



The Pursuit of Meaning: Viktor Frankl, Logotherapy, and Life

Joseph B. Fabry

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Edited and typeset, this is largely a reprint of the 1987 classic. Contains the essence of the logotherapeutic writings of Viktor Frankl, who noted that many readers report that they understand some parts of logotherapy for the first time after reading this book. Fabry wrote in the introduction: Many older therapies place responsibility for our difficulties on our early upbringing. Logotherapy is "education to responsibility." Outside influences are important but not all-determining. Within limitations we have a say about who we are and who we want to become. We need never let ourselves be reduced to helpless victims. Consequently, logotherapy-unlike therapies that aim at equilibrium by adjusting patients to society-does not see a tensionless life as a therapeutic goal. Tension is part of living as a human being in a human society. To remain healthy, the unhealthy tensions of body and psyche are to be avoided. But the healthy tension of the spirit strengthens our spiritual muscles. The healthiest tension is between what we are and what we have the vision of growing toward, or, to use Frankl's favorite phrase, "the tension between being and meaning" (Psychotherapy and Existentialism, p. 10). The struggle for meaning is not easy. Life does not owe us pleasure; it does offer us meaning. Mental health does not come to those who demand happiness but to those who find meanings; to them happiness comes as a side product. "It must ensue" noted Frankl. "It cannot be pursued" (Unconscious God, p. 85). Logotherapy maintains and restores mental health by providing a sound view of the human being and the world as we know it. It draws on the huge reservoir of health stored in our specifically human dimension-our creativity, our capacity to love, our reaching out to others, our desire to be useful, our ability to orient to goals, and our will to meaning. Logophilosophy emphasizes what is right with us, what we like about ourselves, our accomplishments, and our peak experiences. It also considers the qualities we dislike so we may change them, our failures so we can learn from them, our abysses so we may lift ourselves up, knowing that peaks exist and can be reached.

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