

# VIKTOR FRANKL

[ 1905 – 1997 ]

# PERSONALITY THEORIES

Dr. C. George Boeree

*Psychology Department  
Shippensburg University*

Original E-Text-Site:

[ <http://www.ship.edu/%7Ecgboree/perscontents.html> ]

## **Index**

---

<b>Index</b>	2
<b><u>Introduction</u></b>	3
<b><u>Biography</u></b>	4
<b><u>Theory</u></b>	6
Conscience	6
The existential vacuum	7
Psychopathology	8
Finding meaning	9
Transcendence	10
Therapy	11
In conclusion	12
<b><u>Discussion</u></b>	13
<b><u>References</u></b>	14

## Introduction

---

In September of 1942, a young doctor, his new bride, his mother, father, and brother, were arrested in Vienna and taken to a concentration camp in Bohemia. It was events that occurred there and at three other camps that led the young doctor – prisoner 119,104 – to realize the significance of meaningfulness in life.

One of the earliest events to drive home the point was the loss of a manuscript – his life's work – during his transfer to Auschwitz. He had sewn it into the lining of his coat, but was forced to discard it at the last minute. He spent many later nights trying to reconstruct it, first in his mind, then on slips of stolen paper.

Another significant moment came while on a predawn march to work on laying railroad tracks: Another prisoner wondered outloud about the fate of their wives. The young doctor began to think about his own wife, and realized that she was present within him:

The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. (1963, p. 59)

And throughout his ordeal, he could not help but see that, among those given a chance for survival, it was those who held on to a vision of the future – whether it be a significant task before them, or a return to their loved ones – that were most likely to survive their suffering.

It would be, in fact, the meaningfulness that could be found in suffering itself that would most impress him:

(T)here is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man's attitude to his existence, and existence restricted by external forces.... Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete. (1963, p. 106)

That young doctor was, of course, Viktor Emil Frankl.

## Biography

---

Viktor Frankl was born in Vienna on March 26, 1905. His father, Gabriel Frankl, was a strong, disciplined man from Moravia who worked his way from government stenographer to become the director of the Ministry of Social Service. His mother, Elsa Frankl (née Lion), was more tenderhearted, a pious woman from Prague.

The middle of three children, young Viktor was precocious and intensely curious. Even at the tender age of four, he already knew that he wanted to be a physician.

In high school, Viktor was actively involved in the local Young Socialist Workers organization. His interest in people turned him towards the study of psychology. He finished his high school years with a psychoanalytic essay on the philosopher Schopenhauer, a publication in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, and the beginning of a rather intense correspondence with the great Sigmund Freud.

In 1925, a year after graduating and on his way towards his medical degree, he met Freud in person. Alfred Adler's theory was more to Frankl's liking, though, and that year he published an article – "Psychotherapy and Weltanschauung" – in Adler's *International Journal of Individual Psychology*. The next year, Frankl used the term logotherapy in a public lecture for the first time, and began to refine his particular brand of Viennese psychology.

In 1928 and 1929, Frankl organized cost-free counseling centers for teenagers in Vienna and six other cities, and began working at the Psychiatric University Clinic. In 1930, he earned his doctorate in medicine, and was promoted to assistant. In the next few years, Frankl continued his training in neurology.

In 1933, He was put in charge of the ward for suicidal women at the Psychiatric Hospital, with many thousands of patients each year. In 1937, Frankl opened his own practice in neurology and psychiatry. One year later, Hitler's troops invade Austria. He obtained a visa to the U.S. in 1939, but, concerned for his elderly parents, he let it expire.

In 1940, Frankl was made head of the neurological department of Rothschild Hospital, the only hospital for Jews in Vienna during the Nazi regime. He made many false diagnoses of his patients in order to circumvent the new policies requiring euthanasia of the mentally ill. It was during this period that he began his manuscript, *Ärztliche Seelsorge* – in English, **The Doctor and the Soul**.

Frankl married in 1942, but in September of that year, he, his wife, his father, mother, and brother, were all arrested and brought to the concentration camp at Theresienstadt in Bohemia. His father died there of starvation. His mother and brother were killed at Auschwitz in 1944. His wife died at Bergen-Belsen in 1945. Only his sister Stella would survive, having managed to emigrate to Australia a short while earlier.

When he was moved to Auschwitz, his manuscript for *The Doctor and the Soul* was discovered and destroyed. His desire to complete his work, and his hopes that he would be reunited with his wife and family someday, kept him from losing hope in what seemed otherwise a hopeless situation.

After two more moves to two more camps, Frankl finally succumbed to typhoid fever. He kept himself awake by reconstructing his manuscript on stolen slips of paper. In April of 1945, Frankl's camp was liberated, and he returned to Vienna, only to discover the deaths of his loved ones. Although nearly broken and very much alone in the world, he was given the position of director of the Vienna Neurological Polyclinic – a position he would hold for 25 years.

He finally reconstructed his book and published it, earning him a teaching appointment at the University of Vienna Medical School. In only 9 days, he dictated another book, which would become **Man's Search for Meaning**. Before he died, it sold over nine million copies, five million in the U.S. alone!

During this period, he met a young operating room assistant named Eleonore Schwindt – "Elly" – and fell in love at first sight. Although half his age, he credited her with giving him the courage to reestablish himself in the world. They married in 1947, and had a daughter, Gabriele, in December of that year.



In 1948, Frankl received his Ph.D. in philosophy. His dissertation – **The Unconscious God** – was an examination of the relation of psychology and religion. That same year, he was made associate professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Vienna. In 1950, he founded and became president of the Austrian Medical Society for Psychotherapy.

After being promoted to full professor, he became increasingly well known in circles outside Vienna. His guest professorships, honorary doctorates, and awards are too many to list here but include the Oskar Pfister Prize by the American Society of Psychiatry and a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Frankl continued to teach at the University of Vienna until 1990, when he was 85. It should be noted that he was a vigorous mountain climber and earned his airplane pilot's license when he was 67!

In 1992, friends and family members established the Viktor Frankl Institute in his honor. In 1995, he finished his autobiography, and in 1997, he published his final work, **Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning**, based on his doctoral

dissertation. He has 32 books to his name, and they have been translated into 27 languages.

Viktor Emil Frankl died on September 2, 1997, of heart failure. He is survived by his wife Eleonore, his daughter Dr. Gabriele Frankl-Vesely, his grandchildren Katharina and Alexander, and his great-granddaughter Anna Viktoria. His impact on psychology and psychiatry will be felt for centuries to come.

## Theory

---

Viktor Frankl's theory and therapy grew out of his experiences in Nazi death camps. Watching who did and did not survive (given an opportunity to survive!), he concluded that the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche had it right: "He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how." (Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted in 1963, p. 121) He saw that people who had hopes of being reunited with loved ones, or who had projects they felt a need to complete, or who had great faith, tended to have better chances than those who had lost all hope.

He called his form of therapy **logotherapy**, from the Greek word **logos**, which can mean study, word, spirit, God, or meaning. It is this last sense Frankl focusses on, although the other meanings are never far off. Comparing himself with those other great Viennese psychiatrists, Freud and Adler, he suggested that Freud essentially postulated a will to pleasure as the root of all human motivation, and Adler a will to power. Logotherapy postulates a **will to meaning**.

Frankl also uses the Greek word **noös**, which means mind or spirit. In traditional psychology, he suggests, we focus on "psychodynamics," which sees people as trying to reduce psychological tension. Instead, or in addition, Frankl says we should pay attention to **noödynamics**, wherein tension is necessary for health, at least when it comes to meaning. People desire the tension involved in striving for some worthy goal!

Perhaps the original issue with which Frankl was concerned, early in his career as a physician, was the danger of reductionism. Then, as now, medical schools emphasized the idea that all things come down to physiology. Psychology, too, promoted reductionism: Mind could be best understood as a "side effect" of brain mechanisms. The spiritual aspect of human life was (and is) hardly considered worth mentioning at all! Frankl believed that entire generations of doctors and scientists were being indoctrinated into what could only lead to a certain cynicism in the study of human existence.

He set it as his goal to balance the physiological view with a spiritual perspective, and saw this as a significant step towards developing more effective treatment. As he said, "...the de-neuroticization of humanity requires a re-humanization of psychotherapy." (1975, p. 104)

## Conscience

---

One of Viktor Frankl's major concepts is **conscience**. He sees conscience as a sort of unconscious spirituality, different from the instinctual unconscious that Freud and others emphasize. The conscience is not just one factor among many; it is the core of our being and the source of our personal integrity.

He puts it in no uncertain terms: "... (B)eing human is being responsible – existentially responsible, responsible for one's own existence." (1975, p. 26) Conscience is intuitive and highly personalized. It refers to a real person in a real situation, and cannot be reduced to simple "universal laws." It must be lived.

He refers to conscience as a "pre-reflective ontological self-understanding" or "the wisdom of the heart," "more sensitive than reason can ever be sensible." (1975, p. 39) It is conscience that "sniffs out" that which gives our lives meaning.

Like Erich Fromm, Frankl notes that animals have instincts to guide them. In traditional societies, we have done well-enough replacing instincts with our social traditions. Today, we hardly even have that. Most attempt to find guidance in conformity and conventionality, but it becomes increasingly difficult to avoid facing the fact that we now have the freedom and the responsibility to make our own choices in life, to find our own meaning.

But "...meaning must be found and cannot be given." (1975, p. 112) Meaning is like laughter, he says: You cannot force someone to laugh, you must tell him a joke! The same applies to faith, hope, and love – they

cannot be brought forth by an act of will, our own or someone else's.

"...(M)eaning is something to discover rather than to invent." (1975, p. 113) It has a reality of its own, independent of our minds. Like an embedded figure or a "magic eye" picture, it is there to be seen, not something created by our imagination. We may not always be able to bring the image – or the meaning – forth, but it is there. It is, he says, "...primarily a perceptual phenomenon." (1975, p. 115)

Tradition and traditional values are quickly disappearing from many people's lives. But, while that is difficult for us, it need not lead us into despair: Meaning is not tied to society's values. Certainly, each society attempts to summarize meaningfulness in its codes of conduct, but ultimately, meanings are unique to each individual.

"...(M)an must be equipped with the capacity to listen to and obey the ten thousand demands and commandments hidden in the ten thousand situations with which life is confronting him." (1975, p. 120) And it is our job as physicians, therapists, and educators to assist people in developing their individual consciences and finding and fulfilling their unique meanings.

## **The existential vacuum**

---

This striving after meaning can, of course, be frustrated, and this frustration can lead to **noögenic neurosis**, what others might call spiritual or existential neurosis. People today seem more than ever to be experiencing their lives as empty, meaningless, purposeless, aimless, adrift, and so on, and seem to be responding to these experiences with unusual behaviors that hurt themselves, others, society, or all three.

One of his favorite metaphors is the **existential vacuum**. If meaning is what we desire, then meaninglessness is a hole, an emptiness, in our lives. Whenever you have a vacuum, of course, things rush in to fill it. Frankl suggests that one of the most conspicuous signs of existential vacuum in our society is boredom. He points out how often people, when they finally have the time to do what they want, don't seem to want to do anything! People go into a tailspin when they retire; students get drunk every weekend; we submerge ourselves in passive entertainment every evening. The "Sunday neurosis," he calls it.

So we attempt to fill our existential vacuums with "stuff" that, because it provides some satisfaction, we hope will provide ultimate satisfaction as well: We might try to fill our lives with pleasure, eating beyond all necessity, having promiscuous sex, living "the high life;" or we might seek power, especially the power represented by monetary success; or we might fill our lives with "busy-ness," conformity, conventionality; or we might fill the vacuum with anger and hatred and spend our days attempting to destroy what we think is hurting us. We might also fill our lives with certain neurotic "vicious cycles," such as obsession with germs and cleanliness, or fear-driven obsession with a phobic object. The defining quality of these vicious cycles is that, whatever we do, it is never enough.

These neurotic vicious cycles are founded on something Frankl refers to as **anticipatory anxiety**: Someone may be so afraid of getting certain anxiety-related symptoms that getting those symptoms becomes inevitable. The anticipatory anxiety causes the very thing that is feared! Test anxiety is an obvious example: If you are afraid of doing poorly on tests, the anxiety will prevent you from doing well on the test, leading you to be afraid of tests, and so on.

A similar idea is **hyperintention**. This is a matter of trying too hard, which itself prevents you from succeeding at something. One of the most common examples is insomnia: Many people, when they can't sleep, continue to try to fall asleep, using every method in the book. Of course, trying to sleep itself prevents sleep, so the cycle continues. Another example is the way so many of us today feel we must be exceptional lovers: Men feel they must "last" as long as possible, and women feel obliged to not only have orgasms, but to have multiple orgasms, and so on. Too much concern in this regard, of course, leads to an inability to relax

and enjoy oneself!

A third variation is **hyperreflection**. In this case it is a matter of "thinking too hard." Sometimes we expect something to happen, so it does, simply because its occurrence is strongly tied to one's beliefs or attitudes – the self-fulfilling prophecy. Frankl mentions a woman who had had bad sexual experiences in childhood but who had nevertheless developed a strong and healthy personality. When she became familiar with psychological literature suggesting that such experiences should leave one with an inability to enjoy sexual relations, she began having such problems!

His understanding of the existential vacuum goes back to his experiences in the Nazi death camps. As the day-to-day things that offer people a sense of meaning – work, family, the small pleasures of life – were taken from a prisoner, his future would seem to disappear. Man, says Frankl, "can only live by looking to the future." (1963, p. 115) "The prisoner who had lost faith in the future – his future – was doomed." (1963, p. 117)

While few people seeking psychological help today are suffering the extremes of the concentration camp, Frankl feels that the problems caused by the existential vacuum are not only common, but rapidly spreading throughout society. He points out the ubiquitous complaint of a "feeling of futility," which he also refers to as the **abyss** experience.

Even the political and economic extremes of today's world can be seen as the reverberations of futility: We seem to be caught between the automaton conformity of western consumer culture and totalitarianism in its communist, fascist, and theocratic flavors. Hiding in mass society, or hiding in authoritarianism – either direction caters to the person who wishes to deny the emptiness of his or her life.

Frankl calls depression, addiction, and aggression the **mass neurotic triad**. He refers to research that shows a strong relationship between meaninglessness (as measured by "purpose in life" tests) and such behaviors as criminality and involvement with drugs. He warns us that violence, drug use, and other negative behaviors, demonstrated daily on television, in movies, even in music, only convinces the meaning-hungry that their lives can improve by imitation of their "heroes." Even sports, he suggests, only encourage aggression.

## Psychopathology

---

Frankl gives us details as to the origin of a variety of psychopathologies. For example, various **anxiety neuroses** are seen as founded on existential anxiety – "the sting of conscience." (1973, p. 179) The individual, not understanding that his anxiety is due to his sense of unfulfilled responsibility and a lack of meaning, takes that anxiety and focuses it upon some problematic detail of life. The hypochondriac, for example, focuses his anxiety on some horrible disease; the phobic focuses on some object that has caused him concern in the past; the agoraphobic sees her anxiety as coming from the world outside her door; the patient with stage fright or speech anxiety focuses on the stage or the podium. The anxiety neurotic thus makes sense of his or her discomfort with life.

He notes, that "Sometimes, but not always, it (the neurosis) serves to tyrannize a member of the family or is used to justify oneself to others or to the self..." (1973, p. 181) but warns that this is, as others have noted as well, secondary to the deeper issues.

**Obsessive-compulsive** disorder works in a similar fashion. The obsessive-compulsive person is lacking the sense of completion that most people have. Most of us are satisfied with near certainty about, for example, a simple task like locking one's door at night; the obsessive-compulsive requires a perfect certainty that is, ultimately, unattainable. Because perfection in all things is, even for the obsessive-compulsive, an impossibility, he or she focusses attention on some domain in life that has caused difficulties in the past.

The therapist should attempt to help the patient to relax and not fight the tendencies to repeat thoughts and

actions. Further, the patient needs to come to recognize his temperamental inclinations towards perfection as fate and learn to accept at least a small degree of uncertainty. But ultimately, the obsessive-compulsive, and the anxiety neurotic as well, must find meaning. "As soon as life's fullness of meaning is rediscovered, the neurotic anxiety... no longer has anything to fasten on." (1973, p. 182)

Like most existential psychologists, Frankl acknowledges the importance of genetic and physiological factors on psychopathology. He sees **depression**, for example, as founded in a "vital low," i.e. a diminishment of physical energy. On the psychological level, he relates depression to the feelings of inadequacy we feel when we are confronted by tasks that are beyond our capacities, physical or mental.

On the spiritual level, Frankl views depression as "tension between what the person is and what he ought to be." (1973, p. 202) The person's goals seem unreachable to him, and he loses a sense of his own future. Over time, he becomes disgusted at himself and projects that disgust onto others or even humanity in general. The ever-present gap between what is and what should be becomes a "gaping abyss." (1973, p. 202)

**Schizophrenia** is also understood by Frankl as rooted in a physiological dysfunction, in this case one which leads to the person experiencing himself as an object rather than a subject.

Most of us, when we have thoughts, recognize them as coming from within our own minds. We "own" them, as modern jargon puts it. The schizophrenic, for reasons still not understood, is forced to take a passive perspective on those thoughts, and perceives them as voices. And he may watch himself and distrust himself – which he experiences passively, as being watched and persecuted.

Frankl believes that this passivity is rooted in an exaggerated tendency to self-observation. It is as if there were a separation of the self as viewer and the self as viewed. The viewing self, devoid of content, seems barely real, while the viewed self seems alien.

Although logotherapy was not designed to deal with severe psychoses, Frankl nevertheless feels that it can help: By teaching the schizophrenic to ignore the voices and stop the constant self-observation, while simultaneously leading him or her towards meaningful activity, the therapist may be able to short-circuit the vicious cycle.

## **Finding meaning**

---

So how do we find meaning? Frankl discusses three broad approaches. The first is through **experiential values**, that is, by experiencing something – or someone – we value. This can include Maslow's peak experiences and esthetic experiences such as viewing great art or natural wonders.

The most important example of experiential values is the love we feel towards another. Through our love, we can enable our beloved to develop meaning, and by doing so, we develop meaning ourselves! Love, he says, "is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire." (1963, pp. 58-59)

Frankl points out that, in modern society, many confuse sex with love. Without love, he says, sex is nothing more than masturbation, and the other is nothing more than a tool to be used, a means to an end. Sex can only be fully enjoyed as the physical expression of love.

Love is the recognition of the uniqueness of the other as an individual, with an intuitive understanding of their full potential as human beings. Frankl believes this is only possible within monogamous relationships. As long as partners are interchangeable, they remain objects.

A second means of discovering meaning is through **creative values**, by "doing a deed," as he puts it. This is the traditional existential idea of providing oneself with meaning by becoming involved in one's projects, or, better, in the project of one's own life. It includes the creativity involved in art, music, writing, invention, and so on.

Frankl views creativity (as well as love) as a function of the spiritual unconscious, that is, the conscience. The irrationality of artistic production is the same as the intuition that allows us to recognize the good. He provides us with an interesting example:

We know a case in which a violinist always tried to play as consciously as possible. From putting his violin in place on his shoulder to the most trifling technical detail, he wanted to do everything consciously, to perform in full self-reflection. This led to a complete artistic breakdown.... Treatment had to give back to the patient his trust in the unconscious, by having him realize how much more musical his unconscious was than his conscious. (1975, p. 38)

The third means of finding meaning is one few people besides Frankl talk about: **attitudinal values**. Attitudinal values include such virtues as compassion, bravery, a good sense of humor, and so on. But Frankl's most famous example is achieving meaning by way of **suffering**.

He gives an example concerning one of his clients: A doctor whose wife had died mourned her terribly. Frankl asked him, "if you had died first, what would it have been like for her?" The doctor answered that it would have been incredibly difficult for her. Frankl then pointed out that, by her dying first, she had been spared that suffering, but that now he had to pay the price by surviving and mourning her. In other words, grief is the price we pay for love. For the doctor, this thought gave his wife's death and his own pain meaning, which in turn allowed him to deal with it. His suffering becomes something more: With meaning, suffering can be endured with dignity.

Frankl also notes that seriously ill people are not often given an opportunity to suffer bravely, and thereby retain some dignity. Cheer up! we say. Be optimistic! Often, they are made to feel ashamed of their pain and unhappiness.

In **Man's Search for Meaning**, he says this: "...everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." (1963, p. 104)

## Transcendence

---

Ultimately, however, experiential, creative, and attitudinal values are merely surface manifestations of something much more fundamental, which he calls **supra-meaning** or **transcendence**. Here we see Frankl's religious bent: Suprameaning is the idea that there is, in fact, ultimate meaning in life, meaning that is not dependent on others, on our projects, or even on our dignity. It is a reference to God and spiritual meaning.

This sets Frankl's existentialism apart from the existentialism of someone like Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre and other atheistic existentialists suggest that life is ultimately meaningless, and we must find the courage to face that meaninglessness. Sartre says we must learn to endure ultimate meaninglessness; Frankl instead says that we need to learn to endure our inability to fully comprehend ultimate meaningfulness, for "Logos is deeper than logic."

Again, it was his experiences in the death camps that led him to these conclusions: "In spite of all the enforced physical and mental primitiveness of the life in a concentration camp, it was possible for spiritual life to deepen.... They were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom." (1963, p. 56) This certainly does contrast with Sigmund Freud's perspective, as expressed in **The Future of an Illusion**: "Religion is the universal compulsive neurosis of mankind...." (quoted in 1975, p. 69)

It should be understood that Frankl's ideas about religion and spirituality are considerably broader than most. His God is not the God of the narrow mind, not the God of one denomination or another. It is not even the

God of institutional religion. God is very much a God of the inner human being, a God of the heart. Even the atheist or the agnostic, he points out, may accept the idea of transcendence without making use of the word "God." Allow me to let Frankl speak for himself:

This unconscious religiousness, revealed by our phenomenological analysis, is to be understood as a latent relation to transcendence inherent in man. If one prefers, he might conceive of this relation in terms of a relationship between the immanent self and a transcendent thou. However one wishes to formulate it, we are confronted with what I should like to term "the transcendent unconscious. This concept means no more or less than that man has always stood in an intentional relation to transcendence, even if only on an unconscious level. If one calls the intentional referent of such an unconscious relation "God," it is apt to speak of an "unconscious God." (1975, pp. 61-62)

It must also be understood that this "unconscious God" is not anything like the archetypes Jung talks about. This God is clearly transcendent, and yet profoundly personal. He is there, according to Frankl, within each of us, and it is merely a matter of our acknowledging that presence that will bring us to suprameaning. On the other hand, turning away from God is the ultimate source of all the ills we have already discussed.: "...(O)nce the angel in us is repressed, he turns into a demon." (1975, p. 70)

## Therapy

---

Viktor Frankl is nearly as well known for certain clinical details of his approach as for his overall theory. The first of these details is a technique known as **paradoxical intention**, which is useful in breaking down the neurotic vicious cycles brought on by anticipatory anxiety and hyperintention.

Paradoxical intention is a matter of wishing the very thing you are afraid of. A young man who sweated profusely whenever he was in social situations was told by Frankl to wish to sweat. "I only sweated out a quart before, but now I'm going to pour at least ten quarts!" (1973, p. 223) was among his instructions. Of course, when it came down to it, the young man couldn't do it. The absurdity of the task broke the vicious cycle.

The capacity human beings have of taking an objective stance towards their own life, or stepping outside themselves, is the basis, Frankl tells us, for humor. And, as he noted in the camps, "Humor was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation." (1963, p. 68)

Another example concerns sleep problems: If you suffer from insomnia, according to Frankl, don't spend the night tossing and turning and trying to sleep. Get up! Try to stay up as long as you can! Over time, you'll find yourself gratefully crawling back into bed.

A second technique is called **dereflection**. Frankl believes that many problems stem from an overemphasis on oneself. By shifting attention away from oneself and onto others, problems often disappear. If, for example, you have difficulties with sex, try to satisfy your partner without seeking your own gratification. Concerns over erections and orgasms disappear – and satisfaction reappears! Or don't try to satisfy anyone at all. Many sex therapists suggest that a couple do nothing but "pet," avoiding orgasms "at all costs." These couples often find they can barely last the evening before what they had previously had difficulties with simply happens!

Frankl insists that, in today's world, there is far too much emphasis on self reflection. Since Freud, we have been encouraged to look into ourselves, to dig out our deepest motivations. Frankl even refers to this tendency as our "collective obsessive neurosis." (1975, p. 95) Focusing on ourselves this way actually serves to turn us away from meaning!

For all the interest these techniques have aroused, Frankl insists that, ultimately, the problems these people face are a matter of their need for meaning. So, although these and other techniques are a fine beginning to therapy, they are not by any means the goal.

Perhaps the most significant task for the therapist is to assist the client in rediscovering the latent religiousness that Frankl believes exists in each of us. This cannot be pushed, however: "Genuine religiousness must unfold in its own time. Never can anyone be forced to it." (1975, p. 72) The therapist must allow the patient to discover his or her own meanings.

"(H)uman existence – at least as long as it has not been neurotically distorted – is always directed to something, or someone, other than itself – be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter lovingly." (1975, p. 78) Frankl calls this **self-transcendence**, and contrasts it with self-actualization as Maslow uses the term. Self-actualization, even pleasure and happiness, are side-effects of self-transcendence and the discovery of meaning. He quotes Albert Schweitzer: "The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve." (Quoted in 1975, p. 85)

## **In conclusion**

---

Even if you (like me) are not of a religious inclination, it is difficult to ignore Frankl's message: There exists, beyond instincts and "selfish genes," beyond classical and operant conditioning, beyond the imperatives of biology and culture, a special something, uniquely human, uniquely personal. For much of psychology's history, we have, in the name of science, tried to eliminate the "soul" from our professional vocabularies. But perhaps it is time to follow Frankl's lead and reverse the years of reductionism.

## Discussion

---

For all my admiration of Frankl and his theory, I also have some strong reservations. Frankl attempts to re-insert religion into psychology, and does so in a particularly subtle and seductive manner. It is difficult to argue with someone who has been through what Frankl has been through, and seen what he has seen. And yet, suffering is no automatic guarantee of truth! By couching religion in the most tolerant and liberal language, he nevertheless is asking us to base our understanding of human existence on faith, on a blind acceptance of the existence of ultimate truth, without evidence other than the "feelings" and intuitions and anecdotes of those who already believe. This is, in fact, a dangerous precedent, and there is much "pop psychology" based on these ideas. The same tendency applies to the quasi-religious theories of Carl Jung and Abraham Maslow.

Frankl, like May and others, refers to himself as an existentialist. Many others with religious tendencies do likewise. They have even elevated Kierkegaard to the honorary position of founder of existentialism – a word Kierkegaard had never heard. And yet faith, which asks one to surrender one's skepticism to a God or other universal principle, is intrinsically at odds with the most basic concepts of existentialism. Religion – even liberal religion – always posits essences at the root of human existence. Existentialism does not.

## References

---

Frankl, V. E. (1963). (I. Lasch, Trans.) **Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy**. New York: Washington Square Press. (Earlier title, 1959: **From Death-Camp to Existentialism**. Originally published in 1946 as **Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager**)

Frankl, V. E. (1967). **Psychotherapy and Existentialism : Selected Papers on Logotherapy**. New York : Simon and Schuster.

Frankl, V. E. (1973). (R. and C. Winston, Trans.) **The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy**. New York: Vintage Books. (Originally published in 1946 as **Ärztliche Seelsorge**.)

Frankl, V. E. (1975). **The Unconscious God: Psychotherapy and Theology**. New York: Simon and Schuster. (Originally published in 1948 as **Der unbewusste Gott**. Republished in 1997 as **Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning**.)

Frankl, V. E. (1996). **Viktor Frankl – Recollections: An Autobiography**. (J. and J. Fabray, Trans.) New York: Plenum Publishing. (Originally published in 1995 as **Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht**.)