

Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy

Viktor E. Frankl, MD, PhD (1905-1997)

A professor of both psychiatry and philosophy at the University of Vienna, Austria,

Dr. Frankl was the founder of logotherapy. His logotherapy looks at our lives in a different way than most other psychotherapeutic theories. It looks to the healthy **spiritual** core of man for resources of healing, instead of analyzing pathology ad infinitum.

Definition of the Term Logotherapy

Therapy through finding meaning (logos= meaning).

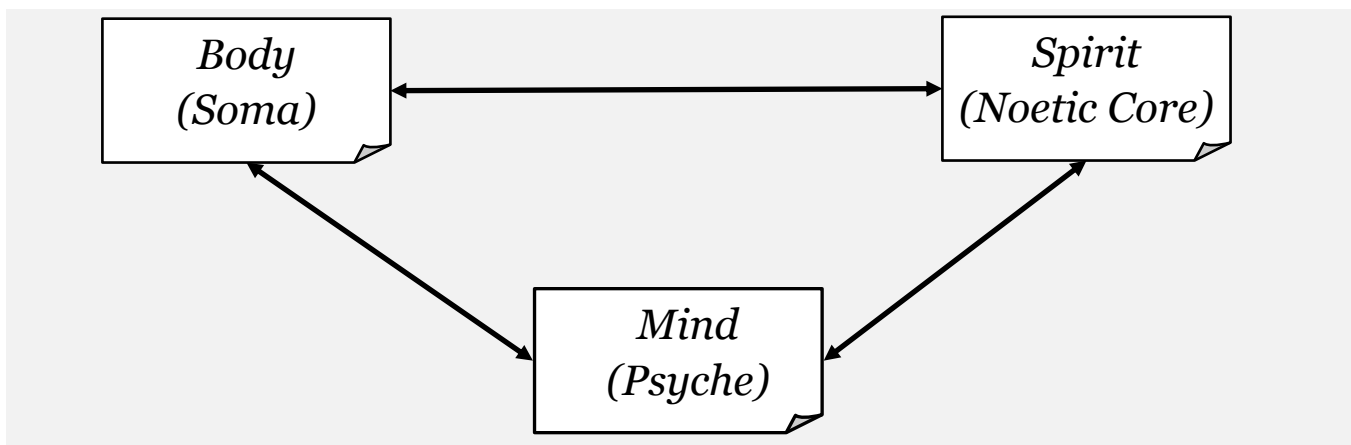
[The Greek term logos will be familiar to students of theology. It is usually translated as the "Word" or "Will" of God in religious circles. In a broader sense, it can be viewed as "that which gives reason for being." Frankl prefers the simple translation of logos as "meaning."]

Basic Assumptions of Logotherapy

1. Life has meaning under all circumstances.
2. People have a will to meaning.
3. People have freedom under all circumstances to activate the will to meaning and to find meaning.

Dimensional Ontology Image of Man

The human being is an entity consisting of:



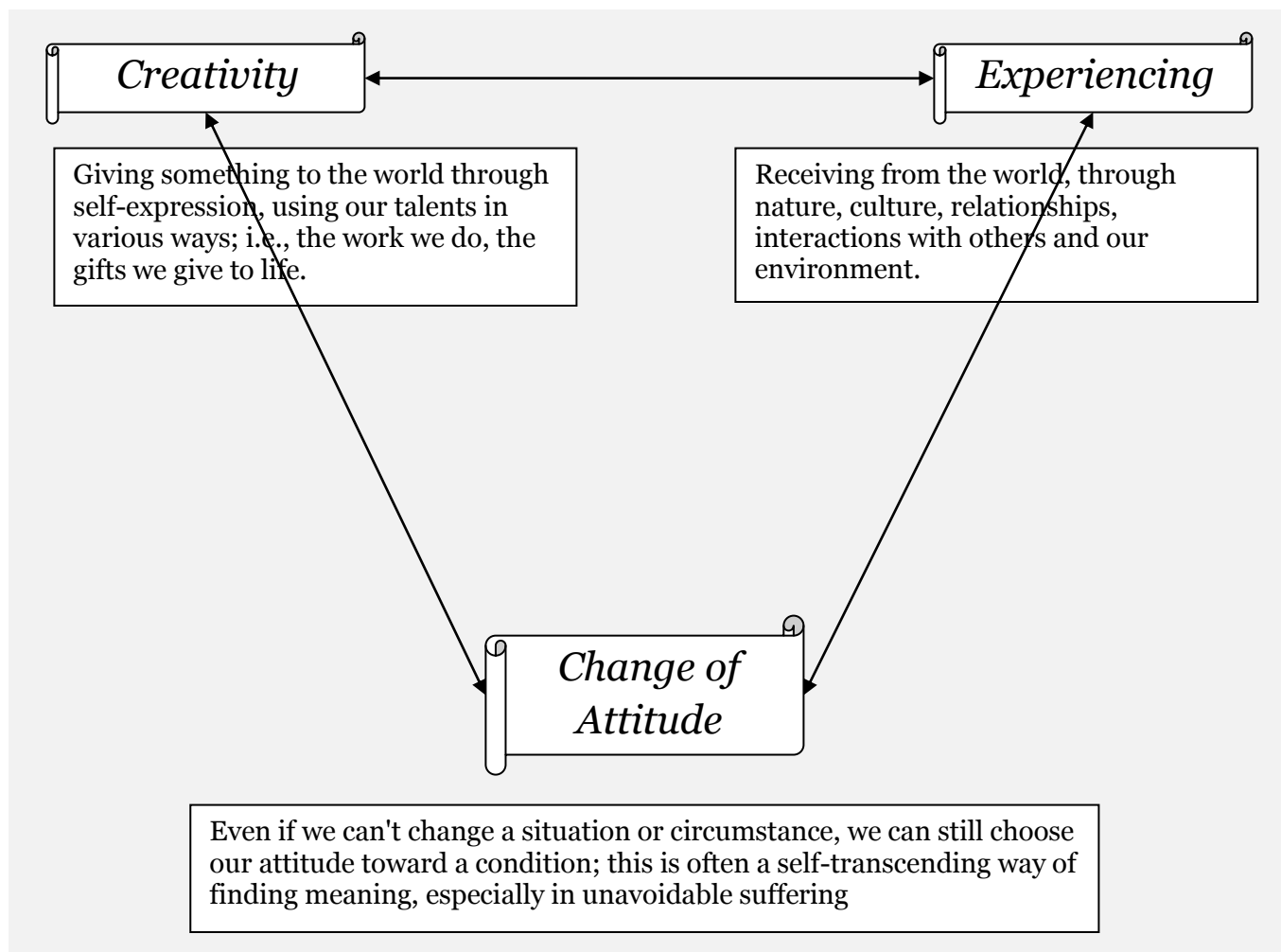
This is an image of man, where the scientific and the philosophic views are combined. Frankl was a clinician as well as a philosopher! Although we can experience sickness in the body and the psyche, the human spirit, our noetic core, remains healthy; however, access to that healthy core can be blocked.

Attributes of the Noetic Dimension

1. Responsibility (not from, but responsibility to)
2. Authenticity and creativity
3. Choices
4. Values
5. Self-transcendence
6. Will to meaning
7. Love
8. Conscience
9. Ideals and ideas, etc....

How Can We Find Meaning in Life?

Frankl points to three ways in the "**Meaning Triangle**"



The Two Levels of Meaning in Life

1. **Ultimate Meaning:** A meaning we can never reach but just glimpse at the horizon... It can be God, but also science as the search for truth, nature, and evolution for those who do not believe in God.
2. **Meaning of The Moment:** We have all the time to answer the questions life asks us and, therefore, it is important to understand the meaning of each moment by fulfilling the demands life places on us.

The Demand Quality of Life

Logotherapy teaches that it is not we who can ask life, "Why, Why, Why...?" Rather, it is Life, who is the questioner. We have to respond to Life's questions! We answer to Life by listening for discernment of the meaning of the moment; then, by making responsible decisions within our available area of freedom. Our choices will be based on our values and guidance received from the voice of our conscience.

The Lack of Meaning in Life Results in an Existential Vacuum

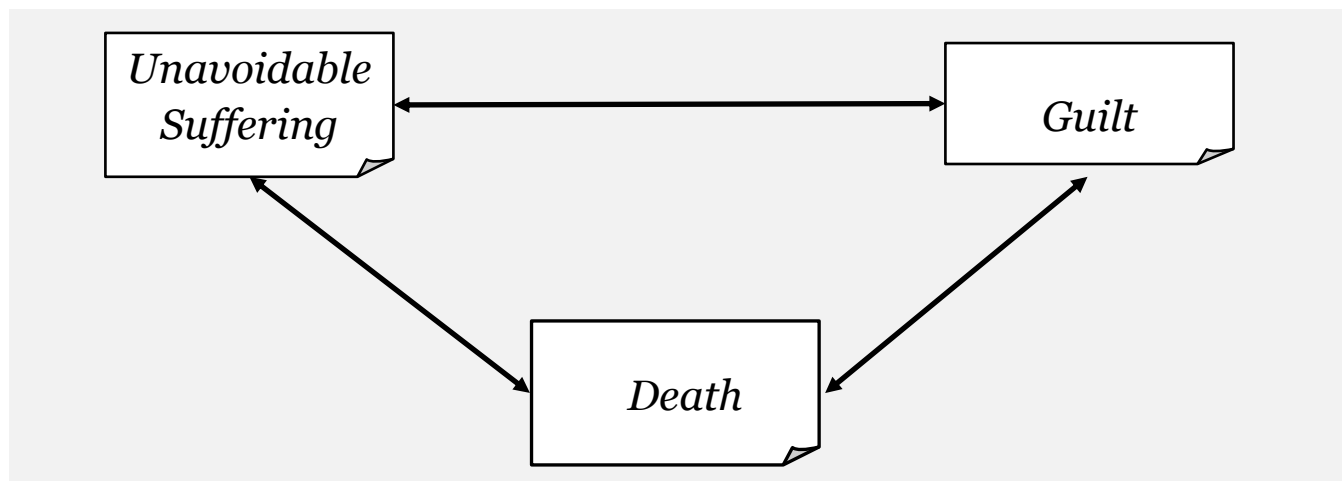
When life has no meaning, it becomes empty. We live in what Frankl calls an "*existential vacuum*." It is a state of inertia, boredom, and apathy experienced by many. If this state persists, it progresses into existential frustration and eventually becomes a "*noogenic neurosis*." We try to fill the existential vacuum with drugs, violence, also with food, over-work, sports, etc., yet remain unfulfilled.

Noogenic Neurosis

This state is what the DSM-IV refers to as "*somatization disorder*". In about 20% of these cases, the maintaining cause of somatization disorder lies in the noetic level, not in the psycho-physical. Noogenic neurosis can be the result of protracted existential vacuum or a conflict of values that result in conflicts in conscience.

The Tragic Triad

Since life is dynamic, we are faced all the time with elements of the tragic triad:



Here, usually the best way to find a meaning -- especially in a situation we cannot change -- is to change our attitude! A new meaning will often dawn by doing so.

Helping People to Find Meaning

1. We are spirit.

Our healthy core lies in the noetic dimension, therefore, the medicine chest of logotherapy is to be found in the noetic dimension. There, the "defiant power of the human spirit" has to be activated and brought to bear on current life situations to bring about the desired change that is healing or life-giving.

With the awareness that we are spirit, we recognize that what we have can be taken from us, but who we are, never!

2. We are unique.

There are always situations where we experience our uniqueness: in relationships, in creativity, etc, etc.... Maybe the painting we made is not a masterpiece, but it is ours!

3. We practice self-transcendence.

It is through transcending our previous limitations, striving toward a worthwhile goal, encountering other human beings that we find meaning and fulfillment in our lives.

4. We can change our attitude.

When faced with unavoidable suffering, we can often find meaning in the situation by looking at it in a different way; i.e., by courageously bearing what cannot be changed.

The Tools of Logotherapy

The main tool is the Socratic dialogue where the therapist and the client together try to find a meaning in life. Meaning cannot be given, it must be discovered.

1. The first thing is to make the client realize that he is NOT A VICTIM of circumstances! He might have symptoms, but he IS NOT his symptoms.
2. Try to help client find a meaning within his "meaning triangle."
3. Make client independent of the therapist by helping him find his guidance within.

Conclusion

Logotherapy is Viktor Frankl's philosophy of life. As such, it can be used in every profession and walk of life. Today it is being used by educators, counselors, ministers, business managers, etc. We can all use it in our daily life, when dealing with our family, friends or colleagues!

Accepting that our life (where we stand today) is a consequence of our choices made in the past, our future will consequently be shaped by the choices we make today!

Every day we have many possibilities from which to choose within our area of freedom. We must choose the most responsible option; make the best choice, not only for ourselves, but also the people around us then happiness and meaning fulfillment will ensue.