

Viktor frankl critique essay

Experience, Human Nature



Viktor Frankl was born in Vienna on March 26, 1905. His father, Gabriel Frankl, was a strong, disciplined man from Moravia who worked his way from government stenographer to become the director of the Ministry of Social Service. His mother, Elsa Frankl (nee Lion), was more tenderhearted, a pious woman from Prague. The middle of three children, young Viktor was precocious and intensely curious. Even at the tender age of four, he already knew that he wanted to be a physician. In high school, Viktor was actively involved in the local Young Socialist Workers organization.

His interest in people turned him towards the study of psychology. He finished his high school years with a psychoanalytic essay on the philosopher Schopenhauer, a publication in the International Journal of Psychoanalysis, and the beginning of a rather intense correspondence with the great Sigmund Freud. In 1925, a year after graduating and on his way towards his medical degree, he met Freud in person. Alfred Adler's theory was more to Frankl's liking, though, and that year he published an article - "Psychotherapy and Weltanschauung" - in Adler's International Journal of Individual Psychology.

The next year, Frankl used the term logotherapy in a public lecture for the first time, and began to refine his particular brand of Viennese psychology. In 1928 and 1929, Frankl organized cost-free counseling centers for teenagers in Vienna and six other cities, and began working at the Psychiatric University Clinic. In 1930, he earned his doctorate in medicine, and was promoted to assistant. In the next few years, Frankl continued his training in neurology. In 1933, He was put in charge of the ward for suicidal women at the Psychiatric Hospital, with many thousands of patients each year.

In 1937, Frankl opened his own practice in neurology and psychiatry. One year later, Hitler's troops invade Austria. He obtained a visa to the U. S. in 1939, but, concerned for his elderly parents, he let it expire. In 1940, Frankl was made head of the neurological department of Rothschild Hospital, the only hospital for Jews in Vienna during the Nazi regime. He made many false diagnoses of his patients in order to circumvent the new policies requiring euthanasia of the mentally ill. It was during this period that he began his manuscript, *Arztliche Seelsorge* - in English, *The Doctor and the Soul*.

Frankl married in 1942, but in September of that year, he, his wife, his father, mother, and brother, were all arrested and brought to the concentration camp at Theresienstadt in Bohemia. His father died there of starvation. His mother and brother were killed at Auschwitz in 1944. His wife died at Bergen-Belsen in 1945. Only his sister Stella would survive, having managed to emigrate to Australia a short while earlier. When he was moved to Auschwitz, his manuscript for *The Doctor and the Soul* was discovered and destroyed.

His desire to complete his work, and his hopes that he would be reunited with his wife and family someday, kept him from losing hope in what seemed otherwise a hopeless situation. After two more moves to two more camps, Frankl finally succumbed to typhoid fever. He kept himself awake by reconstructing his manuscript on stolen slips of paper. In April of 1945, Frankl's camp was liberated, and he returned to Vienna, only to discover the deaths of his loved ones. Although nearly broken and very much alone in the

world, he was given the position of director of the Vienna Neurological Policlinic -- a position he would hold for 25 years.

He finally reconstructed his book and published it, earning him a teaching appointment at the University of Vienna Medical School. In only 9 days, he dictated another book, which would become *Man's Search for Meaning*. Before he died, it sold over nine million copies, five million in the U. S. alone! During this period, he met a young operating room assistant named Eleonore Schwindt - "Elly" - and fell inlove at first sight. Although half his age, he credited her with giving him the courage to reestablish himself in the world. They married in 1947, and had a daughter, Gabriele, in December of that year. In 1948, Frankl received his Ph.

D. inphilosophy. His dissertation - *The Unconscious God* - was an examination of the relation of psychology and religion. That same year, he was made associate professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Vienna. In 1950, he founded and became president of the Austrian Medical Society for Psychotherapy. After being promoted to full professor, he became increasingly well known in circles outside Vienna. His guest professorships, honorary doctorates, and awards are too many to list here but include the Oskar Pfister Prize by the American Society of Psychiatry and a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Frankl continued to teach at the University of Vienna until 1990, when he was 85. It should be noted that he was a vigorous mountain climber and earned his airplane pilot's license when he was 67! In 1992, friends and family members established the Viktor Frankl Institute in his honor. In 1995,

he finished his autobiography, and in 1997, he published his final work, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, based on his doctoral dissertation. He has 32 books to his name, and they have been translated into 27 languages. Viktor Emil Frankl died on September 2, 1997, of heart failure. He is survived by his wife Eleonore, his daughter Dr.

Gabriele Frankl-Vesely, his grandchildren Katharina and Alexander, and his great-granddaughter Anna Viktoria. His impact on psychology and psychiatry will be felt for centuries to come. Logotherapy is based on the works of Viktor Frankl, a famous existentialist philosopher, psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor. He is the author of the best-seller: *Man's Search for Meaning*, which records his experiences in the Nazi concentration camps. Although Frankl initially was a personal student of Freud, he formed his own theory of human behaviour called logotherapy and had formulated many of his ideas before being imprisoned.

Logotherapy is described as a meaning-centred psychotherapy. The word 'logos' is a Greek word which also denotes 'meaning'. The word 'therapy' originates from the Greek word 'therapia' which literally means 'service'. Thus, logotherapy is a therapy through which one can be helped to find meaning – the meaning of one's own life as many people feel that their lives are void of any meaning. Viktor Frankl's theory and therapy grew out of his experiences in Nazi death camps. Watching who did and did not survive (given an opportunity to survive! , he concluded that the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche had it right: " He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how. " (Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted in 1963, p. 121) He saw that

people who had hopes of being reunited with loved ones, or who had projects they felt a need to complete, or who had great faith, tended to have better chances than those who had lost all hope. He called his form of therapy logotherapy, from the Greek word logos, which can mean study, word, spirit, God, or meaning. It is this last sense Frankl focusses on, although the other meanings are never far off.

Comparing himself with those other great Viennese psychiatrists, Freud and Adler, he suggested that Freud essentially postulated a will to pleasure as the root of all human motivation, and Adler a will to power. Logotherapy postulates a will to meaning. Logotherapy has become known as the 'Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy' after that of Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler and is a theory Frankl used not only in his professional life, but also in his private life. Frankl maintained that Logotherapy focuses on the future; "The prisoner who had lost faith in the future -- his future -- was doomed. - Viktor Frankl Logotherapy is based on an explicit philosophy of man and of human life. The concept of man as developed in *The Doctor and the Soul* is multi-dimensional. This means that man lives in a tri-dimensional world. This tri-dimensional world includes: 1. a world of things (physical); the physical-biological (somatic) level; 2. a world of anxieties and hopes, perceptions and memories, of introspection and emotions (psychic); the mental-intellectual (psychic) level; and 3. a world of searching, discovering and actualising unique meanings for one's life (noetic); the socio-spiritual (noetic) level.

Basic tenets. Logotherapy is founded upon the belief that the strongest motivation in human nature is the search for meaning in one's life. Frankl asserted that three facts are fundamental to human experience. These are: freedom of will; the will to meaning; and the meaning of life. Man lives in a world which like himself is unique. It is a world filled with other beings to encounter and meanings to fulfill. Freedom of will is proposed in contrast to philosophies of determinism; the will to meaning is emphasised in contrast to motivational theories based on homeostasis and meaning in life is affirmed in contrast to systems of reductionism.

Frankl spelt out the basic tenets of logotherapy as follows: * 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. Finding Meaning According to Logotherapy, meaning can be discovered in three 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.

Frankl contended that the human heart will remain restless until it has found and realized meaning. Meaning is always found outside of ourselves. If we have nothing and no-one to live for, nothing meaningful to give to the world, if we have no greater cause than our own interests to serve, we are overcome with a sense of futility and our lives remain empty. The existential aspect of Frankl's psychotherapy maintains that man always has the ability

to choose; no matter the biological, or environmental forces. An important aspect of this therapy is known as the tragic triad, consisting of pain, guilt, and death.

Frankl's Case for a Tragic Optimism uses this philosophy to demonstrate that optimism in the face of tragedy and in view of the human potential, which at its best always allows for: * Turning suffering into human achievement and accomplishment, * Deriving from guilt the opportunity to change oneself for the better, * Deriving from life's transitoriness an incentive to take responsible action. Meaning can be found in three principle ways, namely: 1. Creative values or what one gives to the world in terms of one's own positive contributions and creations.

They are more or less the active processes of life: working, producing, creating an artistic work, giving help to others, writing a great novel or taking care of a family. 2. Experiential values or what one takes from the world in terms of one's encounters and experience. Experiential values are realised when a person becomes sensitive and receptive to the truth and beauty. This requires an openness to the world as man engages in dialogue with the world of people and things. 3. Attitudinal values or the attitude one takes to a specific predicament or unchangeable fate or the stand one takes towards an unchangeable aspect of one's existence.

As human beings, we have freedom of will. We are not the helpless victims of bad circumstances. We can transcend these circumstances and change them. We have the capacity of thought which enables us to think things through and decide whether something is meaningful or senseless, right or

wrong, constructive or destructive. We also have a conscience which provides a consciousness of right and wrong and allows us to take responsible action. Human freedom, therefore, is the freedom of responsibility.

Freedom without responsibility is something arbitrary, senseless and either leaves us directionless, or can lead to irresponsible, lawless, immoral, violent or self-destructive ways of living. All of life can be meaningful; it can be realized in every situation and is nowhere more powerfully manifested than in the way we overcome difficulties and hardships, face suffering, or bear witness to the faith we have in good triumphing over evil, however long it takes and however much is asked of us in the process. Our triumph is that we are living our lives as they are meant to be lived, every day and in every way.