

Timo Purjo

Understanding Love



Towards a Profound Interpretation of Love

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PREFACE

This is a book about love, the effort to understand its essence and existence within oneself, others, and the world. It also aims to deepen my understanding of everything involved. The book does not claim that I, among all those who have explored the topic, know what love truly is. However, like many others, I have tried to understand it as best as I can. Many people I consider great philosophical thinkers have served as my guides. One of them is Viktor Frankl, the creator of logotherapy and logotherapy.

Although Frankl's teachings are in many ways at the center of the activities that I carry out in my life and for which I have also understood that I live, this is not exactly a textbook on logotherapy, like my previous English book, *The Spiritual Capabilities of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy* (Purjo, 2020b). Instead, this is a book about the most valuable thing that exists and can exist: love.

My role model for understanding love is my late mother, who was filled with love and gave it to others unconditionally. As I stated at my doctoral dissertation ceremony, my mother was not a philosopher or a seeker of wisdom, because she was already wise. I therefore identify the goal of becoming wise with existential fulfillment, or being filled with love, and the ability to love unconditionally.

I state in the introduction to my research report: "I dedicate my dissertation to my mother, because thanks to her upbringing and example, I am what I have become as a person. The influence of her love has carried me throughout my life. My mother is also my role model for the kind of person blessed with the cultivation of the heart, the kind of person I would like to grow into."

My dissertation, like many of my other books, dealt with education and the ideas of philosophers who are familiar with spiritual growth, such as Lauri Rauhala and Viktor Frankl. As Erich Fromm (2019, p. 115, footnote 3) notes, "The root of the word education is e-ducere, literally, to lead forth, or to bring out something which is potentially present." Based on that, I claim that Logotherapy and logocounseling are explicitly forms of education; their goal is to guide clients toward responsible humanity, namely, being responsible for the value and meaning of their existence.

My parents had conflicting valuations. My father's preferences focused on external success, such as status, power, and income, while my mother embodied tenderness, kindness, and love. Like the story of the two wolves inside a person told by an old Indian to his grandson, their influence on me caused an internal struggle until, finally, the stronger influencer – the greatest and highest of values – love – triumphed. After that, it became the guiding star of my life, leading me forward.

I thought I had already found a kind of life wisdom more than 30 years ago. At that point, I had figured out something fundamental about the nature of love. I understood that love is a difficult skill. However, it is possible to live

love out as a reality, as long as you want it strongly enough and are also willing to make an effort to make it come true. Since then, my will has been directed towards searching for love within myself and in life, and strengthening its manifestation. This book is yet another step towards a clearer understanding of love. However, I have not written all this just for myself. As is my custom, I want to share everything I understand with others, including you, my dear reader.

Many people have encouraged me at various stages of creating this book and eagerly awaited its publication. I would like to especially mention my numerous Ukrainian friends, who are my former students and current colleagues. I would also like to mention two of my former Croatian students, whom I additionally supervised and mentored, namely Vedrana Grgić and Kristina Rožić, both of whom are now logotherapists and logotherapy trainers (not forgetting Nataša Jakovac, whom I still mentor). I express my love to all of them and would especially like to thank Vedrana for her participation in proofreading my book and her valuable suggestions for changes, as well as her contribution to the book covers (together with her daughter Jelena) and introductory texts.

INTRODUCTION

Love is just a word until someone comes along and gives it a signification.

One of my scientific, peer-reviewed books in Finnish is called "Values are the basis of human activity" (Finnish: Arvot ovat ihmisen toiminnan perusta). It is also the central premise of this book. So I approach love first and foremost as a value that is the basis for the entire human existence and its purpose. It thus affects the quality of a person's feelings, attitudes, and ways of acting from deep within. That is, to all our feelings, thoughts, and intentions.

Love is a latent potential in all of us. The decisive thing is whether and to what extent it has awakened to manifest itself in us. One of the questions I am looking for an answer to in this book is how to awaken the dormant power of love in various life stages and situations.

So, love is also about a will to the greatest extent – and more precisely, about a "will to meaning", which Viktor Frankl calls "man's primary concern (Frankl, 1978, p. 29)", and "the basic striving of man to find and fulfill meaning and purpose (Frankl, 2014, p. 20)".¹ The highest possible

¹ What is called the will to meaning in Viktor Frankl's logotherapy does indeed have a central place in the system (Frankl, 2010, p. 125). In it, the will to meaning denotes the fundamental motivation of human existence – the deep longing of the human, spiritual person for their life to have meaning and purpose, that is, for what one lives for, suffers for, creates, and loves would be directed towards something greater than oneself. See the definition in Chapter 51 of this book, and my previous book (Purjo, 2020b), e.g., pages 40-42, and 233-239.

fulfillment of the will to meaning is found and actualized in love. It is not our minds but our hearts that make us human; it is not our capacity for rational thought but our ability for unconditional love.

Love is also the highest possible manifestation of self-transcendence. By self-transcendence, Frankl means reaching out beyond ourselves for something valuable, which he defines as "no more and no less than a fundamental anthropological characteristic of human existence" (Frankl, 2004, p. 4). Without reaching out to the world, the possibilities of meanings in different moments of life are lost. Only self-transcendence offers the possibility of a real, valuable, meaningful, and purposeful connection with the world.

The mystery of love has been pondered throughout human history. So there is an endless supply of usable inspiration materials. Because I have been familiar with Viktor Frankl's philosophy – logotherapy or logos theory, his theory of the Logos – for decades, in this work, I ask especially what we can learn about love, particularly from Frankl, even today. Although Frankl's thinking is at the center, I supplement it to some extent with the valuable thoughts of other philosophical thinkers. However, as human beings, and as such imperfect, we can never have comprehensive and conclusive answers about something as pure and ideal as love. Consequently, this book is also only one contribution to the unbroken philosophical discussion on the phenomenon of love. Despite that, I hope to be able to say something new and valuable about the subject that will enrich the reader.

Would it help to solve the riddle of love if you could think as innocently as little children? Anyway, at this point in my life, I strive to progress towards that kind of innocence, towards the starting point where there were still no faults inside me, but only the limitless possibility of love being realized.

Philosophizing is an excellent way to develop oneself as a person. It's about a skill that small children naturally have, a curious and wondering attitude toward the world. About exploring the world and asking fundamental questions. About philosophy, which, even as an ancient Greek word, means loving wisdom. Instead of talking about the "love of wisdom", Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) conceives philosophy as »the wisdom of love«. Either way, I consider the goal of philosophizing to be finding wisdom and being filled with love. I also like a thought from Alexandre Havaud that I once came across: "Wisdom is sometimes called the knowledge of the heart. This means that love, the highest of passions, enlightens our reason to serve our loved ones better."

It might be a good idea to start by reviewing the responses of some children aged 4 to 8 years old to the question "What does love mean?" asked by a group of professionals. The answers they received were broader, deeper, and more profound than anyone could have ever imagined.² "When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. My grandfather does it for her constantly, even though he also has arthritis. That's love." "Love is when you go out to eat and give someone most of your French fries without expecting them to give you any of theirs."

² I stumbled upon these answers while surfing the Internet, but didn't write down the more specific source if it was even mentioned.

"Love is when my mom makes coffee for my dad, and he takes a sip before giving it to him to make sure it tastes right." "Love is when mom gives dad the best piece of chicken." "Love is what's with you in the room at Christmas if you stop opening presents and just listen." "If you want to learn to love better, start with a friend you hate." "Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even though they know each other so well." If only their and all children's thoughts remained so pure and noble. Then the world would become a good place for everyone to live.

These children closely resemble Viktor Frankl as a young child. Frankl (2000, pp. 28-29) has said that at the age of three, he decided to devote himself to helping people by becoming a medical doctor. At the age of four, he had told his mother about his ideas for developing medicines that could heal people through experimentation, despite the risks involved. On the other hand, many current medications are associated with serious or even fatal side effects. In any case, Frankl's uncompromising principle throughout his life was to save human lives. And it meant not only the psychophysical essence of people but also their spirit, heart, and soul.

1 DETACHMENT FROM FREUD'S PSYCHOLOGISM AND ATTACHMENT TO SCHELER'S PHILOSOPHY

I think most readers know or have read the book *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which Frankl tells about his personal experiences in four different Nazi concentration camps (Frankl, 1985). No wonder, as the book has sold over 16 million copies in more than 50 languages. The book is most impressive, but, unfortunately, not many people are familiar with Frankl's scientific output, comprising about 40 books and hundreds of articles. A large part has also not been translated from the original German into other languages. Therefore, Frankl's teachings are not very well known even in the academic world, let alone among the general public. This is a shame because it deserves much more attention than it has received. Fortunately, the situation is improving in many countries thanks to active and dedicated trailblazers.

Viktor E. Frankl (1905–1997) was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist who, in the 1930s, laid down the foundations of a new and original system of psychotherapy, Logotherapy and Existential Analysis (LTEA). Frankl's doctrine is sometimes called the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy", after those established by Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler. LTEA is an internationally acknowledged and empirically based meaning-centered approach to psychotherapy.

However, LTEA is not a form of psychotherapy alone but includes a holistic and comprehensive philosophical theory of humans and their existence. Frankl sometimes called this logotherapy – a concept I am accustomed to

This book is a true voyage of exploration across the sea of love. In this insightful work, the author, PhD Timo Purjo, invites readers on a journey from foundational ideas to real-life situations where love becomes an attitude, a responsibility, a decision, and a calling. Drawing on the legacy of Viktor Frankl and enriched by thoughts of Max Scheler, Karl Jaspers, Emmanuel Levinas, Erich Fromm, and other eminent thinkers, love is not considered simply as an emotion but as an existential commitment, capable of growth, shaped by suffering, and vital to authentic, meaningful living.

What makes this book unique is its blend of philosophical depth, personal reflection, and practical insight. Love in relationships, work, imperfection, loss, and in our relationship with nature is explored through meaningful examples rooted in the theory of love. Rather than offering ready-made answers, the book creates space for reflection and discovery.

More than a theoretical exploration, this book is an invitation to pause, reflect, and re-examine how love shapes our decisions, our relationships, and our sense of purpose. It encourages the reader to engage in the courageous act of loving, not as a fleeting emotion, but as an enduring orientation toward the good, the true, and the meaningful. Through this lens, love becomes not only a personal experience but an existential commitment, a spiritual path, and a shared human journey.

