Viktor Frankl

**Viktor Emil Frankl** (26 March 1905 - 2 September 1997) was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist as well as a Holocaust survivor. He served as a prisoner in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, Kaufering and Türkheim. Frankl was a founder of logotherapy, which is a form of existential analysis, the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy." His best-selling book *Man's Search for Meaning* (published under a different title in 1959: *Trotzdem Ja Zum Leben Sagen: Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager*) chronicles his experiences as a concentration camp inmate, which led him to discover the importance of finding meaning in all forms of existence, even the most brutal ones, and thus, a reason to continue living. *Man's Search for Meaning* has sold over 10 million copies and has been translated into 24 different languages. Frankl became one of the key figures in existential therapy and a prominent source of inspiration for humanistic psychologists.

Frankl has been the subject of criticism from several Holocaust analysts who questioned the levels of Nazi accommodation that the ideology of logotherapy has and Frankl personally willingly permitted in the time periods before Frankl's internment, when Frankl voluntarily requested to perform unskilled lobotomy experiments approved by the Nazis on Jews, to the time period of his internment, in what is hinted upon in Frankl's own autobiographical account and later under the investigative light of biographical research.

**Life before 1945**

Frankl was born in Vienna into a Jewish family of civil servants (Besamtenfamilie). His interest in psychology surfaced early. For the final exam (Matura) in Gymnasiurn, he wrote a paper on the psychology of philosophical thinking. After graduation from Gymnasiurn in 1923, he studied medicine at the University of Vienna. In practice he specialized in neurology and psychiatry, concentrating on the topics of depression and suicide. His early development was influenced by his contacts with Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler, although he would diverge from their teachings.

**Physician, therapist**

During part of 1924 he became the president of the Sozialistische Mitschüler Österreich, a Social Democratic youth movement for high school students throughout Austria. Between 1928 and 1930, while still a medical student, he organized and offered a special program to counsel high school students free of charge. The program involved the participation of psychologists such as Charlotte Bührer, and it paid special attention to students at the time when they received their report cards. In 1931, not a single Viennese student committed suicide. The success of this program grabbed the attention of the likes of Wilhelm Reich, who invited him to Berlin.

From 1933 to 1937, Frankl completed his residency in neurology and psychiatry at the Stiehoff Psychiatric Hospital in Vienna. He was responsible for the so-called Selbstmörderpavillon, or "suicide pavilion." Here, he treated more than 3000 women who had suicidal tendencies. In 1937, he established an independent private practice in neurology and psychiatry at Alser Strasse 32/12 in Vienna.

**Nazi takeover of Austria in 1938**

In 1938, he was prohibited from treating "Aryan" patients due to his Jewish identity. In 1940 he started working at the Rothschild Hospital, where he headed its neurological department. This hospital was the only one in Vienna where Jews were still admitted. His medical opinions (including deliberately false diagnoses) saved several patients from being euthanised via the Nazi euthanasia program. In December 1941 he married Tilly Grosser.

**Prisoner, therapist**

On 25 September 1942, Frankl, his wife, and his parents were deported to the Nazi concentration camp Kaufering, receiving the threat of punishment under the principle of "kinship liability", in this regard Frankl was a Jewish collaborator. There, within the Cultural life of the Theresienstadt ghetto., Frankl worked as a general practitioner in a clinic and wrote and gave lectures. When his skills in psychiatry were noticed by the Nazis, he was assigned to the psychiatric care ward in Block B IV, establishing a camp service of "psychohygienic" or mental health care. He organized a unit to help camp newcomers to overcome shock and grief. Later he set up a suicide watch, assisted by Regina Jonas.

While presented as a humanitarian act on behalf of Frankl in his autobiography, Thomas Szasz and biographer Timothy Pytell have questioned this by revealing the dimension that suicide amounted to the execution of over 40,000 women in Typhoid wards of the Theresienstadt ghetto, which held up to 2,000 male prisoners in earthen huts, who upon its opening in June of that year, the prisoners were required to construct a transport route to connect underground aircraft factories, laying the infrastructure for the mass production of the world's first jet-powered Messerschmitt Me 262 bomber destroyer, the Nazi response, to regain vital air supremacy, under the growingly unopposed effectiveness of Allied bombing upon the Nazi armament industry. According to Frankl, his feats of physical initiative at this work camp were such that they did not go unnoticed and he was gifted "premium coupons" in late 1944. According to Frankl's autobiography, when infected with the ubiquitous typhoid, he was allowed leave the work camp and was offered a move to the so-called rest camp of Türkheim, prison records list his departure from Kaufering as 8 March 1945. Frankl states that in Türkheim he was placed in charge of fifty men with typhus, it was here he rose to the position of "senior block warden" and began writing his book anew, until 27 April 1945, when the camp was liberated by American soldiers.

**Australia**

Frankl's mother Elsa and brother Walter were murdered at Auschwitz. Frankl's wife was similarly transported out of Auschwitz and moved to Bergen-Belsen, a facility that housed a considerable number of women and minors, including Anne Frank, where they were forced to work in the shoe recycling labor camp, she would similarly be murdered, from the brutal conditions sometime close to the time of its liberation in 1945. The only survivor of the Holocaust among Frankl's immediate family was his sister, Stella, who had emigrated from Austria to Australia.
Life after 1945

Liberated after several months in concentration camps, Frankl returned to Vienna, where he dictated to stenographers—lipists his well known work, "the flood gates had opened", completing the book by 1946. Frankl then published his world-famous book entitled, Trotzdem Ja Zum Leben Sagen: Ein Psychologe Erlebt das Konzentrationslager ("Saying Yes to Life in Spite of Everything: A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp"), known in English by the title Man's Search for Meaning (1959 title: From Death-Camp to Existentialism). In this book, he described the life of an ordinary concentration camp inmate from the objective perspective of a psychiatrist. Frankl believed that people are primarily driven by a "striving to find meaning in one's life," and that it is this sense of meaning that enables people to overcome painful experiences.

After enduring the suffering in these camps, Frankl concluded that even in the most absurd, painful, and dehumanized situation, life has potential meaning and that, therefore, even suffering is meaningful. This conclusion served as a basis for his logotherapy and existential analysis, which Frankl had described before World War II. He said, "What is to give light must endure burning." Frankl's concentration camp experiences shaped both his therapeutic approach and philosophical outlook, as reflected in his seminal publications.

He often said that even within the narrow boundaries of the concentration camps he found only two races of Men to exist: decent ones and unprincipled ones. These were to be found in all classes, ethnicities, and groups. "Under such conditions, who could blame them for trying to dope themselves?" "These were the men who were employed in the gas chambers and crematoriums, and who knew very well that one day they would have to leave their enforced role of executioner and become victims themselves."

In 1946, he was appointed to run the Vienna Polyclinic of Neurology. He remained there until 1971. In 1947 he married his second wife Eleonore Katharina Schwindt. She was a practicing Catholic and the couple respected each other's religious backgrounds, going to both church and synagogue, and celebrating Christmas and Hanukkah. They had one daughter, Gabriele, who went on to become a child psychologist.

In 1948, Frankl earned a Ph.D. in philosophy. His dissertation, The Unconscious Goal is an examination of the relation of psychology and religion.

In 1955, he was awarded a professorship of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Vienna, and as visiting professor, he resided at Harvard University (1961), at Southern Methodist University, Dallas (1966), and at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh (1972). Frankl published 39 books, which were translated into as many as 49 languages. He lectured and taught seminars all over the world and received 29 honorary doctoral degrees.

The American Psychiatric Association awarded Frankl the 1985 Oskar Pfister Award for important contributions to religion and psychiatry.

Frankl died of heart failure on 2 September 1997. He was survived by his wife Eleonore, one daughter, two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Controversy

In The Missing Pieces of the Puzzle: A Reflection on the Odd Career of Viktor Frankl, Timothy Pytell of California State University, San Bernardino, conveys the numerous discrepancies and omissions in Frankl's "Auschwitz survivor" account and later autobiography, which many of his contemporaries, such as Thomas Szasz, suggest was not only selective but ghostwritten. Frankl's Search for meaning the book devotes approximately half its contents to describing schizophrenia and the psychology of its prisoners, suggesting a long stay at the death camp, however his wording is contradictory and to Pytell, "profoundly deceiving", when rather the impression of staying for months, Frankl was held close to the train, in the "depot prisoner" area of Auschwitz and for no more than a few days, he was neither registered there, nor assigned a number before being sent on to a subsidiary work camp of Dachau, known as Kaufering III, the true meaning of such much of what is described in his book.

On Frankl's doctrine that one must instill meaning in the events in one's life that work and suffering to find meaning, will ultimately lead to fulfillment and happiness. In 1982 the highly cited scholar and holocaust analyst, Oskar Pfister argued Frankl's concentration camp experiences shaped both his therapeutic approach and philosophical outlook, as reflected in his seminal publications.

The origins of logotheraphy, as described by Frankl, were therefore a major issue of continuity that Biographer Pytell argued were potentially problematic for Frankl because he had laid out the main elements of logotheraphy while working for/contributing to the Nazi-affiliated Göring Institute. Principally Frankl's 1937 paper, that was published by the institute. This association, as a source of controversy, that logotherapy was palatable to National Socialism is the reason Pytell suggests, Frankl took two different stances on how the concentration-camp experience affected the course of his psychotherapy theory. Namely, that within the original English edition of Frankl's most well known book, Man's Search for Meaning, the suggestion is made and still largely held that logotherapy was itself derived from his camp experience, with the claim as it appears in the original edition, that this form of psychotherapy was "not concocted in the psychiatrist's armchair nor at the analyst's couch; it took shape in the hard school of air-raid shelters and bomb craters; in concentration camps and prisoner of war camps." Frankl's statements however to this effect would be deleted from later editions, though in the 1963 edition, a similar statement again appeared on the back of the book jacket of Man's Search for Meaning.

Frankl over the years would use with these varied logical connections and others, switch between the claim that logotherapy took shape in the camps to the claim that the camps merely were a testing ground of his already preconceived theories. An uncovering of the matter would occur in 1977 with Frankl revealing on this controversy, though compounding another, stating "People think I came out of Auschwitz with a brand-new psychotherapy. This is not the case."
Decorations and awards

- 1956: Promotion Award for Public Education of the Ministry of Education, Austria
- 1962: Cardinal Innitzer Prize, Austria
- 1969: Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art, 1st class
- 1976: Prize of the Danubia Foundation
- 1980: Honorary Ring of Vienna, Austria
- 1981: Austrian Decoration for Science and Art
- 1985: Oscar Pfister Award, USA
- 1986: Honorary doctorate from the University of Vienna, Austria, and Honorary member of the association Bürgervereinigung Landsberg im 20. Jahrhundert
- 1988: Great Silver Medal with Star for Services to the Republic of Austria
- 1995: Hans Prinzthom Medal
- 1995: Honorary Citizen of the City of Vienna
- 1995: Great Gold Medal with Star for Services to the Republic of Austria
- 1995: Grand Decoration of the Austrian Chamber of Physicians
- Grand Merit Cross with Star of the Federal Republic of Germany

Bibliography

His books in English are:


See also

- Aaron Antonovsky
- Existential analysis
- List of logotherapy institutes named after Frankl
- Meaning-making

References


External links

- Timothy Pytell (2015) Viktor Frankl’s Search for Meaning, Berghahn Books
- Viktor and I, the Film 2011
- Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna
- Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy
- Viktor Frankl, The Will to Meaning - extract (1962)
- Viktor Frankl + Find a Grave
- Who Was Viktor Frankl? by Dr. Henry Abramson

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Viktor Frankl was a 20th century psychiatrist who founded the field of logotherapy. A Holocaust survivor, he wrote the best-selling book, Man's Search for Meaning. Professional Life. Viktor Emil Frankl was born on March 26, 1905 in Vienna, Austria. He received his MD and PhD degrees from the University of Vienna where he studied psychiatry and neurology, focusing on the areas of suicide and depression. As a medical student in the late 20s, he successfully counseled high school students to virtually eliminate suicide. March 26: Viktor Emil Frankl is born in Vienna as the second of three children. His mother, Elsa Frankl, nee Lion, hails from Prague, his father Gabriel Frankl, Director in the Ministry of Social Service, comes from Southern Moravia. 1914-1918. During the first World War the family experiences bitter deprivation; sometimes the children go begging to farmers. 1915-1923. In his high school years Frankl eagerly reads the "Nature Philosophers" and attends public lectures on Applied Psychology. He comes into contact with Psychoanalysis. 1921.