

Logotherapy and American Psychology

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In the United States, logotherapy is situated within Third Force psychology, an umbrella term describing a variety of humanistic and existential approaches. The central feature of these approaches compared to psychoanalysis (First Force) and behaviorism (Second Force) is an emphasis on the application of specific philosophical principles to clinical work.¹ While all such schools tend to emphasize the therapeutic relationship over testable procedures, logotherapy is distinguished from its peers by the development of defined clinical techniques.² The Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy, moreover, places logotherapy between the humanist-existential schools (e.g., the work of Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, Irvin Yalom, and others) and the transpersonal schools (e.g., the work of Abraham Maslow, Stanislav Grof, Michael Washburn, Fritjof Capra, and others) owing to Frankl's emphasis on self-transcendence.³

Frankl does not specifically disagree with behaviorism, in much the same way that he does not specifically disagree with psychoanalysis. Rather, he sees behaviorism as a discipline belonging to a lower dimension of research; logotherapy surpasses it without contradicting it. He explains this position by using the analogy of an airplane: the fact that an airplane is capable of flight does not contradict its ability to move on the

¹ Sol L. Garfield, *Psychotherapy: An Eclectic Approach* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980), 28. The term transpersonal psychology is sometimes used to describe a Fourth Force.

² Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Pacific Grove, Calif.: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1991), 177.

³ Robert C. Barnes, *Franklian Psychology: Meaning-Centered Interventions* (Abilene, Texas: Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy, 2005), 17-18.

ground like an automobile.⁴ Frankl's interest, however, is in the specifically human capacity of noetic flight: "How should a psychotherapy that derives its conception of human nature from experiments with rats deal with the fundamental anthropological fact that persons, on the one hand, in the midst of an affluent society commit suicide, and, on the other hand, are prepared to suffer as long as that suffering has meaning?"⁵

Whereas Frankl sees logotherapy as complementary to psychoanalysis and behaviorism, he does take issue with the notion of self-actualization—a central concept in the practice of American humanist psychology. Self-actualization refers to the desire of the human person to realize individual potentials.⁶ Frankl sees a concern for self-actualization as evidence of the frustration of the will to meaning and as a contradiction of the quality of self-transcendence. Like happiness, he sees self-actualization as something that cannot be pursued directly, but as something that ensues as a result of self-transcendence.⁷ For Frankl, the true actualization of the self comes about only in the context of reaching beyond the self, in serving a cause solely for the sake of the cause, or in loving another solely for the sake of the other. Self-actualization reduces such causes or persons to mere means for its own ends.⁸

In contrast to these traditional approaches, American psychology has seen an increasing interest in positive traits and psychological strengths in recent years.⁹ The positive psychology movement reflects a shift of emphasis away from pathology and

⁴ Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 26.

⁵ Frankl, *On the Theory and Therapy of Mental Disorders*, 12.

⁶ For Maslow's definition of self-actualization, see Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being, Second Edition* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1968), 25.

⁷ Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 38, 41.

⁸ Frankl, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, 94.

⁹ Michael F. Steger, et. al., "The Meaning in Life Questionnaire: Assessing the Presence of and Search for Meaning in Life," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 53 (2006): 80.

toward resilience. While this movement is not founded on logotherapy, the two approaches do share such a similar orientation that logotherapy has been described as “anticipatory” of the new movement.¹⁰ These similarities include an acceptance of human spirituality, an emphasis on human strengths and values, an appreciation of beauty, gratitude, and humor, and an interest in a fulfilling and meaningful life.¹¹

¹⁰ Haddon Klingberg, “Logotherapy, Frankl, and Positive Psychology,” in *Existential Psychotherapy of Meaning: Handbook of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis*, eds. Alexander Batthyány and Jay Levinson (Phoenix: Zeig, Tucker & Theisen, 2009), 197.

¹¹ Klingberg, “Logotherapy, Frankl, and Positive Psychology,” 208-212.