



CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF THE MEANING OF LIFE IN LOGOTHERAPY

CONSIDERAÇÕES SOBRE O CONCEITO DO SENTIDO DE VIDA EM LOGOTERAPIA

Sergio Luiz Julio dos Santos¹, Patricia Damiana da Silva Coelho², Clarissa de Araujo Davico³, Neide Araujo Chaves⁴, Cleia Zanatta⁵, Luís Antonio Monteiro Campos⁶

e351450

<https://doi.org/10.47820/recima21.v3i5.1450>

PUBLICADO: 05/2022

ABSTRACT

The article in question proposes to bring brief contributions to the concept of the meaning of life and analyze it in the context of its impacts on youth. The theme is centered on the studies of logotherapy, proposed by Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), a Viennese physician, psychiatrist, neurologist, and philosopher who conceived his theoretical proposal motivated by questions about life from when he was still a child and who advanced in this theme until his last days of life. The question that guided this work refers to the question: what is the meaning of life in Viktor Frankl's work? To this end, it was outlined as objectives to guide the text, present significant facts about the life of Viktor Frankl; analyze the concept of the meaning of life in the context of logotherapy and report the meaning of life with issues related to youth. As for the methodology, it consists of theoretical research based on a bibliographic review of scientific articles and books on the subject addressed.

KEYWORDS: Logotherapy. The meaning of life. Viktor Frankl

RESUMO

O artigo em questão propõe-se a trazer breves contribuições sobre o conceito do sentido da vida e analisá-lo no contexto de seus impactos na juventude. O tema centraliza-se nos estudos da logoterapia proposta por Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), médico, psiquiatra, neurologista e filósofo vienense que concebeu sua proposta teórica motivado por questionamentos acerca da vida desde quando era criança e que avançou neste tema até seus últimos dias de vida. A questão que norteou este trabalho refere-se à pergunta: o que é o sentido da vida na obra de Viktor Frankl? Para tal, traçou-se como objetivos para nortear o texto, apresentar fatos significativos da vida de Viktor Frankl; analisar o conceito do sentido da vida no contexto da logoterapia e relacionar o sentido da vida com questões relativas à juventude. Quanto à metodologia, consiste em uma pesquisa teórica pautada numa revisão bibliográfica em torno de artigos científicos e livros sobre a temática abordada.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: Logoterapia. Sentido de Vida. Viktor Frankl

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to make brief considerations about the concept of the meaning of life in the context of logotherapy studies. Logotherapy is a theory created by the psychiatrist, neurologist, and philosopher Viktor Emil Frankl, who was born in Vienna in 1905 and died in 1997 and who was interested in reflections on the theme of life. The theme has always been of interest to scholars in the field of Philosophy, Theology and became a scientific concept from Frankl's contributions to logotherapy, emphasizing that it also interests people's lives in the everyday context. Questioning

¹ Universidade Católica de Petrópolis

² Universidade Católica de Petrópolis

³ Universidade Católica de Petrópolis

⁴ Universidade Católica de Petrópolis

⁵ Universidade Católica de Petrópolis

⁶ Doutor em psicologia pela UFRJ, coordenador do mestrado em psicologia na universidade católica de Petrópolis, professor da PUC-Rio e da UNILASALLE



RECIMA21 - REVISTA CIENTÍFICA MULTIDISCIPLINAR ISSN 2675-6218

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF THE MEANING OF LIFE IN LOGOTHERAPY
Sergio Luiz Julio dos Santos, Patricia Damiana da Silva Coelho, Clarissa de Araujo Davico,
Neide Araujo Chaves, Cleia Zanatta, Luis Antonio Monteiro Campos

about the meaning of life has always been the target of motivation of the human being, in general, manifested through questions such as: who am I? why do I live? and where do I direct my life? what is the meaning of my life? among others and in this direction, Frankl theorized about it.

The study in Personality (CAMPOS, 2016) shows that humanist's and existentialists theories bring another dimension, the spiritual dimension.

In this article, the author's concern is to bring some considerations around this concept, to leave some contribution to the theme and associate it with other concepts in the scope of logotherapy, as well as, about the contextualization of the theme in the analysis of the meaning of life and contemporary youth.

The purpose of the authors is justified by the motivation to study the subject and share some analyses about it, with students and professionals in human sciences, philosophy, and theology.

Methodologically, this is one study based on the literature review around scientific articles and books on the theme addressed.

THE LOGOTHERAPY AND THE LIFE OF VIKTOR FRANKL

The concept of the meaning of life finds in Logotherapy is a scientific approach in the context of Psychology, where Viktor E. Frankl (1905-1997), is a great reference and pioneer in the theme because he writes and systematically questions the subject. Frankl worked in Vienna as a doctor, psychiatrist, and neurologist and acted as a psychotherapist concerned about the existential path of Viennese youth.

Questions about meaning, occur from an early age in Frankl's existential journey, and, according to Aquino (2013, p. 16): "at the age of four, when he became aware of death, the young Frankl was shocked by the question of the finitude of his own being", something very early for the age he presented.

The Frankl boy discovered at the age of three that growing up he would dedicate his life to the craft of medicine, making his father proud in that episode. He was not only interested in the practice, but also research and experiences. Since this time, he was not afraid of death, but he was concerned about the issue of the transience of life and whether this would take away the meaning of life, a subject that would be addressed years later when writing about logotherapy (FRANKL, 2010).

As a teenager, when he was still 13 years old, "his science teacher taught that life was just a process of oxidation and combustion; such a nihilistic conception caused Frankl to question the master: "What meaning does life have?" (FRANKL, 1989, p. 31 as quoted by AQUINO, 2013, p. 18).

Frankl was born on Czerningasse 6 street in Vienna, where he spent the early years of childhood accompanied by his parents, his brothers Walter, and Stella, and had to live with the reality of World War I. The young man had grown very close to his family, to the point of suffering from longing when he needed to spend the night in the hospitals where he worked (FRANKL, 2010).



RECIMA21 - REVISTA CIENTÍFICA MULTIDISCIPLINAR ISSN 2675-6218

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF THE MEANING OF LIFE IN LOGOTHERAPY
Sergio Luiz Julio dos Santos, Patricia Damiana da Silva Coelho, Clarissa de Araujo Davico,
Neide Araujo Chaves, Cleia Zanatta, Luis Antonio Monteiro Campos

In 1930, the already doctor Viktor Frankl, realizing that Europe was going through a moment of hopelessness thanks to recession and unemployment, offered himself to other therapists to help youth, which made zero the number of suicide attempts in Vienna. But it was only in 1938 that Frankl would use the word Logotherapy for the first time, in the article "The spiritual problem of psychotherapy", in the *scientific journal Zentralblatt für sychotherapies* (AQUINO, 2013).

When World War II broke out since the German army invaded Austria in 1937, Frankl was no longer able to work in his newly opened clinic and saw his personal life has a major impact because of the war: his wife, Tilly Grosser, whom he married in 1941, was forced to abort his five-month-old son because Jewish women could not have their children (AQUINO, 2013).

As World War II progressed, Frankl had to decide whether to go to the United States with his wife or stay in Vienna with his parents, chose the latter option, after being sure of his decision to find in his father's house a piece of marble that he had picked from the remains of the Vienna synagogue that contained a fourth part of the Commandment of the Torah laws: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be prolonged on earth which Yahweh thy God gives you" (AQUINO, 2013).

In September 1942, Frankl was led along with his parents to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, where he saw his father die in his arms sometime later. His mother later died in the gas chamber at Auschwitz, where his brother also died. His wife died in Theresienstadt, surviving only Frankl's sister, Frankl went through four concentration camps: Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, Kaufering, and Türkheim (AQUINO, 2013), but with the end of the war he resumed his life and rereported his experiences there lived, in his best-known book, *In Search of Meaning*.

By being in what he called, *experimentum crucis*, in the experience of the concentration camps, Frankl was able to observe that prisoners who had something to accomplish in their future outside of there, were more likely to survive the horror of the place, which constituted one of the premises of Logotherapy (FRANKL, 2016).

MEANING OF LIFE

The term "logos" means "meaning", so Logotherapy is psychotherapy centered on the sense and search of the person for this sense. Frankl believes that "life has a potential meaning under any circumstances, even the most miserable" (FRANKL, 2008, p. 10), as he was able to observe in the concentration camps, whether by imagining and talking to his wife or by contemplating art in an improvised theater in a shed, with the use of humor or even thinking about his future when freedom arrived.

The meaning in life proposed by Frankl is unique and specific to each moment, being different for each person and can be fulfilled only by him. The author also draws attention to the difference in the meaning of life in general, in a generic way, and the specific meaning of life before each moment, every situation, where life calls man to do a task, to carry out his specific vocation or mission at that moment (FRANKL, 2008).



RECIMA21 - REVISTA CIENTÍFICA MULTIDISCIPLINAR ISSN 2675-6218

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF THE MEANING OF LIFE IN LOGOTHERAPY
Sergio Luiz Julio dos Santos, Patricia Damiana da Silva Coelho, Clarissa de Araujo Davico,
Neide Araujo Chaves, Cleia Zanatta, Luis Antonio Monteiro Campos

For logotherapy, it is not a question of injecting meaning into situations, but of extracting their meaning, finding it in the world. With this, it is worth mentioning that the psychologist cannot give meaning to the life of another person or indicate what the meaning of life of his patient would be, and it is up to him to play the role of an ophthalmologist, that is, to expand the field of vision of his patient so that he can expand his field of vision and perceive the potential meanings that he can perform (FRANKL, 2008).

As for the meaning of life, Frankl believes that man always points to some cause beyond himself or someone other than him and that only so can be done, calling this man's inclination self-transcendence (FRANKL, 2016).

About the transience of life, an inquiry that accompanied Frankl since childhood, he writes that death and suffering may seem to take away the meaning of life but responds to this by referring to the potentialities of meaning that are realized, they leave the transitory and stay in a safe place of the past, in the barn of each one's life, place, which is not lost on the achievements, which remain guarded. With this, it does not consider the Logotherapy pessimistic when thinking about the subject but activist, because it always characterizes life as unpredictable and that the human being needs to decide, through his freedom and responsibility, what is his monument, what are the potentialities that will be realized and exist, and which are those that will be condemned to non-existence (FRANKL, 2008).

It is perceived that the work of Viktor Emil Frankl results in a valuable contribution to the understanding of the human being. "The desire of the human being for a life, as much as possible, endorsed with meaning" (FRANKL, 2008, p. 125), is one of the essential presuppositions of Franklin's thought.

Through logotherapy, the look and understanding of the human being are enlarged. Before this look was reduced to its biological dimension and psychosocial dimension, but from Frankl's contribution, the human being begins to be considered in its integrality, in its three-dimensionality, that is, as a being endowed with three dimensions: bio-psycho-noetic (FRANKL, 2016).

Because of this, according to Aquino (2013), "the human being could no longer be conceived only as an automaton being, reduced to psychological, sociological or somatic processes" (AQUINO, 2013, p. 43). Man, in the use of his freedom and responsibility, can decide and position himself in the face of existing constraints. Frankl, when asked if as a neurologist he did not confirm that human beings have their contingencies and conditionings in the biological and psychological dimension, stated that he was fully aware of these conditionings, but that he could see on many occasions the human being positioning himself in the face of the worst situations with courage or distancing himself from them, exclusively human capacity (FRANKL, 2016).

Aquino (2013, p. 45) points out that the noetic dimension "would be like an integrative nucleus of the human being". It is precisely the specific dimension of the human being that gives him the ability to differentiate himself from other animals, because, precisely in this dimension are human values,



RECIMA21 - REVISTA CIENTÍFICA MULTIDISCIPLINAR ISSN 2675-6218

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF THE MEANING OF LIFE IN LOGOTHERAPY
Sergio Luiz Julio dos Santos, Patricia Damiana da Silva Coelho, Clarissa de Araujo Davico,
Neide Araujo Chaves, Cleia Zanatta, Luis Antonio Monteiro Campos

freedom, responsibility, self-understanding, self-distancing, humor, self-transcendence, in short, everything that is proper to the human.

Frankl points out that man's last freedom is to choose the attitude he assumes in the face of the circumstances that life presents to him, and that freedom should always be thought out alongside the responsibility of man, who decides what he is, who he wants to be, about what he feels responsible for and for those who feel responsible. In his book, *In Search of Meaning*, he tells examples of prisoners who were worse than the German guards themselves in certain situations in the concentration camp. According to Frankl (2008, p. 112), "the human being is the being who always decides what he is. but also, that being who entered the gas chambers, upright, with a prayer on his lips."

Logotherapy is based on three pillars: freedom of will, the will of meaning, and the meaning of life. For logotherapy, "the search for meaning in a person's life is the main motivating force in the human being" (FRANKL, 2008, p. 124). And from this force, man can realize his existential path, through his free and responsible choices, being able in this search for meaning, to make his life meaningful and valuable.

According to Souto (2020), Frankl analyzes four dimensions that can help the person to find the meaning of life: (1) *The valorization of what is important to the person*, that is, what had meaning during life, from small to large events, because life experiences influence the way each one must deal with situations. (2) *Choices* - the individual is responsible for every choice he makes throughout his life, including in adverse situations. Frankl approaches suffering as a great opportunity for personal growth, which, however, depends on how one faces it. It can succumb to pain or draw lessons from the difficult situation. (3) *Responsibility* - for everything the person does, for choices and decisions. (4) *Immediate meaning* - to give meaning to the things that happen in daily life, both positive and negative experiences.

Based on these assumptions, Frankl (2008) proposes three paths of significant values for a life with meaning: 1. *creative value* - which consists of producing something meaningful, doing a good deed, which one can offer to the world; 2. *experiential value* - to experience through the values what the person receives from the world, which may be related to the experiences of affective exchanges or even interacting with the objects of the world, through nature or the arts. Meaning can be found in an experience independent of any action, and a single moment of intense experience can provide meaning for life; 3. *attitudinal value* - when the person goes through situations of inevitable suffering and turns personal tragedy into triumph, that is, seek lessons of personal growth in difficult times (FRANKL, 2008).

For the author, suffering is also part of life and if there is meaning in life, there is also meaning in suffering and death. When it is no longer possible for the human being to change a limited situation, the person is called by life to change himself, as in the case of a serious illness or the case of Frankl, in the concentration camp (FRANKL, 2008).



RECIMA21 - REVISTA CIENTÍFICA MULTIDISCIPLINAR ISSN 2675-6218

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF THE MEANING OF LIFE IN LOGOTHERAPY
Sergio Luiz Julio dos Santos, Patricia Damiana da Silva Coelho, Clarissa de Araujo Davico,
Neide Araujo Chaves, Cleia Zanatta, Luis Antonio Monteiro Campos

For Viktor E. Frankl, the loss of meaning for life could result in the so-called existential emptiness, which "is the experience of the radical absurdity of one's existence produced by loss of the horizon of values and meaning" (GUBERMAN; SOTO, 2006). This loss manifests itself mainly in a stage of boredom and can trigger symptoms such as anxiety, depression, lack of hope, and physical decline. In his work entitled, *Be of meaning* Frankl (2016) highlights the results of research conducted by the University of California, which "indicate that the existential vacuum is the predominant state in the new American generation, whose values differ significantly from those of the middle-aged generation or old age" (FRANKL, 2016, p. 13).

Frankl (2016) when asked about the possible causes of this sense of meaninglessness states that in modernity, man no longer has traditions, which previously helped him about what he should do, what paths to seek, but today this man is faced with a new context, where often seems no longer to know what you want. As a result, it ends up striving to want to do what others do and the result is conformism, the massification typical of today's society. Or else, he does what others won't, what is required of him - and then we have totalitarianism (FRANKL, 2016, p. 14-15).

However, as proposed by Frankl (2008), what man needs is to carry out his search for an objective that may be worthwhile, because, precisely in this search for meaning, during his existential journey, in the use of his freedom, through responsible choices, in the experience of values, dedicating himself to a specific cause and/or task, man can make his life meaningful and valuable.

YOUTH AND SENSE OF LIFE

Now, one notices the resumption of themes that seemed forgotten, put behind, but which, in the directions that the life of the planet has taken, reappear with great force. In the context of this resumption, there is a very strong criticism of the current youth about their alienation from themes of social relevance to their individualism, a youth that remains in a position of late adolescence. In other words, in the present day, it seems to be becoming increasingly common, still call the adolescent the young person between 18 and 25 years or more, who have already completed higher education, but who continues to live in the parents' house, being financially dependent on them, without the parents and young people themselves realize how much this dependence can hinder the future entry as a professional in the labor market. Taking their "little life", they remain oblivious to what is happening around them, to the environmental emergencies, to the relief that needs to be to the planet earth, and to the pressing needs of humanity itself. Universal values seem to have been replaced by personal values, in which the extrinsic motivation, that is, the one in which the ends will justify the means, whether ethical or not, weighs significantly.

The theme of youth presents a series of ambivalences: now youth is understood as power, now as a promise of change, as it was characterized in the 1950s and 1960s, now as a social problem, risk, and vulnerability, a conception recently announced in public policy programs for this



RECIMA21 - REVISTA CIENTÍFICA MULTIDISCIPLINAR ISSN 2675-6218

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF THE MEANING OF LIFE IN LOGOTHERAPY
Sergio Luiz Julio dos Santos, Patricia Damiana da Silva Coelho, Clarissa de Araujo Davico,
Neide Araujo Chaves, Cleia Zanatta, Luis Antonio Monteiro Campos

public. Youth is a moment experienced as confusing and little defined in the transition of roles and the lack of social emancipation.

Abramo (1997, 2005) points out that youth is marked by transitions between dependence and autonomy, and that the various processes of insertion include personal and social aspects such as sexuality, cultural and political participation, and insertion into work. These aspects manifest ways of being young and, in the course of history, as already mentioned, fluctuate from transformative potential to social risk and vulnerability.

Throughout history, it is worth mentioning how Zanatta (2015) points out that there are relevant contributions in the field of Sociology and Anthropology, and that they reveal from the context of certain cultures that this phase of life manifests itself in a differentiated way, especially considering the processes of socialization.

Concerning this aspect of the transforming potential that the young person possesses, it is worth considering as proposed by the logotherapy that, "at any time, the person needs to decide, for good or evil, what will be the monument of his existence" (FRANKL, 2008, p. 144) For this, youth needs to awaken consciousness to the path of values, be attentive to the field of possibilities that life offers, understand the importance of responsible choices and the experience of an authentic life because it will be through these achievements that youth can configure a walk with meaning. And in the face of the challenges of this phase of life, to believe that this human potential is always present, because as Lukas reminds us: "in each of us there is something else- there is the spark that renews everything" (LUKAS, 2002, p. 41).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The contributions of logotherapy to the analysis and reflections on the theme meaning of life expand the knowledge about the human being, the person, and their potential to live. To live is to give meaning to life, to put in life the motives that characterize the human being in each person, and therefore to make the person more human every day. In this sense, ethical values assume a definitive position to give meaning to life, according to the contributions of logotherapy.

Studying the theme of life in the context of logotherapy presupposes knowing the biographical trajectory of Viktor Frankl marked by coherence and authenticity in what he theorized because life in the concentration camp colored with greater intensity previous assumptions, which since childhood and throughout his youth, he already intended and investigated in his studies and personal reflections. Thus, studying the meaning of life from Frankl's contributions becomes enriched when one knows his life history and the context in which.

Another aspect addressed in the article concerns Frankl's concerns about the trajectory of youth about the meaning he attributes to life, because the author devoted part of his time, in addition to being a psychiatrist and neurologist, to youth care because he understands that this stage of life is



RECIMA21 - REVISTA CIENTÍFICA MULTIDISCIPLINAR ISSN 2675-6218

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF THE MEANING OF LIFE IN LOGOTHERAPY
Sergio Luiz Julio dos Santos, Patricia Damiana da Silva Coelho, Clarissa de Araujo Davico,
Neide Araujo Chaves, Cleia Zanatta, Luis Antonio Monteiro Campos

rich in meanings, but that they can also be lost, in terms of achievement if there are no values that function as compasses guiding safe paths and providing hope in a personal future to be followed.

REFERENCES

AQUINO, T. A. A. **Logotherapy and existential analysis: an introduction to Viktor Frankl's thought**. São Paulo: Paulus, 2013.

CAMPOS, L. A. M. **Psicologia da Personalidade**. Rio de Janeiro: SESES, 2016.

FRANKL, V. E. **Be of meaning**. São Paulo: Quadrante, 2016.

FRANKL, V. E. **In search of meaning: a psychologist in the concentration camp**. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2008.

FRANKL, V. E. **The will of meaning**. São Paulo: Paulus, 2011.

FRANKL, V. E. **What's not written in my books**. São Paulo: É Realizações, 2010.

GUBERMAN, M.; SOTO, E. P. **Dictionary of Logotherapy**. Lisbon: Paulus, 2006.

LUKAS, E. **Spiritual Psychology-sources of a life full of meaning**. São Paulo: Paulus, 2002.

SOUTO, F. Q. Logotherapy and youth: the search for the meaning of life. **Cadernos de fé e Culture**, v. 5, p. 1-10, 2020.

ZANATTA, C.C. G. D. **Adolescence and meaning of life**. Curitiba: CRV, 2015.