

Meaning and Hope in the Work of Viktor Frankl

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Abstract: Reflecting on my work, supporting parents of adult children with disabilities, I asked myself about the meaning of my work. If the answer is “to give hope,” is it possible to live up to such a challenge? Viktor Frankl’s most famous book, *Yes to Life: In Spite of Everything*, bears witness to hope in its very title – witness to the hope that life has meaning despite all the suffering. The aim of this paper is to show the relationship between meaning and hope through analysing some of Frankl’s books. First, I provide a brief background to the people with whom I work. In understanding hope, I draw on Jan Sokol’s definition. I then briefly introduce Frankl’s logotherapy and the basic concepts with which he works, before analysing his texts and defining the relationship between meaning and hope. Finally, I consider whether I can live up to the claim of bringing hope through my work.

Keywords: logotherapy; meaning; hope; anthropology; disability

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Introduction

I work in a non-profit organization with parents of adults with disabilities. My work straddles the line between psychotherapeutic and social counselling and peer programmes. I myself have a 30-year-old son with a disability. The people who I have been given to accompany for two years on the journey of their lives have experienced dehumanised treatment of people with disabilities under communism in Czechoslovakia. The profound devaluation of human dignity is expressed in a nutshell by a doctor’s advice to the parents of a beloved baby: “Put it in an institution.” Now, the parents are in the second half of their lives, and they no longer have as much energy as before. What they fought for during the communist regime and won after the Velvet Revolution, that is, the life of their child in a family outside of institutional care, is again uncertain. The government is systemically unable to create good conditions for their children, now about 40 to 50 years old, to be able to continue to live in their homes, in the environment they know, in an environment that gives them safety and which they can understand, after their parents’ deaths. After two years of guiding them, I am confronted in some cases with the situation of leaving these “aging” parents alone, tired,

battered and humiliated in their struggle for a proper quality of life for their children, in uncertainty, with no prospect of a change in their conditions. As part of my self-reflection and reflection on my work, I asked myself the question, *What is the meaning of my work?* And the answer came to me: to bring hope. But is it possible to live up to such a claim in my work? Since in my practice I use a logotherapeutic approach, I adapted the question to this realm: *Can logotherapeutic practice bring hope?*

The aim of this paper is to show that logotherapy is a means of bringing hope, although Viktor Frankl, the founder of logotherapy, does not explicitly address this issue. He builds his logotherapy–existential analysis on a view of the human being which extends the contemporary conception of the human being in psychology as a psychophysical being, with a specifically human dimension, a spiritual dimension. At the start, therefore, I focus on the anthropology of Frankl’s analysis, to see if it creates space for grasping hope at all.

Logotherapy works primarily with the question of meaning and its fulfilment in human life. The next step in my inquiry, therefore, is the significance of the notion of meaning in Frankl’s work as a “tool” of logotherapy, if one accepts the Czech psychologist Karel Balcar’s paraphrasing of logotherapy as a treatment with meaning.¹ Last but not least, I examine Frankl’s statements relating hope, or rather hopelessness, to meaning. I conclude the paper with my answer regarding the possibility of logotherapeutic guidance bringing hope. Before proceeding to Frankl’s notion of hope, let me refer to the Czech philosopher Jan Sokol’s definition of hope as a reference point for my argument:

Hope, an attitude that clings to the expectation of the future. Hope can be objectified and fixed on a particular goal or something, or it can remain open as an expression of trust in the world or in God’s direction. In this sense, Christianity regards it as one of the divine virtues.²

1 Karel Balcar, “O knize” in Viktor E. Frankl, *Léčba smyslem, základy a aplikace logoterapie* (Prague: Portál, 2021), 160.

2 Jan Sokol, *Slovník filosofických pojmů* (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2004), 330.

1. Viktor Frankl and logotherapy³

Viktor Frankl, born in Vienna in 1905, founded logotherapy / existential analysis, sometimes called the third Viennese school of psychotherapy alongside Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual psychotherapy. He worked as a neurologist and psychiatrist and published his first works on questions of meaning in human life in the 1930s. He is not only widely known in the professional milieu, but thanks to his book *Yes to Life in Spite of Everything: A Psychologist Experiences a Concentration Camp*, translated into many languages, he is also in the consciousness of the general public. Frankl died in 1997.

“Logotherapy is applied therapy on the basis of the psychological-anthropological model developed by Viktor Frankl.”⁴ Existential analysis is also characterized here as the philosophical basis of logotherapy and, at the same time, as its form. An understanding of existential analysis is provided through its comparison with psychoanalysis. In contrast to psychoanalysis, which enables a person to become aware of what is instinctual in them, existential analysis helps a person become aware of what is spiritual or existential in them.⁵ In the words of Frankl, “Existential analysis presupposes the image of the human as a spiritual, free and responsible being, responsible for the realization of values and the fulfilment of meaning.”⁶ Existential analysis seeks to reveal an intact and unbreakable humanity while appealing to the freedom and responsibility of the person. Logotherapy / existential analysis is now an internationally recognized and empirically validated psychotherapeutic approach with the key concept of meaning.

3 A distinction must be made between Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy/Existential Analysis (the direction more commonly referred to as logotherapy) and the direction based on this background of thought developed in a separate psychotherapeutic approach by Alfied Längle, Logotherapy and Existential Analysis (more commonly referred to as Existential Analysis). Frankl himself later prefers logotherapy in the name of his approach and retreats from the term existential analysis because of its extension in different contexts and the resulting ambiguity.

4 Alexander Batthyány, “What is Logotherapy / Existential Analysis?,” *Viktor Frankl Institut*, <https://viktorfrankl.org/logotherapy.html> (accessed 31. 7. 2023).

5 Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* (London: Rider, 2011), 30. Epub.

6 Viktor E. Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen: Einführung in Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse* (München – Basel: E. Reinhardt, 1993), 142.

2. Logotherapy – Existential Analysis and its view of a human being

The term logotherapy expresses the key position of meaning in Frankl's therapy.⁷ As noted in the introduction, Balcar paraphrases logotherapy as a treatment with meaning. To understand the significance of meaning and its role in human life as Frankl conceives it, it is necessary to understand his view of human being. Frankl was well aware that psychotherapy always relies, consciously or unconsciously, on a certain anthropology.⁸ Since the 1930s, in relation to Freud's psychotherapist's and Adler's individual psychology, Frankl discussed the rehumanization of psychotherapy. He did not underestimate the importance of either psychotherapist direction, but argued that psychotherapy, in order to help the suffering person, must work on the basis of the true image of the person, that is, in their wholeness, their psychophysical-spiritual unity:⁹ "Human beings are more than an animal; they extend into the human dimension."¹⁰ Frankl considers this specifically human dimension to be the spiritual dimension and thus distinguishes three human dimensions overall: physical, psychological and spiritual or noetic.

The spiritual dimension is to be understood in the broadest sense, not primarily in a religious sense. The inclusion of the spiritual dimension allows one to see and understand human beings in their wholeness. Frankl uses the metaphor of a cylinder to approach this idea. The cylinder is represented as a circle on the plane projection and as a rectangle on the lateral projection. Neither of these projections independently shows the relationship between these representations, nor the object in its entirety. Only the three-dimensional view allows the cylinder to be seen as a cylinder; and even as open – as hollow. Similarly, the three-dimensional view of a human being makes it possible to see them as a human being in their fullness and uniqueness.¹¹

7 The term *logos*, used in philosophy in multiple senses, can be understood in Frankl's work as meaning.

8 Viktor E. Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben, Psychotherapie für heute* (Freiburg: Herder, 1987), 98.

9 Viktor E. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1986), 16–17, eBooks.

10 Viktor E. Frankl and Pinchas Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005), 73.

11 Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 417–20.

The relationships among the different human dimensions are not identical. Frankl termed the relationship between the physical and psychic dimensions *parallelism*, expressing the close connection between these dimensions and their inner unity, which, however, does not imply identity. The spiritual dimension is independent of both the physical and psychic dimensions.¹² This independence of the spiritual dimension establishes the possibility of human beings fulfilling their existence freely and responsibly.

In the introduction to *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, Frankl defines the human dimensions and their interrelationships with respect to ultimate meaning.¹³ The spiritual dimension is a higher and specifically human dimension and includes both the psychological and physical dimensions of a person. The higher dimension always overarches the lower dimensions. Thus, biology is transcended by psychology, psychology by noology, and noology by theology.¹⁴ Frankl reflects that if the noological dimension as a specifically human phenomenon is described as a person seeking meaning, then religion can be defined as a person seeking ultimate meaning. He refers to Albert Einstein, who said that the religious person is one who seeks an answer to the question about the meaning of life.¹⁵

Logotherapy, by including this spiritual, specifically human dimension, can grasp specifically human phenomena “in order to incorporate them in its therapeutical arsenal”.¹⁶ Specifically, human phenomena have the capacity for self-transcendence, in the sense of self-overcoming and self-distancing – the capacity for self-detachment.¹⁷ Logotherapy involves precisely these human phenomena. Self-transcendence is the ability of a person to transcend themselves, to forget themselves when they focus on a particular thing or a fellow being; it is the ability to transcend oneself in a direction towards something that is not oneself.¹⁸ This capacity makes one a being who decides what, or,

12 Martin Wagenknecht, “Současné rozpracování a metody existenciální analýzy (vybrané části ze závěrečné práce pro psychologický výcvik v logoterapii a existenciální analýze)”, *Společnost pro logoterapii a existenciální analýzu*, 10, <https://www.slea.cz/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ealt-rozpracovani-GLE.pdf> (accessed 31. 7. 2023).

13 The higher meaning, or ultimate meaning, is the meaning of all the world's events and is described below in the section on meaning and values.

14 Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, 22.

15 Ibid., 22.

16 Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 420.

17 Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen*, 10.

18 Viktor E. Frankl, *The Will to Meaning* (New York: Penguin Group, 2014), 5, Kindle.

perhaps more accurately, who they will be in the next moment. Concerning this, Frankl quotes Jaspers' words: "What man is, he has become through that cause which he has made his own."¹⁹ It is precisely as a consequence of the capacity for self-transcendence that a human being is always searching for meaning.²⁰ Frankl considers love and conscience to be the most striking phenomena of self-transcendence. Love is the transcendence of self in relation to another being and conscience in relation to meaning.²¹ In this case, self-transcendence must be understood as an anthropological and not a theological concept.

The capacity for self-detachment allows a human being to withdraw from themselves, from their problems and illnesses, to detach from the situation. This distance allows them to take a free attitude towards the situation. Humour and heroism refer to the ability of self-detachment.²² What equips one with these faculties is conscience and will to meaning. Conscience, which Frankl calls the organ of meaning, empowers a person to seize the meaning in a particular, given, unique situation.²³ Conscience tells a human being what to do or what not to do²⁴ – what the situation requires of a person. But if one does not know how to decide until the last moment, if one does not know whether one's conscience is mistaken, one must take the risk of making a decision knowing that one may be incorrect.²⁵ To search for meaning, a human being is endowed not only with a conscience, but also with a will for meaning: "Man is essentially penetrated by the will to meaning,"²⁶ that is, the desire for one's existence to have meaning.²⁷ The will to meaning is rooted in human beings, and Frankl uses this term to describe the striving "for the best possible fulfilment life."²⁸ The will to meaning leads a human being to find and fulfil meaning and, at the same time, to encounter the

19 Ibid., 22–23.

20 Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen*, 19.

21 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 5.

22 Ibid., *The Will to Meaning*, 4.

23 Ibid., 6.

24 Ibid., 6.

25 Frankl and Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 57–58.

26 Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen*, 14.

27 Ibid., 146.

28 Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben*, 70.

other – the “you” – to love them. The will to meaning is thus understood by logotherapy as a basic motivational theory.²⁹

3. Person

Frankl summarizes what is specifically human in a human being under the term *person*, characterized in his lecture “Ten Theses About the Person.”³⁰ In the way Frankl, as a psychiatrist and neurologist, describes the person, regardless of their philosophical and theological backgrounds, he maintains a dialogue primarily with the psychology of his time.

1. The person as an individuum is indivisible; they are whole; they are unity. Frankl refers to this unity in relation to psychiatric illness, describing human illness as splitting the personality, as in the case of schizophrenia. A person remains whole despite any illness.
2. “The person is not only in-dividuum but also in-summabile; that is to say, it is not only indivisible, but also not fusible, because it is not only unity but also wholeness. As such, it is also impossible that the person completely dissolves in higher entities: in the crowd, in the class, in the race: All these ‘units’ or ‘wholes’ that can be posited above the person are not personal entities, but at most pseudo-personal.”³¹
3. They are an absolute novelty – they are a personal spirit, a spiritual existence; they are non-transferable. They cannot be reproduced.
4. They are spiritual and, as such, cannot become ill at all. In relation to the psychophysical organism, the person is both carried by it and carrying it. The person is endowed with dignity regardless of social or vital utility. Existence establishes human beings as responsible and free, open to the future. The person is meaning-oriented, striving for values.
5. A person is existential; this characterizes them as an optional being. A person is always deciding what they will be in the next moment. Existence establishes human beings as responsible and free.
6. The person belongs to the sphere of the self, as opposed to the sphere of the id. “I” cannot be derived from “id.” A person is unconscious of the

²⁹ For more on this, see Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 20–27, and 17–31.

³⁰ Viktor E. Frankl, “Ten Theses about the Person,” *Victor Frankl Institut*, <https://viktorfrankl.org/texts.html> (accessed 31. 7. 2023).

³¹ *Ibid.*

source of their spirituality. It is therefore important to distinguish between the instinctively unconscious, as considered in psychoanalysis, and the spiritually unconscious. In the realm of the spiritually unconscious, Frankl includes unconscious faith.

7. The person is not only unity and wholeness, but also constitutes this unity and wholeness in three layers of being (the physical, the psychological and the spiritual).
8. The person is dynamic. As a spiritual being, they can distance themselves from themselves as a psychophysical organism. This distancing from oneself defines and manifests the spiritual person as such.
9. This capacity for detachment distinguishes human beings from animals. For the animal, human reasoning and its relation to the environment as a world of meaning and values is inaccessible. By analogy, a human being can reason about the super-world, but intellectual knowledge of its meaning remains inaccessible to them.³²
10. The person can attain self-understanding through transcendence by hearing its call in their conscience.

Sokol, we saw, defined hope as an attitude related to expectations of the future. Frankl's conception of human beings as not only psychophysical but also spiritual, and thus open and relating to the future, sets the conditions for considering such a human attitude as hope. The inclusion of specifically human phenomena in the logotherapeutic practice is then a fundamental prerequisite for the possibility of therapeutic work in relation to hope. In logotherapeutic practice, the therapist seeks to appeal to the person and to help the client discover and draw on their spiritual strengths. Frankl says that the purpose of logotherapy is "to appeal to the person and to stir up the spite of the spirit."³³ As is clarified later, hope for Frankl is an attitude of *in spite of*, and logotherapy works with the person's attitudes, but explicitly in relation to meaning. What, then, does Frankl mean by meaning, and what relation does meaning have to hope?

³² See more in the section below on Meaning and Values.

³³ Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen*, 59.

4. Meaning and values

Frankl characterizes meaning as always objective. In defining meaning in relation to being in the world, he starts with a comparison between *subject* and *object*. The maintenance of the otherness of the object, according to Frankl, always necessarily requires a tension between subject and object. The same tension then distinguishes between “I am” and “I ought,” between reality and ideal, between being and meaning: “I should say that it is the meaning of meaning to set the pace of being.”³⁴ It is meaning that draws a human to self-transcendence through values.

In order to understand *meaning* in Frankl’s view, it is important to distinguish who asks the question for meaning. It is not a person who asks, but life that asks a person about the meaning of their existence, and a person answers this question. By their active response, they become responsible for their existence.³⁵ In their answer, a person is free, but at the same time responsible for ensuring that their answer is right, by finding the true meaning of a situation:³⁶ “It is the task of conscience to disclose to man the *unum necesse*, the one thing that is required.”³⁷

Some of Frankl’s formulations, such as this statement about the responsibility of finding the right meaning, the unveiling of the *unum necesse* of the situation and the objectivity of meaning, may raise questions about Frankl’s understanding of human determination. Here a brief digression is in order, even if it is not clear that there is a direct link to Frankl’s understanding of hope. At best, there is only an indirect relation, which could be expressed thus: “What would be the need for hope if a person’s fate is predetermined?” Although Frankl speaks of the objectivity of meaning and the responsibility to find the right meaning – the *unum necesse* of a situation – he also emphasizes the freedom of human decision-making, a spiritual freedom that is independent of any psychological-physical or social determinism. Frankl is very sharply opposed to determinism, which for him implies a narrowing of freedom.³⁸ Freedom manifests itself in free will and means not freedom

34 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 33.

35 Peter Tavel, “Základní myšlenky Viktora Frankla,” in Viktor E. Frankl, *Utrpení z nesmyslnosti života, psychoterapie pro dnešní dobu* (Prague: Portál, 2016), 120.

36 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 42.

37 Frankl, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning*, 41.

38 See more Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 128–31. Epub.

from conditions – these are given – but freedom to take a stand on all conditions.³⁹ It is this freedom to take a stand that enables one to realize attitudinal values⁴⁰ in relation to suffering. Frankl's response to the existentialist philosophical position, which sees the world as a work written in secret, speaks against the deterministic understanding of meaning. Rather, Frankl compares the world to a protocol to be dictated by a human being. With reference to Martin Buber and the human experience, he further emphasizes the dialogical nature of the life of spirit, that it is life that asks us questions to which we respond: "Truly, life is serious questions and answers."⁴¹

Through their life, a person creates being out of the nothingness of the future and makes it the past. They create it in the particular present moment as an event – as their experience and their decision. Making it the past, they bring it into eternity: "The strait of the present, this narrow place that transports from the nothingness of the future into the (eternal) being of the past, is then the liminal plane between nothingness and being, the liminal plane of eternity."⁴² Here again, Frankl establishes human responsibility for what a person brings by their free decision into this eternity of the past. Preserving of the realized events in the past can also be a source of hope. "All that is good and beautiful in the past is safely preserved in the past. On the other hand, so long as life remains, all guilt and all evil is still 'redeemable' (Scheler, *Wiedergeburt und Reue*)."⁴³

Meaning is the cause of human transcendence. Being does not remain static; it is dynamic and existential. Rather than accepting the determination given by the objectivity of meaning and the responsibility for the proper fulfilment of meaning, I understand the relationship between meaning and the human being motivated by the will to meaning as a dialogical becoming of oneself through the choice and realization of values, open to the future until the last moment of human life.

In Frankl's work, one can distinguish three types of meaning, which Batthyány of the Viktor Frankl Institute in Vienna categorizes as follows:

39 Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben*, 103.

40 On attitudinal values, see the section below "Meaning and Values."

41 Viktor E. Frankl, *Vůle ke smyslu, vybrané přednášky o logoterapii* (Brno: Cesta, 1994), 39.

42 *Ibid.*, 39.

43 Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 186.

the meaning of the whole world; the meaning of life; and meaning in life.⁴⁴ Knowledge of the meaning of the world or the “purpose” of world events, and therefore the ultimate meaning, lies outside the intellectual realm of human knowledge. This super-meaning is transcendent; it is more than comprehensible. To illustrate this point, Frankl uses the analogy of Pascal’s statement that a branch can never understand the meaning of the whole tree.⁴⁵ According to Frankl, this super-meaning can be grasped existentially with one’s whole being, that is, through faith.⁴⁶ That is why in the final lecture of the book *The Will to Meaning*, entitled “Dimensions of Meaning,” he discusses the relationship between logotherapy and religion, which reflects the dimensions of meaning, rather than the relationships among the different types of meaning.

Frankl relates the ultimate meaning to God, arguing that belief in the ultimate meaning must be preceded by trust in a supreme being – God. He thus expresses the relationship between the human and the divine world. The divine world is in a different dimension from the human world, which is why a person cannot grasp it intellectually. However, by grasping this dimensional difference, a person can understand why this dimension lies beyond their capacity for knowledge.⁴⁷

For a believer, this knowledge is not problematic because of their faith. For others, the question of the ultimate meaning – the purpose of world events – is problematic because the purpose lies outside of what has that purpose.⁴⁸ Although this meaning is intellectually inaccessible to humans, Frankl is convinced that a person is penetrated by a basic trust in ultimate meaning, without which they could not exist: “Even a person who commits suicide must be convinced that suicide makes sense.”⁴⁹ If they were not convinced of that meaning, they would not do anything. For Frankl, this confidence in meaning is transcendent, and therefore nothing can destroy it.⁵⁰

Logotherapy leaves the door to religion open precisely in the area of responsibility, in which one decides not only what one is responsible for,

44 Alexander Batthyany, “Logotherapie und Religion,” in Frankl and Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 40.

45 Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 71.

46 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 111.

47 *Ibid.*, 113.

48 Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 69.

49 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 116.

50 *Ibid.*, 116.

but also to whom one is responsible for one's actions.⁵¹ This meaning is inaccessible through logotherapy and is not its subject. A key observation, however, is made by Karel Balcar in his afterword to the Czech translation of Frankl's *The Will to Meaning*: The importance of the super-meaning for logotherapy / existential analysis is that "everything depends on it".⁵² For Frankl, super-meaning is a necessary premise that gives meaning to human life and human suffering. In this sense, he also asks the rhetorical question, "[...] but must we not assume that the human world itself is overarched by a world that is similarly inaccessible to man, and that only the meaning of this world, its 'meta-meaning', could give meaning to his suffering?"⁵³

This dimensional difference between the human and divine worlds cannot be overcome by a person, but the ultimate meaning can be grasped through faith. This faith is mediated by trust in a supreme being. Logotherapy, being a form of therapy, does not work with this higher dimension of meaning, but presupposes it and builds its anthropology on it. For Frankl, as I discuss later, hope is an attitude of trust relating to the ultimate meaning, or the meaning of the world. This interconnectedness of dimensions, though not intellectually graspable from a lower-dimensional perspective, is crucial to understanding how logotherapeutic work can bring hope.

The next type of meaning is the meaning of life itself. Frankl claims that human life always has meaning: "Logotherapists venture to talk about life as something that always has meaning."⁵⁴ Drawing on his conception of the person, he defends the meaningfulness of human existence, human dignity and uniqueness of each human life and its meaning, even under conditions of suffering. The meaning of a particular life as such, however, in its totality, is invisible to humans. Frankl communicates this idea using a parable about film: "A film has a meaning as a whole, but we only learn that meaning when we see the individual pictures in their context. We only see the meaning of our lives when we are lying on our deathbeds. At best."⁵⁵ In contrast, elsewhere he says, "And he will not know it even on his deathbed."⁵⁶ Here he shows the connection of the meaning of life to a higher meaning. One

51 Ibid., 110.

52 Balcar, "O knize," 161.

53 Frankl, "Ten Theses about the Person," point 9.

54 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 127.

55 Frankl and Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 118.

56 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 45.

could only glimpse the meaning of one's life in its totality in the context of a higher meaning. At the same time, the fulfilment of the meaning of life is tied to the fulfilment of a particular meaning here and now: "And doesn't the final meaning, too, depend on whether or not the potential meaning of each single situation has been actualized to the best of the respective individual's knowledge and belief?"⁵⁷ Like the question of super-meaning, the question of the meaning of life is not the subject of logotherapy, although it is possible to address these issues in existential analysis if the client brings them up.

Logotherapy deals with the third type of meaning, meaning in life. This type of meaning is characterized by particularity. The uniqueness of each existence and the uniqueness of each moment gives a person the possibility of fulfilling that moment and thus realizing the meaning of their own existence. It is precisely this uniqueness of human life and the uniqueness of the moment that gives deep meaning to our existence and calls it to responsibility. It is at this point of the encounter of human existence with the moment of reality that humans grasp the possibility of meaning. To perceive meaning is to recognize it as a possibility against the background of reality, when this possibility "is always unique, unrepeatable and passing."⁵⁸ This transience refers to this possibility only at this given moment. The possibility of meaning, if grasped and realized, is fulfilled once and for all. What has been realized has become past and is saved; it is conserved, stored in the past, and can no longer be damaged or changed by transience. According to Frankl, "The past is the safest mode of being,"⁵⁹ and "only unrealized possibilities pass away."⁶⁰ Just like meaning in relation to being in general, this unique, particular meaning is not a purely subjective meaning, but a meaning that humans themselves give to a situation. Subjectivism for Frankl implies a rejection of the existence of meaning "in itself," which in effect entails a denial of meaning itself:

This is what we have to struggle with. The moment there is no objectivity, the moment we forget that the world contains possibilities of meaning and values waiting to be realized in the time period we call our life, all the

57 Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, 141.

58 Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben*, 28.

59 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 91.

60 Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 134.

binding force of the possibilities of meaning and values disappears. Why should I realize them? After all, it is nothing but my own projection.⁶¹

Altogether, meaning in life can be characterized by three of Frankl's statements:

1. "Meaning cannot be given; meaning must be found."⁶² This means that everyone must responsibly find the meaning of a particular situation for themselves. No one can tell them what that meaning is.
2. "Meaning must be found, but it cannot be created."⁶³ With this statement, Frankl distinguishes between subjective and objective meaning. True meaning, that is, objective meaning, lies in the tasks of the world and is not identical with the subjective experience of meaning.
3. "But not only do we have to find meaning, we can find it."⁶⁴ This statement refers to the human endowment for finding meaning, which is conscience and the will to meaning.

Logotherapy works with meaning precisely in this sense of the unique, concrete meaning of a particular person in a particular situation. It helps the person discern and fulfil meaning in situations of loss of orientation to meaning. A person fulfils meaning by actualizing values, that is, through action, activity, experiencing and choosing an attitude.

In distinguishing three directions of fulfilling meaning, Frankl identifies three chief groups of values: creative, experiential, attitudinal. Creative values include the sphere of human creation, which, in the broadest sense of the word, is the realization of a work: "what [a human being] gives to the world." Experiential values include the realms of nature, art, love, beauty and goodness: "what [a human being] takes from the world." Meaning can be fulfilled even in the unchangeable conditions of human life, when humans cannot realize values in the first two directions, in a situation of suffering. Then, in spite of suffering, they fulfil meaning by taking a stance towards the suffering and therefore realizing their attitudinal values. For Frankl, the

61 Frankl and Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 53.

62 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 91.

63 Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben*, 28.

64 *Ibid.*, 29.

fact that even in these circumstances life has meaning is an argument for the meaningfulness of human life itself.⁶⁵

Earlier I presented a division of meaning into three types. Based on the descriptions of these different types of meaning, it can be seen that they are not three mutually independent categories. What are the relationships among the different types of meaning? For Frankl, meaning is one, although in his lectures he distinguishes the three types of meaning in order to clearly specify the field of the logotherapeutic approach. In "Dimensions of Meaning," Frankl does not explicitly address the dimensions of meaning, but he does address the question of religion in relation to logotherapy.⁶⁶ He makes a clear distinction between the two fields. As with a human person, he uses a dimensional analogy and points to the dimensional difference between the human and the divine world, that is, the dimensional difference between the meaning of the here and now and the higher meaning. However, this dimensional difference does not imply separateness or difference. If one views reality only from a two-dimensional perspective, one cannot understand the three-dimensional perspective. At the end of this lecture, reflecting on human suffering and in the context of his own experience, he asks, "What kind of meaning might depend on whether they print my manuscript?" And he answers: "I wouldn't care about that kind of meaning. If there is a meaning, it is unconditional, and neither suffering nor death can disturb it in any way."⁶⁷

In relation to patients, he then argues that what they need is "unconditional belief in unconditional meaning."⁶⁸ Meaning in the here and now is relative and subjective only insofar as it is tied to a particular individual and a particular situation. The connection to a higher dimension of meaning is shown not only by this "unconditional meaning," but also by Frankl's claim that a person is responsible for finding the right meaning. Further, the belief that life is always meaningful despite the suffering is based on a link to ultimate meaning. The possibility of finding proper meaning in situations of suffering and then taking a stance towards that suffering, even though the meaning of the suffering is only glimpsable from the perspective of a higher meaning, confirms this link. It turns out that there is only one meaning,

65 Cf. Frank, *The Will to Meaning*, 48–49.

66 See above.

67 Frank, *The Will to Meaning*, 119.

68 *Ibid.*, 120.

even though logotherapy involves working with meaning in certain clearly defined conditions.

Logotherapy deals with a particular person's meaning in the here and now – with the meaning that appears in a unique way to a particular person against the background of reality in the possibility of realization of values, in the unique way of their own life. This meaning remains, at the same time, an objective one. It is this objectivity of meaning which remains outside of human beings that I find hopeful. The human being grasps the particular meaning of a situation in their own unique way, thus moving out of themselves and relating to the future in the confidence of the fulfilment of the meaning of the situation and, consequently, of their life. The objective meaning draws a person out of their shell and towards the world and others – and into the common work of fulfilling the meaning of the world. It thus presupposes the hope that this meaning of the world, or ultimate meaning, exists.

In relation to Sokol's definition, I understand this concrete realization of meaning as an objectified hope in the sense of achieving a specific thing or accomplishing a task. However, at the same time, for Frankl, meaning is neither a goal nor a task.⁶⁹ It does not consist in a thing, task or goal, but is determined by the value that one realizes through reaching this goal, a value that does not lie in human beings, but in the world that offers it in the possibility of fulfilling its meaning. Thus, in the realization of values, the subjective meaning, that is, the responsibly grasped meaning, and the objective meaning, offered by the world in values, encounter each other.

5. Hope

Most of Frankl's texts are lectures aimed at introducing logotherapy; the significance of meaning is discussed and placed in a practical context. However, Frankl says very little explicitly about hope, though his books are often described as hopeful or hope-bearing. Christoph Schönborn, the Archbishop of Vienna, praises Frankl's book *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* thus: "With this book, Viktor Frankl will give millions of people a message of hope and spiritual and psychological guidance."⁷⁰ In a letter to Frankl, prisoners in a maximum-security prison wrote after reading his books, "People who

⁶⁹ Frankl and Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 74.

⁷⁰ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* (New York: Basic Book, 2000), 71. I quote from this edition of the book only here.

were helpless and without hope suddenly see a new meaning in their lives. [...] It's before Christmas, but logotherapy means Easter for us. [...] May we have a beautiful new day."⁷¹

How does Frankl understand hope? In Frankl's dialogue with the Jewish theologian Pinchas Lapid, he characterizes what he says about hope as unprepared and improvised, commenting:

Hope cannot be commanded, but hope must be present from some higher dimension. [...] Hope is only true hope when the dying know that they are going to die, and therefore, know it while still alive. And yet they don't give up their faith that everything will somehow be all right or will be put right or will be put right by so and so, by this or that. In that sense, they still hope. Every true hope is in spite of and never by some privileged hope.⁷²

Frankl's notion of hope appears as an open attitude of trust in the future, even at the ultimate point of human life, at the moment of death. Hope is given from a higher dimension, that is, it presupposes it. In relation to Sokol's definition, Frankl's understanding corresponds to an attitude of trust in the meaning of life and the meaning of the whole world.

A comparison of Frankl's statements on meaning and hope offers many similarities. How they overlap can be seen in the following table 1.

Tab. 1: Similarities of meaning and hope according to Viktor Frankl

Meaning	Hope
Meaning cannot be given, meaning must be found.	Hope cannot be commanded.
Meaning must be found, but it cannot be created.	Hope must have a reason. ⁷³
We can find it – humans are equipped with the will to meaning and the conscience.	A person is penetrated by a basic trust in ultimate meaning.
Meaning is in spite of suffering	True hope is in spite of everything.
There is a higher dimension of the meaning – super-meaning	Hope must be present from some higher dimension

⁷¹ Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben*, 84.
⁷² Frankl and Lapid, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 89.
⁷³ Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben*, 96.

As can be seen, neither meaning nor hope can be provided from the outside; each person must relate to meaning and hope by themselves and find the reason for them. To discern and find both meaning and hope, a person is equipped, in relation to meaning, with a conscience and a will to meaning and, in relation to hope, with a basic trust in the ultimate meaning. One finds meaning and hope “in spite of” the conditions in which one lives. Both meaning and hope are tied to a higher dimension.

The similarity between hope and meaning was also noted by Pinchas Lapide who, in his dialogue with Frankl, called meaning “the twin of hope.” He saw this twin similarity primarily in relation to the future. Hope enables one to see reality not only in the here and now, but also in its fulfilment in the future. Similarly, meaning, through requiring the act of fulfilment, transcends the present and points towards the future, to what ought to be.⁷⁴ Lapide’s view expands understanding of the relationship between hope and meaning.

Although Frankl does not explicitly address hope in his lectures, he often deals with the loss of hope – despair – which I understand as the experience of hopelessness. Therefore, I now turn to the relationship between meaning and hope in this negative characterization. Frankl characterizes despair as a manifestation of hopelessness as a kind of deification, as the absolutization of a single value. One gives absolute value to something that has only a conditional, relative value. Frankl shows this in the case of a woman, a nurse, who fell ill with a terminal illness and could no longer perform her job. She fell into despair not because of her illness, but because of her inability to work; her life thus lost its meaning for her. Frankl points out that such an approach understands human life as meaningful only if one is able to work for so many hours, but it neglects the possibility of another grasp of the meaning of a particular life situation. For this woman, the value of being able to work was a built-in value, and this attitude did not allow her to see other values in her life.⁷⁵

It is precisely logotherapy that enables a person to turn from despair to meaning through guiding the responsibility for the realization of existence even in the unchangeable conditions of suffering. It does so through its phenomenological accompaniment to the discovery of values in life and the support of choosing an attitude. This grasp of meaning then somehow

⁷⁴ Frankl and Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 120.

⁷⁵ Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen*, 178–79.

includes hope. It includes hope in the sense of a change of attitude from *what will no longer be* to *what may yet be*, that is, to the future. Logotherapy, as has already been said, brings not religious hope, but spiritual hope – that whatever the conditions be, one can freely and responsibly adopt an attitude towards a situation. In his lectures, Frankl liked to quote Nietzsche: “He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*.”⁷⁶

The relation between the finding of meaning and despair is also suggested by a diagram,⁷⁷ whose purpose is to illustrate the dimensional difference between the success – failure axis and the despair – fulfilment of meaning axis, as well as to demonstrate this dimensional difference through research. The graph shows persons in the fields defined by the axes described above, with the horizontal denoting failure – success and the vertical capturing despair – meaning. It shows that some people who can be considered successful regarding their status in life, having money, a job, a family and apparently no reason for dissatisfaction, yet fall on the despair side of the vertical axis. On the other side, this graph shows people who, despite “failure in life,” show a feeling of fulfilment of meaning. Although this research cannot, as Lukas⁷⁸ argues, demonstrate a negative correlation of the tendency to despair with an orientation towards meaning, it nevertheless shows that it is not possible to reduce the experience of meaning to the experience of success. It also confirms Frankl’s claim that one can find and fulfil meaning even in desperate conditions, precisely by choosing the attitude one adopts.⁷⁹

The opposing relationship between fulfilment of meaning and hopelessness is expressed in the point of the following story, where Frankl illustrates how meaning can be found in suffering: “At the same moment, he could see a meaning in his suffering, the meaning of a sacrifice. There was still suffering, but no longer despair. Because despair is suffering without meaning.”⁸⁰ This quotation illustrates that while the act of finding meaning may not bring an end to suffering, it averts despair. Thus, it is hopeful. Evidence of the consequences of finding meaning as hopeful also exists in some of the stories from Frankl’s lectures, such as the following excerpt from a prisoner’s letter to Frankl:

76 Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 104.

77 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 53.

78 Elisabeth S. Lukasová, “K validizaci logoterapie,” in Frankl, *Vůle ke smyslu*, 195.

79 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 52–53.

80 Frankl, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning*, 130.

I shall show them an exact circumstance from our prison where, from the depths of despair and futility a man was able to mold for himself a meaningful and significant life-experience. They, also, would not believe that a man under these circumstances could possibly undergo a transmutation which would turn despair into a triumph. I shall attempt to show them not only is it a possibility, it is a necessity.⁸¹

One may ask why Frankl hardly talks about hope. I suggest that it is because of the practical focus of his lectures, which can be described in two points. First, hope, in the sense of “true hope,” was for Frankl a concept that belonged more to the realm of the meaning of life and the meaning of the world, a realm that logotherapy does not address, although Frankl considered trust in the last sense to be a basic human attribute and spoke of it in the context of his anthropology. It can be asked if this trust is, ultimately, identical with hope. Second, despite consciously building on a philosophical view of human beings as doctors and as persons, Frankl was confronted with human suffering, often associated with the loss of hope. In such moments, people do not ask where their hope is, but rather ask what the meaning of their suffering is. Convinced that all suffering must have a meaning, Frankl, being a psychiatrist, seeks and finds a practical answer to this question. He answers with logotherapy, with the key concept of meaning in which, as I have shown, hope is unarticulated, but present.

6. Conclusion

The connection of meaning and hope stems, in my view, from the binding of the particular meaning of the individual person in a particular situation here and now to the meaning of their life, and hence to a higher meaning. This guarantees the objectivity of the “partial concrete meanings” of each person in their situation. Through this objectivity of meaning, the human being is drawn into a common work that is in process and, hence, open to the future. Humans, in their own unique way, participate in the “creation of the world.” The realization of these particular and, at the same time, objective values strengthens and empowers them and brings hope, that is, an attitude of trust in the future – in the possibility of the fulfilment of meaning. This attitude can be adopted even if one rejects or does not see the existence of the ultimate meaning. According to Frankl, although one does not per-

⁸¹ Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 54–55.

ceive the ultimate meaning, as a spiritual person who cannot fall ill, one is equipped not only with the will to meaning, as the basic human motivation, and conscience, as the organ of meaning, but also with the basic trust in the ultimate meaning, that is, the a priori hope that everything has a meaning in the end, even if one cannot always recognize it. This relationship is nicely expressed by Václav Havel: “Hope is not simply optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something has a meaning – no matter how it turns out.”⁸²

How then does one express the relationship between meaning and hope? I agree with Lapide that meaning is the twin of hope, or, to put it another way, that meaning and hope go hand in hand. The search for and fulfilment of meaning, turning one towards the future, appears to be hopeful, as evidenced by the stories from Frankl’s lectures. Logotherapeutic practice can bring hope because of its focus on activating the spiritual. It supports the search for and realization of meaning in the here and now, precisely because this meaning, though unique and specific to one’s situation, is ultimately tied to the higher meaning from which hope springs. I find this interconnectedness of meaning realized through the realization of values in Frankl: “There is certainly the possibility of imagining everything of value in such a way that it converges to one supreme value, to one ‘person of value’ (Scheler); so that perhaps all truth, conceived to the end, misses God; all beauty, conceived to the end, glimpses God; and every salutation, rightly understood, salutes God.”⁸³

The search and fulfilment of meaning here and now is also the search and fulfilment of human hope. This hope given to a human being cannot be destroyed, as the spiritual is bound to the objectivity of meaning, that is, to the ultimate meaning. Thus, to return to my original question as to whether hope can be brought through my counselling logotherapy work, this investigation in to the role of meaning and hope in Frankl would indicate that the answer is: “Yes, it can.”

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82 Václav Havel, *Dálkový výslech (rozhovor s Karlem Hviždálou)* (Prague: Melantrich, 1989), 156–57.

83 Viktor Frankl, *Zeit und Verantwortung* (Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1947), 43.