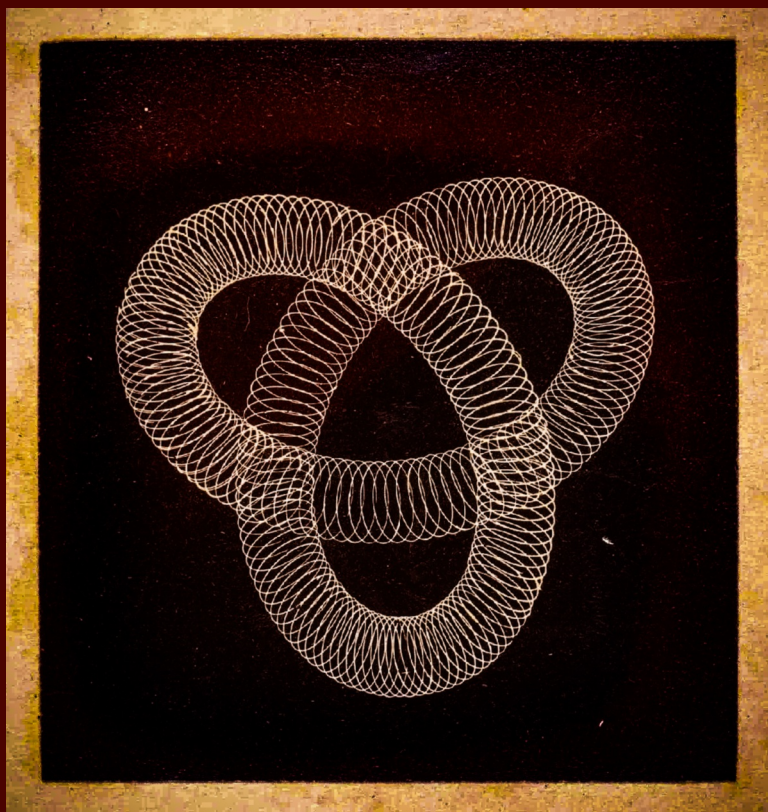


Jukka Packalén

A GOOD LIFE DESPITE EVERYTHING

Practical Wisdom from Philosophy,
Psychology and Neuroscience



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Foreword by Sabine Indinger

Some books inform.

Some books inspire.

And then, every once in a while, a book comes along that quietly changes the way we see ourselves and the world.

A Good Life Despite Everything is one of those books.

I realised this much sooner than I expected.

As someone who has spent many years studying Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy and Existential Analysis, I approached this manuscript with both curiosity and high expectations. Frankl's philosophy has shaped not only my professional work but also my understanding of what it means to be human. It has given me a language for meaning, responsibility, freedom, and hope.

Or so I thought.

Only a few pages into this manuscript, I found myself experiencing something that had happened only once before in my life.

It took me back to my very first training weekend with Elisabeth Lukas, Viktor Frankl's closest student. I remember sitting there with an unmistakable feeling: This feels like coming home. I was

hearing ideas that resonated as profoundly true— ideas I somehow felt I had always known, yet had never been able to articulate, not even to myself.

Reading this manuscript awakened that same feeling.

Not because it merely presents Frankl's philosophy well— although I genuinely believe it contains one of the clearest, most accessible, and yet philosophically faithful introductions to Frankl's thinking that I have ever read.

But because it does something rarer.

It demonstrates what it looks like to continue Frankl's project without losing its centre.

Frankl repeatedly emphasised that Logotherapy was never meant to become a closed system. He invited future generations to develop it further while remaining faithful to its philosophical core. This is far more difficult than it sounds. It requires intellectual courage, philosophical integrity, and deep respect for the original vision.

I believe Jukka Packalén has achieved precisely that.

Rather than simply presenting four different frameworks side by side, he allows them to illuminate one another. Lauri Rauhala's holistic conception of the human being provides the philosophical foundation. Viktor Frankl contributes the existential orientation toward meaning, responsibility, and

values. Internal Family Systems offers a compassionate language for our inner psychological life, while Polyvagal Theory deepens our understanding of the embodied nervous system. Together, they become something greater than the sum of their parts—not because they erase their differences, but because each helps reveal another dimension of what it means to be fully human.

Yet what impressed me most is not the synthesis itself.

It is the spirit in which this book is written.

This is not philosophy observed from a distance.

It is philosophy lived.

Every concept is grounded in lived experience. Every theoretical reflection is connected to the realities of being human: suffering, uncertainty, relationships, hope, failure, healing, and the countless ordinary moments that quietly shape a life.

The result is a book that feels remarkably generous.

It neither simplifies life's complexity nor overwhelms the reader with it. Instead, it gently invites reflection. Again and again, I found myself pausing—not because the text was difficult, but because it had put words to something I had sensed for a long time without fully understanding. It gave language to intuitions that previously had no clear form.

That, perhaps, is this book's greatest gift.

It speaks to readers encountering Frankl for the very first time, making his philosophy approachable without reducing its depth. At the same time, those already familiar with his work may discover fresh perspectives and unexpected connections that invite them to revisit ideas they thought they already knew.

Perhaps the greatest compliment I can give this manuscript is a deeply personal one.

I often felt I should slow down.

The reflections, the exercises, and the invitations to pause deserved time. And yet I repeatedly found myself unable to put the book down. It carries that rare quality of being simultaneously contemplative and compelling—a book that asks to be lived even while it keeps you turning the next page.

In a culture that often promises the perfect life, this book offers something infinitely more humane.

A good enough life.

Not despite suffering being absent, but despite suffering being part of what it means to be human.

I sincerely hope this book reaches readers from many different walks of life. Whether they come searching for meaning, recovering from hardship, navigating uncertainty, or simply

longing to understand themselves a little better, I believe they will find thoughtful companionship in these pages.

And perhaps, like I did, they may occasionally close the book for a moment—not because they have reached the end of a chapter, but because they have recognised something deeply true within themselves.

Sabine Indinger

Meaning-Centred Counsellor, Educator,
and International Lecturer

Internationally accredited by the Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna

None of Us Escapes Pain

Life will find a way — to always throw small and big obstacles our way. We slip on the ice, break our wrists, and are hampered in our daily lives for weeks. We succumb to our unconscious behavioural patterns, act against our values, and damage our relationships. We experience devastating losses that make us lose faith in life's inherent meaningfulness.

Inevitable obstacles like these are instances of the many forms of suffering: physical and somatic, psychological, spiritual or noetic, and situational. These simple examples also show how suffering compounds and intertwines across the different dimensions of being human. There is no purely physical pain. We experience it deeply in our emotions. There is no psychological pain without physical manifestations. And there is no existential crisis that doesn't affect our psychological, physiological and situational functioning.

I write these sentences during what, for me, constitutes an existential crisis. Powers beyond my control have stopped me from pursuing a thing that gave me a real reason to get out of bed as a disability pensioner. To an outsider, what happened is “not that big of a deal”, just an everyday, albeit complete, failure of technology. I was creating an album of original music to celebrate my upcoming 60th birthday. But after half a year's effort, my computer, the tool every producer uses these days, simply broke down beyond repair. And as is often the case with

IT, incompatibility issues mean I cannot use new-generation computers with my production software for the foreseeable future. I found this out only after investing a significant sum in the new tool.¹

The celebration through musical creation held existential gravity for me. 60 is an age I never thought I'd reach because I live with complex post-traumatic stress. This condition, in itself, often entails what psychologists call *a sense of a foreshortened future*. Hence, pessimism about ageing is part of the deal. And complex trauma rewires one's nervous system so that even the tiniest everyday discomfort becomes truly difficult to deal with. Let alone dealing with something that stops you from pursuing what was the centre of your existence for 6 months.

I can hear, in my imagination, someone shouting, "Come on, surely there's a way to just do it!" But there isn't — not the way I envisioned it, and not without learning an entirely new way of doing things. That's impossible for someone with limited hours of clear-headed energy per day. I have to live my whole life in those few hours, self-care and unavoidable chores included. For someone whose nervous system has been fundamentally altered by trauma, even seemingly small obstacles can consume resources that simply aren't there. I have to accept the

¹ For the open-minded music lover, the two eclectic instrumental tunes I finished before the project was halted are available on streaming services under my name with the titles "Injured Person Dance Contest" and "Ballistic".

facts. We are not all built the same.

But I'm not feeling sorry for myself. While I was doing exactly that for two days, I am now here, starting to write a new book. I'm not in a super excited state, but I do know the book serves a greater purpose in life than succumbing to depression and giving up on everything again. I'm not going to lie; I've been known to do that too, but not this time. The reason I could pick up another task, deeply meaningful to me, was that I had done my homework; I had another passion to cling to, instead of just drifting in my pensioner's life. So, when one opportunity fled, another one was already begging my attention. And I had learned how to pursue my passion without burning out, finally, after so many years of repeated burnouts. In my earlier life, a crisis such as this could have set me back months.

And so, this is a book about never having to give up. But it's not only about my experience, even though I often resort to it as an example. It's also about how wisdom from philosophy, psychology and neuroscience, taken together, illuminates the human condition in a profound way and provides practical tools for coping with life's inevitable suffering.

I will refer to the philosophies of Lauri Rauhala and Viktor Frankl, the psychological framework known as Internal Family Systems (IFS), and the neuroscience of Polyvagal Theory.

We are not all built the same, but we can all draw strength from the same resources.

And Yet, Life Can Be Good

Despite the suffering inherent in being human, life can be good. Not necessarily ecstatic or constantly enjoyable, but good enough. This is not a popular view because it acknowledges the darker side of life; we want a perfect life, good enough is not enough. Our culture will have none of the shadow, only the pretence of constant light. We are conditioned all our lives to suppress our negative experiences and the emotional upheaval they rightly provoke (Walker 2015, pp. 2–3). We are lied to by snapshots of glamour, success and exhilaration that different media bombard us with.

Unconsciously, we know that peak moments are rare and far between, yet we cling to them in an unhealthy way and have a childlike wish that the good moments last forever. It is tragic that we also lie to each other about the states of our lives on social media by portraying only part of the story. Pete Walker notes that “Be all you can be is an insidious snare that traps us in workaholism and merciless perfectionism” observing that the relentless pursuit of success can easily become addictive, and each achievement only creates pressure for the next (ibid., p. 29).

The cold, hard fact remains: there are no peaks without valleys.

I have learned this the hard way. My former career as an IT consultant peaked at the beginning of the century. Job offers kept coming in for challenging, highly rewarding positions with

Is a good enough life possible — not despite suffering, but with it fully in view? *A Good Life Despite Everything* says yes, and shows how.

It offers a coherent, holistic philosophical view of the human condition, with practical "Try This" exercises throughout. Philosopher and psychologist Lauri Rauhala's existential-phenomenological thinking is the foundation of this journey. Viktor Frankl's philosophy of life is the heart. Internal Family Systems and Polyvagal Theory complete the picture, illuminating our psychological dynamics and the nervous system that underlie all our experiences. A closing chapter on situationality brings it all back to the particulars of a single human life.

This is not an easy self-help book, but a serious inquiry, of practical use for those willing to take responsibility for how they meet their life.

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