

Timo Purjo

The Spiritual Capabilities of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy

Guidelines for Successful Application



second revised edition

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SECOND, REVISED EDITION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION	7
PREFACE	9
ADDITION TO PREFACE	18
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REMARKS	19
PART A. LOGOTHEORY AS EXISTENTIAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY	21
1 PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY	27
2 ANTHROPOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF LOGOTHEORY	38
2.1 Frankl's Philosophical-Anthropological Conception of the Human Being	42
2.1.1 Frankl's Three-Dimensional Ontology	50
2.1.2 Frankl's Ten Theses on the Human Person	53
2.2 What Did Frankl Mean by the Meaning of Life?	59
2.2.1 Being Directed Outside Oneself as the Foundation of a Meaningful Existence	63
2.2.2 The Essence of Values	66
2.2.3 Conscience as an Organ That Deciphers Meaning	80
2.3 Situatedness as a Supplement to Frankl's Concept of the Person	88
2.4 Spirituality as the Higher Level of Awareness	101
2.4.1 The Relationship Between Psychic and Spiritual Awareness	110
2.5 Responsible Humanity	115

INTRODUCTION TO PART B.....	125
PART B. LOGOTHERAPY AS EXISTENTIAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL PRACTICE.....	129
1 THE PHILOSOPHICAL CORE OF LOGOTHERAPY.....	134
1.1 The Phenomenological Method of Logotherapy	138
1.2 Fundamentals of a Successful Relationship in Therapy.....	146
1.2.1 Phenomenological View of the Therapeutic Relationship	164
1.2.2 Dialogue at The Core of an Ethical Encounter	180
1.3 The Central Spiritual Capabilities of a Human Person	193
1.3.1 Distancing-into-Spiritual-Dimension	200
1.3.2 Self-Consciousness and Self-Observation	213
1.3.3 Self-Examination and Self-Evaluation	220
1.3.4 Will to Meaning.....	237
1.3.5 Conscience	243
1.3.6 Transcending the Self.....	250
1.3.7 Summary of the Application of Spiritual Abilities.....	259
1.4 The Defiant Power of the Human Spirit.....	264
2 EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS AND LOGOTHERAPY.....	282
2.1 Existential Analysis as Elucidation of the Existential Situation ...	285
2.2 Logotherapy as Healing Through Meaning.....	297
2.3 Logotherapeutic Value Exercises	311
REFERENCE LIST.....	315

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The world is on fire more intensely than at any time since World War II. In the ADDITION TO PREFACE to the first edition of the book, I stated that the world was shaken by the global coronavirus pandemic that began in 2019. Since the book was published, several wars have erupted in different parts of the world, affecting, in one way or another, ethically oriented people everywhere. The full-scale war in Ukraine that began in February 2022 and the war in Gaza that started in October 2023 are probably the most well-known of these. As a citizen of Finland, a neighboring country of Russia, I have been most deeply touched and worried by the Russian attack on Ukraine, which is a continuation of the territorial occupations of Ukraine that began in 2014.

As a logotherapist and trainer of logotherapists, I immediately began to consider how I could help alleviate the suffering of the Ukrainian people. The first contact with the Ukrainian group of psychologists occurred fate-like in the fall of 2022, and it led to a collaboration that included translating this book into Ukrainian and initiating my training with them in January 2023. Everything happens out of solidarity with them and on the altruistic principle, where what I gain is the opportunity to fulfill my will to meaning in serving them for their good. The community of Ukrainians who have already trained as logotherapists, as well as those studying to become one, has grown significantly in such a short time.

I've heard that ordering this book has been increasingly difficult, although it is still available somewhere. Due to its timeless nature and its complementary nature to Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, there is a constant demand for the book; therefore, a new edition is justified. At the same time, I have reviewed the entire book, edited the text where necessary, and corrected the remaining errors from the first edition. However, I have not

changed the book's content, other than modifying the wording of some of the spiritual capabilities to make them more illustrative.

For those seeking a fresh perspective on my thoughts, I recommend reading my latest book, *Understanding Love: Towards a Profound Interpretation of Love*. It refers to this book in some places, so the books complement each other, which was also their intention. It can therefore be interpreted that the books are two parts of the same book series and form a continuum.

Finally, I would like to thank my Croatian colleague, Vedrana Grgić, an intensive user and promoter of this book, not only for her valuable suggestions but also for creating the book's introductory texts, and her daughter, Jelena, for designing the covers.

Loppi, Finland, September 2025

Timo Purjo

PREFACE

What makes logotherapy and its practical applications as relevant and necessary today as they were when Viktor E. Frankl began developing them in the 1920s? We live in a rapidly changing world. People all over the world face changes in their climate, depletion of natural resources, species extinction, food shortages, mass migration, rising tensions between nations, and perhaps an increasing number of wars. The global economic system, based on growth, competition, and consumption, results in a loss of connection to oneself, one's family, and the community that supports an excellent quality of life. Loneliness, alienation, fear, and hostility will continue to increase. Frankl warned about the effects of an existential vacuum that arises from living 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 increasingly evident that we need to rethink the way we live. It is no wonder that people of all ages seek a new perspective on how to fit in and survive in a 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 the 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 that lend meaning and purpose to all human activities. Everyone should strive to promote the common good. However, today, an increasing number of 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 exploded entirely. And what is the idea of most of the books?

They encourage readers to adopt a total egoism, or selfishness, based on the belief that moral behavior should be directed solely toward one's self-interest. In other words, they validate and strengthen actions that use collective resources for selfish ends, diminish the common good, and lead to suffering. And, at its extreme, to the poverty of other people. The goal of such an ideology is purely personal well-being, designed to help a person survive and thrive. Such an aspiration is entirely at odds with 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 applied and refined his theories in large-scale clinical work and research 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 into 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 receive much attention until it was published in the USA in 1959 under 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, it is clear that there is a growing interest in questions about finding meaning and purpose in one's life. It appears there is a surge, or at least a movement, around issues related to 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 Frankl's book mentioned is "Man's Search for Meaning." To me, this suggests that the author has either disregarded or ignored Frankl's life's work.

On the other hand, it seems fashionable to mention Viktor Frankl. That is good if a genuine interest in his thought system increases; the concerns and suggested solutions that Frankl expressed are timeless and placeless. 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 1930s, 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 when applied to different contexts and purposes. These interpretations and emphases can—and should—differ slightly, depending on the context. Each field has its own 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 lies elsewhere.

Viktor Frankl was a psychiatrist and neurologist. However, he could be characterized as an inborn philosophical thinker, a trait that was evident from 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 the quality of human beings and presents

well-developed anthropology in his writings. (Kimble & Ellor, 2000, p. 9) This philosophical-theoretical foundation, prevalent in 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 that constitute the psychological roots of logotherapy—Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual psychology—can be best distinguished. However, logotherapy's origins are not only psychological but, above all, philosophical. They are rooted in existential and phenomenological philosophies, as well as an existential-phenomenological conception of the person. Within that framework, a human being is fundamentally understood as a spiritual person who cannot be reduced to or explained at a simpler level. Concepts such as responsibility and the will to meaning cannot be reduced to mere biological or cerebral processes, or to psychological urges, instincts, and drives. Human beings, as spiritual beings, are transcendent, not only over the world but more importantly over the 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 (as of 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. The Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna organizes biennial international congresses attended by several hundred, as well as 10-20 local

conferences in various countries around the world each year, and publishes numerous journals. Currently, there are almost 450 books and 400 master's and doctoral theses on logotherapy in various languages. More than 600 empirical investigations have provided evidence of logotherapy's effectiveness, including the development of 15 specific logotherapeutic instruments (2006). (Deurzen, 2019, p. 321) In Austria and Switzerland, logotherapy is also recognized by the state, as well as in the USA by the American Psychological 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 of Frankl's works published in German, English, and Finnish.¹ Therefore, my dissertation adopted a logothetical perspective, which I have supplemented with the Finnish philosopher Lauri Rauhala's thought. I aimed to develop both a new proposal for an existential-phenomenological conception of the person and a basis for educational work with adolescents,

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. A 14-volume edition of Viktor Frankl's collected works is also planned in German. Five of them have been published so far (as of May 2019). I am happy to read Frankl's books in German fluently because I had a bilingual education at the German School in Helsinki. In my opinion, 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 readers, it is noteworthy that several of Frankl's key works have not been translated into English. 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.

focusing on life skills and ethics. Like Rauhala, I understand education broadly as influences aimed at guiding and supporting adolescents' growth in both home and professional contexts, such as 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 the focus of my dissertation.

I obtained the final inspiration from the warm reception that my dissertation received from researchers and practitioners who use logotherapy in their 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 I received culminated at 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's work internationally through my dissertation.² The atmosphere of reciprocal recognition I sensed from my colleagues strengthened my determination further to develop 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 Diplomate 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. The Viktor Frankl Institute Finland, which I established, was, for a long time, the only accredited training institute in the Nordic countries. Today, some of my former students have established their own institutes, which have also been accredited.

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

So far, I have written six books and edited two books on logotherapy; one of them has been 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 on making Frankl's philosophical principles more accessible to 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 by 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 explicit, as clear and detailed as possible, form of logotherapy. For me, research has only instrumental value; through scientific or theoretical research, I seek knowledge that can benefit professionals and help others discover the conditions for a good life. Research has to justify itself through practice. For a researcher in the human sciences and philosophy, this means taking responsibility for the future of helping people, a duty to develop more effective procedures. I aim to help those in the helping professions 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 my work will be helpful to all those seeking inspiration for their growth towards responsibility.

This book is part of a series exploring the true nature of logotherapy theory as it has unfolded for me and its potential applications in the helping professions and for individuals. I have heard several people say that the

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.

doctrine of logotherapy is simple and easy to understand. 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 it contains beyond what I already understand. In my experience, Frankl's theory is not easy to understand, as it is easy to misunderstand its central concepts. Viktor Frankl himself mastered all aspects of logotherapy and logotherapy, but unfortunately, he refrained from providing detailed descriptions in some areas.

Besides research, I have also written this book with the understanding that I have developed over the course of my quarter-century of practical work in youth education implemented in schools, child welfare clinics, and juvenile prisons. Frankl's works have increasingly influenced the education of violent youth and young adults 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 include everything I have so far interpreted and understood of Frankl's doctrine in a single book. Therefore, this book is only one contribution to this pervasive and rich theme. This book's perspective is philosophical, and my central task is to explain and argue why logotherapy is essentially a philosophical therapy. Logotherapy, the practice of logotherapy, is a philosophical practice, regardless of its use as a psychiatric or psychotherapy method or for some other activity that aims to clarify one's

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

Logotherapy, whether used therapeutically or preventively, fosters education for spiritual growth and personal development, helping reduce existential difficulties.

Timo Purjo answers Viktor Frankl's call for logotherapists to develop an understanding of logotherapy, its practical application, and integration with other approaches. Besides foundational concepts, including Frankl's three-dimensional ontology, the Ten Theses on the Human Person, understanding of values, spirituality, and more, the book introduces philosophical terms from key contemporary thinkers, integrating them into existential-phenomenological philosophy and logotherapy.

The book underscores Frankl's contribution to conceptualizing the spiritual capabilities that allow humans to seek, find, and realize meaningful values and expands it with Purjo's structured model of self-distancing and self-transcendence to cultivate these abilities. It provides an applied pathway for developing spiritual capacities, which evolve from basic capabilities into abilities and ultimately into fully realized spiritual skills.

Since the first edition of the book, five years of systematic testing and implementation have confirmed the effectiveness of these concepts.

Purjo's approach is invaluable for hands-on, urgent training of emerging logotherapists, working with people's existential challenges such as combat trauma, loss of loved ones, life and work in hazardous conditions, and vulnerable populations in the context of the war. Through this structured framework, logotherapists can effectively tailor their methods to real-life needs, with their effectiveness already confirmed through research.

Readers who have actively used the book have also testified that it unlocks successive layers of knowledge and insight with each reading.

