# The Philosophical Background of Logotherapy
## (CAUTION EARLY DRAFT – NEEDS REVISION)
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Frankl identifies logotherapy as "existential"[1,2] and "phenomenonlogical."[3,4]  The focus of existentialism is on understanding the way in which an individual experiences the world.  Phenomenology holds that existence can be studied as one phenomenon among others.[5]  These terms have largely converged within the fields of psychiatry and psychology[6] where they apply to multiple theories that emphasize human experience over natural-scientific approaches.[7]  Frankl does not define existentialism within logotherapy, though he does wryly remark that "... there are as many existentialisms as there are existentialists."[8]  He does define phenomenology:  "Phenomenology, as I understand it, speaks the language of man's prereflective self-understanding rather than interpreting a given phenomenon after preconceived patterns."[9,10]

Spiegelberg argues that phenomenology allowed Frankl to free himself from the preconceived patterns of psychoanalysis and individual psychology.  Consequently, Frankl was able to develop logotherapy by hearing his patients instead of offering them interpretations.[11]  As such, Spiegelberg argues, Frankl was not interested in the

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[1] Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, *op. cit.,* 5, 6.

[2] Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, *op. cit.,* 29.

[3] Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, *op. cit.,* 7.

[4] Frankl, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, *op. cit.,* 108.

[5] Spiegelberg, *op. cit.,* xxix.

[6] Spiegelberg, *op. cit.,* xxvii-xxix.

[7] Halling, S. and Nill, J. D.  (1995).  A Brief History of Existential-Phenomenological Psychiatry and Psychotherapy.  *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *26*, 1-2.

[8] Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, *op. cit.,* ix.

[9] Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, *op. cit.,* 2, note 2.

[10] Frankl, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, *op. cit.,* 108.

[11] Spiegelberg, *op. cit.,* 353.

development of phenomenology *per se*, but rather, in its application to psychiatry.[12]  For

example, Frankl bases his three assumptions of logotherapy (freedom of the will, the will

to meaning, and meaning in life) on his understanding of phenomenology.[13]

Existential phenomenology is a movement deriving from multiple sources, though

Kierkegaard is generally regarded as the first existentialist while Husserl is seen as the

founder of phenomenology.[14]  Kierkegaard emphasizes the concrete existence of the

human person in a concrete life situation and argues against abstract understandings such

as those based on the philosophy of Hegel.  Kierkegaard views despair, for example, as

the result of denying one's true self and one's true situation, or the insistence that one

should be who one is not.[15]  Frankl likewise argues that each unique human person is

called to accomplish a unique concrete task that no one else can accomplish.[16]  Husserl's

phenomenology emphasizes methodology in the study of things as they appear (*zu den

Sachen selbst*[17]), especially the relationship between consciousness and the objects of

perception; he specifically argues against psychological reductionism and relativism.[18]

Frankl sets overcoming psychological reductionism as a specific task of logotherapy.[19]

Frankl often quotes his own translation of Nietzsche:  "He who has a *why* to live

for can bear almost any *how*."[20]  His use of the term "will to power" is also clearly drawn

from Nietzsche though applied to Adler's "superiority goal" in a way that Adler might

disapprove.[21]  Nietzsche's concept of the "overman" (*Übermensch*) can be understood as

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[12] Spiegelberg, *op. cit.,* 245, 352.

[13] Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, *op. cit.,* 2, 11, 14.

[14] Halling and Nill, *op. cit.,* 2-3.

[15] Halling and Nill, *op. cit.,* 3-4.

[16] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, *op. cit.,* 108-109.

[17] "to the things themselves"

[18] Halling and Nill, *op. cit.,* 3, 5-6.

[19] Frankl, *Recollections*, *op. cit.,* 59-60.

[20] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, *op. cit.,* 104 and many other places.

[21] Adler, in *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology*, *op. cit.,* 15, states the goal of Individual
Psychology:  "For the aim of this point-of-view is to gain a reinforced sense of reality, the development of a
feeling of responsibility and a substitution for latent hatred of a feeling of mutual goodwill, all of which can

one who creates and lives out authentic values.[22]  Kaufmann describes the overman as he "who has organized the chaos of his passions, given style to his character, and become creative.  Aware of life's terrors, he affirms life without resentment."[23]  Much the same could be said of Frankl.[24]

Though Heidegger did not consider himself to be an existentialist, he combined existential concerns with phenomenological method in addressing the question of Being. He uses the German term *Dasein* in a specific and philosophically rich manner.  *Da*, meaning here or there, is used to signify that transcendence is intrinsic to the human person.  *Sein*, or being, means to Heidegger that the human person is the being who questions Being.  Heidegger uses the word *Dasein* in place of the words person, conscious, or subject.  Heidegger's *Dasein* is partly revealed and partly hidden; he suggested a phenomenological hermeneutics by which Dasein reveals itself.[25]  This hermeneutics is indistinguishable from ontology.[26]  The partly hidden nature of *Dasein* became a basis for understanding the unconscious among some psychotherapists.[27]  As with Kierkegaard, Heidegger sees *Dasein* as a concrete phenomenon in space and time. Recognition of the finality of death allows the human person to become aware of one's unique individuality.[28]  Frankl takes a similar point of view when he writes, "...the transitoriness of our existence in no way makes it meaningless.  But it does constitute our responsibleness; for everything hinges upon our realizing the essentially transitory possibilities."[29]

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be gained only by the conscious evolution of a feeling for the common weal and the conscious destruction of the will to power."

[22] Halling and Nill, *op. cit.,* 7.

[23] Kaufmann, W. A. (1967).  Friederich Nietzsche. In Edwards, P. (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 5-6* (p. 511).  New York:  Macmillan.

[24] Redsand, A. S. (2006).  *Viktor Frankl:  A Life Worth Living.*  New York:  Clarion, 75, 81.

[25] Halling and Nill, *op. cit.,* 8-10.

[26] Heidegger, M. (1996).  *Being and Time:  A Translation of Sein und Zeit.*  (Joan Stambaugh, Trans.). Albany:  State University of New York Press, 398-401.

[27] Halling and Nill, *op. cit.,* 9.

[28] Halling and Nill, *op. cit.,* 10.

[29] Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning, op. cit.,* 120-121.

The psychiatric theories most closely associated with Heiddegger's thought are Binswanger's *Daseinanalyse* and Boss's *Daseinanalytik*,[30] the former of which is considered a freer interpretation of Heiddegger than the latter.[31]  Frankl sees logotherapy as moving beyond Heidegger and Binswanger when he states:  "*Existenzanalyse* aims to complement these previous theories, to remodel and surpass them, and to complete a truer picture of the 'complete' man, namely, 'being man' as essentially spiritual *Existenz*."[32]  Frankl does not discuss Boss to any great extent, but supplements his argument for logotherapy by quoting Boss as saying, "Daseinanalysis has nothing to do with psychotherapeutic practice."[33]  Frankl further explains, "Logotherapy is concerned not only with being but also with meaning - not only with *ontos* but also with *logos* - and this feature may well account for the activistic, therapeutic orientation of logotherapy.  In other words, logotherapy is not only analysis but also therapy."[34]

One of the greatest influences on the development of logotherapy is the phenomenology of Scheler.[35]  In writing about his final days of association with the Society for Individual Psychology, Frankl states:  "At that time I finally saw through my own psychologism.  My ultimate shakeup came from Max Scheler whose *Formalismus in der Ethik* [*Formalism in Ethics*] I carried with me like a bible."[36]  Scheler's phenomenology had wide influence on a number of psychiatrists and psychologists.[37]  The influence of Scheler on Frankl may best be seen in Frankl's concept of dimensional ontology and in the development of his categorical values.

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[30]  Halling and Nill, *op. cit.,* 14-15.

[31]  Spiegelberg, *op. cit.,* 333, note.

[32]  Frankl, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, *op. cit.,* 195.

[33]  Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, *op. cit.,* 134.

[34]  Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, *op. cit.,* 1.

[35]  Spiegelberg, *op. cit.,* 348, 352.

[36]  Frankl, *Recollections*, *op. cit.,* 62.

[37]  Spiegelberg, *op. cit.,* 16.

Frankl gives credit to Scheler and to Hartmann for inspiring his dimensional ontology.[38]  Scheler's contribution in this regard is his stratification of feeling based on the vital, the mental and the spiritual.  Each stratification has its own relationship to values.[39]  Scheler explains, "A *spiritual* level also exists for this analysis, one that has nothing to do with the sphere of the sensible or the sphere of the vital or of the lived body, which is to be sharply distinguished from the sensible sphere."[40]  Hartmann's contribution to Frankl's dimensional ontology may be found in his general doctrine of ontology that states that higher strata are supported by lower strata while remaining autonomous from them.  He applies this law to the relationship between psychological phenomena (the lower stata) and spiritual phenomena (the higher stata).[41]  Frankl draws from each the notion of a spiritual stratum separate from the psychophysical layers, but speaks of dimensionality as a way to maintain the unity of the human person.[42]

Spiegelberg notes that while Frankl's categorical values are original to Frankl, they do owe some degree dependence on Scheler.[43]  By use of his stratification system, Scheler allows for value hierarchies to be deliberately considered.[44]  He explains, "In the *totality* of the realm of values there exists a singular order, an "*order of ranks*" that all values possess among themselves.  It is because of this that a value is "*higher*" or "*lower*" than another one.  This order lies in the essence of values themselves..."[45]  Frankl states: "The rank of a value is experienced together with the value itself.  In other words, the experience of one value includes the experience that it ranks higher than another.  There is no place for value conflicts."[46]

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[38] Frankl, *The Will the Meaning*, *op. cit.,* 22.

[39] Spiegelberg, *op. cit.,* 17.

[40] Scheler, *op. cit.,* 65.

[41] Spiegelberg, *op. cit.,* 22.

[42] Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, *op. cit.,* 22.

[43] Spiegelberg, *op. cit.,* 351-352.

[44] Spiegleberg, *op. cit.,* 17.

[45] Scheler, *op. cit.,* 86-87.

[46] Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, *op. cit.,* 57.

For both Scheler and Frankl, values must be lived. Scheler explains, "It is not only in 'inner perception'...but also in the felt and lived affair with *world*...in the course of *performing* such intentional functions and acts, that values and their order flash before us!...A spirit limited to perception and thinking would be absolutely *blind* to values...."[47] Frankl, likewise, explains, "However, the experience of the hierarchical order of values does not dispel man from decision making. Man is pushed by drives. But he is pulled by values. He is always free to accept or to reject a value he is offered by a situation."[48]

Close correspondence between the writings of Scheler and Frankl may be found in a number of areas. Although Scheler is not specifically credited with the logotherapeutic concepts below, it is possible that Scheler's work had an important influence. Some key areas for logotherapy include the understanding of the conscience, Frankl's realization of the weakness of Freud's pleasure principle and possibly even the clinical technique of dereflection. These examples follow:

Frankl and Scheler share similar ideas regarding the nature of the conscience. Frankl defines conscience as "essentially intuitive" because it must anticipate that which has not yet been actualized. He explains, "It is the task of conscience to disclose to man the *unum necesse,* the one thing that is required. This one thing, however, is absolutely unique inasmuch as it is the unique possibility a concrete person has to actualize in a specific situation."[49] This may be compared with Scheler's formal definition of conscience: "(1) it represents the *individual form of the economization* of moral insight, and (2) it represents this insight only insofar as it is directed to the *good as such* 'for me.'"[50] Moral struggle for Scheler is not a matter of logic, but is a matter of correct or deceptive estimates of the ranks of values. Thus, Scheler's hierarchy of values, his "order

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[47] Scheler, *op. cit.,* 68.

[48] Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, *op. cit.,* 57.

[49] Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, *op. cit.,* 40-41.

[50] Scheler, *op. cit.,* 324.

of ranks," is as integral to his analysis of moral struggle,[51] as the "one thing that is required" is for Frankl.[52] Scheler explains how these estimates of value may be discovered: "There is a depth in man that always silently tells him what the 'relativity' of felt values is, no matter how much he may seek to cover it up by means of judgments, comparisons, and induction."[53] Scheler also states: "Interconnections are, like essences, "*given*." They are not a 'product' of 'understanding.' They are *intuited*, not 'made.'...The *logos* permeating the universe can be grasped only through them."[54]

Frankl's rejection of Freud's pleasure principle as nothing but a derivative of the will to meaning[55] is similar to Scheler's explanation of the relationship between contentment and pleasure. Scheler explains, "...it is a quite peculiar phenomenon that sensuous enjoyment or a harmlessly trivial delight (e.g., attending a party or going for a walk) will bring us full 'contentment' *only* when we feel 'content' in the more central sphere of our life, where everything is 'serious.' It is only against this background of a deeper contentment that a fully content laughter can resound about the most trivial joys. Conversely, if the more central sphere is not content, there arises a 'discontentment' and a restless search for *pleasure values* that at once replace a full contentment in feeling the lower values concerned. One can even draw a conclusion from this: the many forms of hedonism always reveal a token of 'discontentment' with regard to higher values. There exists a reciprocal relation, then, between the degrees of *searching* for pleasure and the depth of contentment in a value of the value-series in question."[56] Compare this to Frankl's notion that happiness cannot be pursued, but must ensue from a life lived with meaning.[57]

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[51] Scheler, *op. cit.,* 84, 85.

[52] Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning, op. cit.,* 40-41.

[53] Scheler, *op. cit.,* 99.

[54] Scheler, *op. cit.,* 68.

[55] Frankl, *The Will to Meaning, op. cit.,* 35.

[56] Scheler, *op. cit.,* 96-97.

[57] Frankl, *The Will to Meaning, op. cit.,* 34.

It is possible that even the clinical technique of dereflection owes something to Scheler.  As with values, Scheler develops a stratification of levels of feeling.  These levels are the "sensible" (feelings of the senses), "feelings of the lived body" (states and functions of the body), "psychic" (related to psychological processes), and "spiritual" (related to the personality).[58]  Scheler believes that the closer a feeling is to the spiritual the less it can change while the closer it is to the sensible the more it can change.  This change is brought about by a "displacement of oversight."[59]  The displacement of oversight sounds much like a description of Frankl's dereflection, or the process of diverting attention away from a symptom (that may be a feeling, such as anxiety) and toward a greater meaning to fulfill.[60]

Frankl has been closely identified with Scheler in much the same way that Binswanger has been identified with Heidegger.  In neither case can a theory of psychology be identical with a system of philosophy.  However, Frankl and Scheler both argue that "meanings" are real phenomena, just as music, art, dance, love and other forms of human experience are real and true at the level of the human person who experiences them.  Perhaps more than any other European psychiatrist, Frankl has ensured that existential-phenomenological ideas continue to influence clinical practice.[61]

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[58] Scheler, *op. cit.,* 332.  Note also the possible relationship to dimensional ontology.

[59] Scheler, *op. cit.,* 337.

[60] Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, *op. cit.,* 253.

[61] Sahakian, W. S.  (1979).  Logotherapy's Place in Philosophy.  In Joseph B. Fabry, Reuven P. Bulka and William S. Sahakian (Eds.), *Logotherapy in Action* (p. 67).  New York:  Jason Aronson.