

Psychotherapy Guidebook

# LOGOTHERAPY

Viktor E. Frankl

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# Logotherapy

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## DEFINITION

Logotherapy, or existential analysis (Existenzanalyse) as I, its founder, have also called it, is referred to by many authors as the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy (after Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual psychology). To me (Viktor E. Frankl) logos means meaning, and Logotherapy, indeed, centers and focuses on my concept of a "will to meaning": that is, the striving to see in life, and fulfill, a meaning and purpose. Today, ever more patients complain of a sense of meaninglessness and emptiness that I have termed "existential frustration" and "existential vacuum," respectively. So far, two test devices have been designed and developed in order to measure an individual's existential frustration; namely, James C. Crumbaugh's PIL Test (1968) and Elisabeth S. Lukas's "Logo-Test."

Existential frustration need not but may well result in neurosis, known as a "noogenic neurosis" in contrast to the conventional, or psychogenic, neurosis. According to statistical studies conducted in various countries of Europe and in America, about 20 percent of the cases of neurosis accruing in clinics and hospitals are noogenic. In such cases, Logotherapy is the method

of choice. In addition, it also lends itself to the treatment of obsessive-compulsive cases and phobic cases in which anticipatory anxiety has established a vicious circle: a symptom evokes a phobia, the phobia provokes the symptom to reappear, and the reappearance of the symptom reinforces the phobia. A logotherapeutic technique that I described in a paper published in 1939, namely, “paradoxical intention,” is devised to break this feedback mechanism by inducing the patient to deliberately “try to do,” or “wish to happen,” the very things he fears. In other words, the pathogenic fear is replaced by the paradoxical, ironical wish.

What thereby is achieved is a complete inversion of the original avoidance pattern of behavior on the part of the patient. Another logotherapeutic technique, “dereflection,” counteracts the fact that the more an individual aims at pleasure, the more he is liable to miss it (Frankl 1975). For pleasure is, and must remain, an effect of loving encounter or meaning fulfillment, and is destroyed and spoiled whenever it is made a target. As I see it, frigidity and impotence result from the very attempt of a male patient to demonstrate his potency, or a female patient to prove to herself her capacity for orgasm. As to the treatment of noogenic neuroses, however, it is in no way the job of a psychiatrist to prescribe meanings, as it were. It is rather up to the patient himself to choose his own meanings. Each person does have his own meaning, and so has every situation confronting him. “Man’s search for meaning” thus winds up with a Gestalt perception, with meaning inherent in

each and every life situation.

Thus there is no life situation conceivable that really would lack any meaning. Meaning is available first through creating a work, or doing a deed; second, through experiencing something, or lovingly encountering a person. Last but not least, there is a third possibility as well: even facing an unchangeable fate, say, an incurable disease such as an inoperable cancer, man may bear witness of the human potential to turn one's predicament into an achievement. Thus, life is unconditionally meaningful. This contention does not involve moralizing but is based on a phenomenological analysis of the "pre-reflective ontological self-understanding" observable in the man on the street. Recently, Logotherapy's axiology has been validated by empirical research based on computerized data obtained from several thousand subjects.