

# For What are We Born to Become?

## The Logotherapy of Dr. Victor Frankl

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**Abstract:** For what are we born to become as Homo Sapiens? This question is answered in this article on the logotherapy of Dr. Viktor Frankl. This article commences with an exploration of human ontology guided by the philosophy of existentialism. This exploration leads to a continuation of this article by an explanation of logotherapy in theoretical principles and therapeutic processes. This explanation leads to the conclusion of this article by an application of logotherapy in three cases. This article is written with a creative synthesis that engages philosophical thoughts and psychological practices for logotherapists in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

“The scientific name for ourselves is Homo Sapiens. We have defined ourselves to belong to the genus Homo and the species Sapiens. Wise ones it means.”

Yet, how wise are we as a family of humanity beginning the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with an unprecedented 22 War Crimes Against Humanity in the International Court of Justice at the Hague in The Netherlands?

This context of inhumanity raises questions about the nature of human ontology. Let us commence this article by answering this question guided by the philosophy of existentialism.

Are we humans merely a chemical evolution as purported by paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould? Are we humans merely physical processes of oxidation and combustion, as purported by pathologists, that result in body chemicals at death valued at \$8.37 (2)? Are we humans merely mechanisms that are conditioned by stimuli-responses

in external environment of rewards and punishments as purported by behaviorists Ivan Pavlov, B.F. Skinner and Edmund Thorndike? Are we humans basically selfish as purported by philosophers Thomas Hobbes and Ayn Rand and geneticist Richard Dawkins ? Is human life nothing more than “a tale told by an idiot” as purported by poet William Shakespeare in Mac Beth’s “The Sound and the Fury” (3)?

These general questions about the nature of human ontology lead us to a particular consideration of human existence guided by the philosophy of existentialism and revealed in three sets of footprints. The first set of footprints were primal footprints of Homo Sapiens evidenced in archaeology. It analyzed the environment of fossils, fauna and flora to deduct theories about the nature of human ontology in ancient times. This information suggested that, at some point in time, four-legged animals with small brains became two-legged humans with larger brains who stood upright with free hands to make tools and weapons (4). At that time, primal footprints revealed the quantum leap in “beings who lost tails and gained minds” (5). These primal footprints, according to Mary Leakey, spoke of motion “so intensely human and transcending time (6)”.

These beings left more than individual primal footprints on a 75 foot trail. They left an image of an earth community in motion toward greater consciousness. These human attributes were revealed in recent archaeology discoveries in Dmanisi Georgia. There, a toothless skull was found. Questions abound. Physically, how did this person eat long after losing teeth?

Socially, was this person fed by others? Philosophically, why was this person cared for by the community? This new social context led Jane Goodall to assert that

“these beings could strive to understand the meanings of life on earth and beyond the stars (7).

Did not this insight into the nature of human ontology deepen in 1969 with a second set of footprints on the moon? Did not this profound experience unite earth community on THE PALE BLUE DOT in the heavens?

Yet, in this same century, the world experienced the worst wars and most war crimes against humanity on earth. These atrocities and brutalities raised up the question of human ontology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century walking with ecological footprints on earth? (8) This is the third set of footprints to impact the nature of human ontology with global consciousness, conscience and compassion.

This search and discovery of human ontology leads us to Dr. Viktor Frankl and an explanation of his psychology of logotherapy in theoretical principles and therapeutic processes. This explanation continues this article

Logotherapy is known as the third school of Viennese Psychology by Viktor Frankl (search for meaning). It is contrasted to the second school of Viennese Psychology by Alfred Adler (search for power) and the first school of Viennese Psychology by Sigmund Freud (search for pleasure).

Logotherapy consists of theoretical principles in three assumptions, three values and three dimensions. The three assumptions are that one can will, search and discover meaning in human existence even in the most miserable circumstances of suffering. Thus, there is unconditional meaning in life that raises up human ontology beyond reductionism, pandeterminism, nihilism and fatalism.

These assumptions can be expressed in three values. A creative value is an expression of meaning revealed in a creative act by an individual such as art and gift giving. An experiential value is an expression of meaning revealed in an experience by an individual such as beholding beauties in loved ones and nature.

Finally, an attitudinal value is an expression of meaning revealed in a positive attitude in suffering. This is a choice one can make in conditions that are unchangeable such as illness, suffering and living in a death camp.

In addition to these three values, logotherapy is structured in three interrelated dimensions. These dimensions are soma (physical), psyche (psychological) and noetic (moral as spiritual *Geistig* but not religion *Geistlich*).

These dimensions, values and assumptions were revealed by Dr. Viktor Frankl in his classical book *MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING*. This book was written in nine days. Since its publication in 1946, this book has been reprinted 73 times, translated into 26 languages and sold over 10 million copies.

While this book revealed some physical and psychological sufferings, this book reflected more importantly on the nature of human ontology. Why did some prisoners behave like swine and other prisoners behaved like saints in the same death camps?

While Frankl suffered yet he sought no harm on others. He was a victim of violence while committed passionately to nonviolence. He could have become bitter but rather chose to become better. He belonged to this world yet he was not of this world. This transformation of hatred into love was the crucible of logotherapy born from sufferings.

How? This question, and its answers, can be found in logotherapy by clinical interventions of four therapeutic processes and three therapeutic methods.

The four therapeutic processes are designed to be sequential in order to be successful. These four therapeutic processes can be augmented by diverse psychotherapeutic modalities that integrate cognitive and existential approaches. According to Frankl,

“Logotherapy is not a panacea. Therefore, it is open to cooperation with other psychotherapeutic approaches” (9).

“There real significance and value become visible only if we place them in a higher and more inclusive human dimension” (10 ).

“As compared to behavioral therapy logotherapy simply adds another dimension – the distinctively human dimension and its resources”(11).

“It is perfectly legitimate for us to use the sound findings of both psychodynamics and behavioristic research to adopt some of there techniques. Biochemistry and heredity are important” (12)

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) relates well to logotherapy in at least three ways. These therapies value the person as distinct from the dysfunction. Second, these therapies focus on the present rather than the past or future. Third, these therapies provide treatments that are active and effective rather than mystical, historical and passive.

In contrast, REBT focuses on the integration of bio-psycho-social dimensions while logotherapy includes the further dimension of noetic and its powerful implications and resources for human development and character virtues. Moreover, Frankl

admonishes logotherapists “to not tranquilize or analyze away noetic frustrations and aspirations” (13) because these conditions can respond well to the noetic dimension of human ontology.

A second contrast is that REBT is directed primarily by a therapist who discerns, decides and prescribes treatment goals, objectives and methods for the client to do in order to achieve success in therapy.

In contrast, logotherapy is facilitated primarily by the client guided by the therapist who must be able to tune in to the underlying issues using four therapeutic processes and three therapeutic methods.

Let us now examine these four therapeutic processes and three therapeutic methods before applying them to three clinical cases.

The first process is the action of self-distancing from the problem. This action, facilitated by the therapist, enables the client to withdraw from the problem in order to gain distance from the problem to become more objective.

This distance enables the therapist to facilitate the client into the second process of logotherapy. This second process is the action of attitude modification.

This action, facilitated by the therapist, enables the client to reframe the negative problem into positive possibilities. This attitude modification enables the therapist to facilitate the client into the third process of logotherapy.

This third process of logotherapy is the action of reducing the symptoms of the problem. This action, facilitated by the therapist, enables the client to become free from the old negative problem and thus free to search for new positive potentials in life. This

reduction of symptoms enables the therapist to facilitate the client into the fourth and final process of logotherapy.

This fourth and final process of logotherapy is the search and discovery of new positive meanings in life. This action, facilitated by the therapist, enables the client to identify new meanings in life that are valuable to the client.

Thus, as a result of these four therapeutic processes, the client has transformed a past negative problem into a present positive potential to become actualized.

These four processes of logotherapy are facilitated by three methods of logotherapy which can be exercised randomly. These methods are dereflection, Socratic dialogue and paradoxical intention.

Dereflection is a method of logotherapy that decreases hyperreflection and hyperintention and increases self transcendence by directing attention from the problem and symptoms to the resolution. This method is used for sleeplessness, sexual dysfunctions, addictions and depression.

Socratic dialogue is a method of logotherapy that therapists use to ask questions and solicits answers from clients that reveal hope, strengths and achievements.

Paradoxical intention is a method of logotherapy that facilitates the human capacity for self-distance through humor. This method breaks the vicious cycle that traps people who suffer from phobias and obsessive compulsions.

In summary, the therapist is in an excellent role to succeed with clients in logotherapy because of its four therapeutic processes and three methods.

How might this explanation of processes and methods in logotherapy be applied in clinical cases? This question, and its answers, will now conclude this article

### **A Case of Suffering**

In the book *MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING*, Dr. Frankl reflected upon a man who was diagnosed with severe depression caused by the death of his wife. While Frankl acknowledged the grief as a natural response to loss, he used the method of deflection to decrease hyperreflection on loss and increase attention on gain. Moreover, Frankl used the method of Socratic dialogue in the form of an open question. "What if you had died first and your wife would have survived you (14)?"

The man acknowledged that this situation would have caused more suffering for his wife rather than for himself. Thus, Frankl used the steps of self-distancing, attitude modification and reduction of symptoms which led the man, in a short time, to discover that his suffering was reframed as a loving sacrifice that spared his wife more suffering in life.

### **A Case of paralysis**

A living testimony to logotherapy is Jerry Long who suffered paralysis as a result of a diving accident at the age of 17. His motto has been "I broke my neck, it did not break me" (15).

The accident was an external circumstance that broke his neck. However, Jerry chose the defiant power of the human spirit to make internal choices on how he would live with this external circumstance.

He applied the meaning symbol to his life. The meaning symbol consists of four quadrants with meaning and despair opposed on the y-axis and fate and success opposed on the x-axis. Using this symbol, Jerry made the choice for meaning and success. How?



He attended college, became a therapist and counseled clients who were quadriplegic. Jerry exemplified the spirit of logotherapy by engaging in the assumption that life is meaningful through creating values and fostering the noetic dimension of human ontology. He was a recovering patient who counseled individuals with compassion and competencies as a logotherapist.

Imagine his internal fortitude in helping others to transform their negative attitudes and actions to positive attitudes and actions because of logotherapy in theoretical principles and therapeutic processes.

### **Conclusion**

This article has reflected on the nature of human ontology guided by the philosophy of existentialism and framed in the psychology of logotherapy.

What have we learned about human ontology from this article? First, we are Homo Sapiens with a physical dimension to existence because of DNA and consciousness. Second, we are Homo Sapiens with a social dimension to existence because of the community. It is based on the geographic compass. It measures and marks countries and continents by latitudes, longitudes and how we treat our neighbors. Third, we are Homo Noetics because of conscience. We can reason the moral compass. It measures and marks the Golden Rule and Golden Jewel.

In this noetic dimension, Frankl summons us, as the Plato of Vienna, to the heights of hominization. Frankl invites us to rediscover Spinoza's "amor fati" as the family of humanity in the synthesis of consciousness, community, conscience and compassion. Therefore, as logotherapists, may we respond ever more to the cries of people suffering and seeking human ontology in human dignity and human rights.

Finally, may we reveal logotherapy as “wise ones” like our ancestors and for our descendants and lifekind. For ultimately, we all desire the ancient truth and eternal quest “in striving to understand the meanings of life on earth and beyond the stars” (16). Is this not so?

### Notes

1. Carl Sagan. *The Path Were No Man Thought: Nuclear Winter*, 63.
2. William Greer, “How Do We Determine The Value of Human Life?” *New York Times*, June 26, 1986, Section A, Column 2.
3. William Shakespeare, *Mac Beth: The Sound And The Fury*, Act 5, Scene 5, Verse 27.
4. Mary Leakey, “Footprints In The Ashes Of Time” *National Geographic*, April 1979, 155, 4:446.
5. Harry Overstreet, *The Enduring Quest*, 199.
6. Sharon Begley, “Witness To Creation” *Newsweek*, December 23, 1996:74.
7. Jane Goodall, *Reason For Hope*, 2.
8. <http://www.mediamessage.com/lifekind.htm>.
9. Viktor Frankl, *The Unheard Cry For Meaning*, 15.
10. *Ibid.*, 15, 23.
11. *Ibid.*, 138.
12. *Ibid.*, 23.
13. Viktor Frankl , *Psychotherapy And Existentialism*, 34.
14. Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search For Meaning*, 135.
15. Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search For Meaning*, 172.

16. Jane Goodall, *Reasons For Hope*, 2.

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