact his first published papers followed Freudian teachings.

Frankl was also a member the second Viennese school (Alfred Adler's individual psychology) which focussed on the human desire to self-development and progressing to find a place as a member of society. (The will to power). This development could be inhibited by the inferiority complex.

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These schools of Psychoanalysis and Individual Psychology laid the foundations for much of modern psychology. Frankl was expelled from the Adlerian school because he challenged Adler's ideas as incomplete, maintaining that the deepest human motivation was to come to terms with life itself, to live in a way that has meaning.

Watch as Frankl tells his own story of the development of Logotherapy, the third Viennese school of psychotherapy.

Video 3 Frankl on the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/7za05hycujriq94/Viktor%20Frankl%20Opel.wmv?dl=0>

Many of Frankl's insights have been integrated, often only partially and without attribution, into more recent therapeutic approaches, but few approaches attempt to outline a philosophy of life encompassing what it means to be human.

Logotherapy maintains that, within the limits his psychiatric credo, the essence of the human being which Frankl called the *geistig* (often translated in English as the human spirit) is always capable of choosing, of taking a stand towards being the person we wish to be in a particular circumstance.

“Life does not guarantee happiness, it offers meaning” Frankl states. Hence suffering is accepted as part of life, as are guilt and death. All are unavoidable and the attitude the person takes to them is the most important issue.

The skill of the logotherapist is to help clients discover these truths about meaningful living. A logotherapist walks with, and sometimes challenges, clients as they determine meaningful directions in life.

Logotherapists come from all walks of life, as Logotherapy is first and foremost about what you believe about life itself. So we have trained logotherapists who are psychologists, medical practitioners, nurses, funeral directors, wedding celebrants, even accountants and company executives.

What is next? It is time to revisit your second worksheet, **Worksheet 2. Part B of the Purpose in Life Scale**. Before you finish this short course I invite you to revisit that. Would you now change anything in your responses? If so, what? Has your attitude to life itself changed, even a little?

To complete this short course, please download and fill out the Student Evaluation. This is optional but your opinion will help us improve this course.

Student Evaluation

First download the Word version of the Evaluation so that you can respond on that page.

Send the responses to Lifechange Therapies by uploading them to the LMS.