

## Frankl's Laws of Dimensional Ontology

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Frankl addresses the relationship between the person as a spiritual being and the empirical study of the human person through the sciences by means of his *first law of dimensional ontology*: “One and the same phenomenon projected out of its own dimension into different dimensions lower than its own is depicted in such a way that the individual pictures contradict one another.”<sup>1</sup> Returning to the image of the cylinder, Frankl explains that, if projected from three-dimensional space onto a two dimensional plane, the cylinder may appear as either a rectangle or a circle (see figure 2). These images appear contradictory, one having height and width, the other having circumference and radius. The contradiction is only solved when one recalls that the geometry measured is only a projection of a cylinder. An error is made if one comes to believe that a cylinder is nothing but a rectangle or nothing but a circle. Likewise, an error is made if the psychologist assumes that the human person is nothing but the dynamics of the psyche or if the biologist assumes that the human person is nothing but a collection of chemicals.<sup>2</sup> Said another way, depression may be seen by some as a set of cognitive self-statements learned in childhood or it may be seen as a deficiency of a chemical neurotransmitter. Frankl argues that an error is made if it is seen as either of these things exclusively. Regardless of its cause, the human spirit is able to take a defiant stance toward the depression.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 24-25.

<sup>3</sup> Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 123, 132-133.

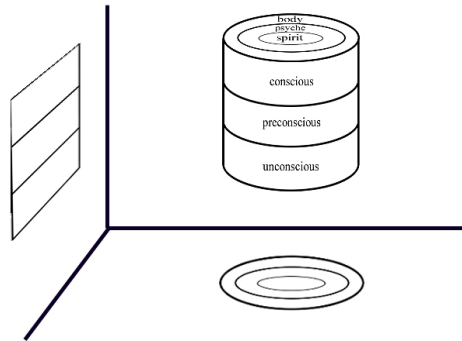


Figure 2. Frankl's First Law of Dimensional Ontology

A second analogy to explain Frankl's first law of dimensional ontology is made with the observation that the cylinder as depicted by Frankl is open, whereas the rectangular and circular projections are closed. That is, deterministic principles operate within the closed systems of psychology and biology, but freedom is found in the open system of the human spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Frankl's model is further explained by his *second law of dimensional ontology*: "Different phenomena projected out of their own dimension into one dimension lower than their own are depicted in such a manner that the pictures are ambiguous."<sup>5</sup> One may imagine that a circle may be the two dimensional projection of a cone, a cylinder, or a sphere (see figure 3). The cause of the circle is unclear. Likewise, a depression may have a physical, a psychological, or a spiritual cause.<sup>6</sup> Frankl sees logotherapy as the specific treatment of choice when the cause of psychological symptoms is spiritual, that is, when the cause is a conflict between what the person is and what the person may become. Because Frankl views the spiritual dimension as incorruptible, logotherapy is

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<sup>4</sup> Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 24-25.

also seen as an ancillary treatment when a psychological disturbance has either psychological or physical causes.<sup>7</sup> In this latter case, the spiritual core is seen as a source of health and strength in its ability to choose an attitude toward the illness.<sup>8</sup>

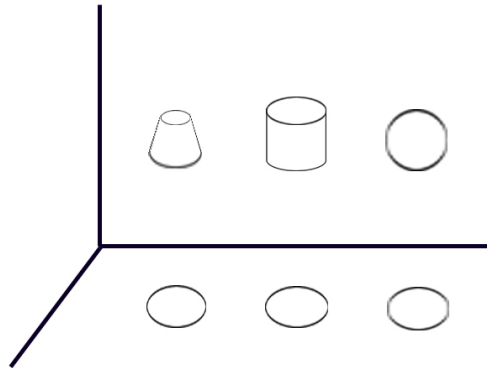


Figure 3. Frankl's Second Law of Dimensional Ontology

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<sup>7</sup> Frankl, *On the Theory and Therapy of Mental Disorders*, 185.

<sup>8</sup> Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 289-290; Frankl, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, 73.