

# Man's Search for Meaning

Viktor Frankl

(A Touchstone Book. Third Edition: 1959, 1962, 1984)

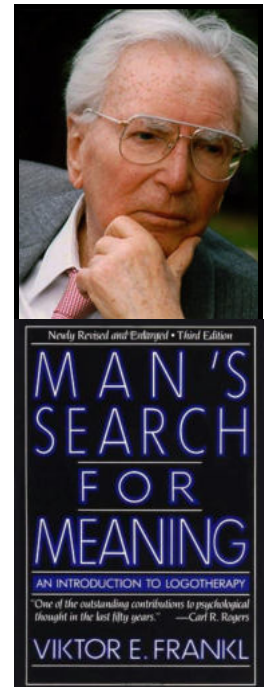
*“He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how.”*

– Friedrich Nietzsche

## Introduction

### Viktor Frankl (1905-97).

- Austrian neurologist, psychiatrist, philosopher, author, and Holocaust survivor.
- Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Vienna Medical School.
- The founder of logotherapy.
  - ▶ Mankind's primary motivational force is “the will to meaning” in life.
  - ▶ Fulfillment in life comes through dedication to a cause outside of, and greater than, oneself.
  - ▶ VF: “I admonish my students: ‘Don't aim at success – the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must *ensure*, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself.” [12]
  - ▶ VF: “One must have a reason to ‘be happy’.” [140]



### Spiritual Orientation.

- An existentialist who believed we must discover our meaning and purpose in life through our own intuitive senses and life experiences.
- Does mankind have a sin problem?
- Frankl was neither an agnostic nor a secular humanist.
- A deist or a theist?

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- ▶ Frankl: The fact that organized religions assert that certain doctrinal (and moral) principles as codified in specific creeds are absolutely true is “a distortion of any sound concept of deity.” [150]

[NOTE: This denies the reality – or even the possibility – of direct divine revelation as claimed in the Bible.]

- Frankl: Each individual must construct a religion that is unique and meaningful to oneself.
  - ▶ VF: “Certainly the trend is away from religion conceived in such a strictly denominational sense. Yet this is not to imply that, eventually, there will be a universal religion. On the contrary, if religion is to survive, it will have to be profoundly personalized.” [19]

Q: In lieu of divine revelation, how would we know that these spiritual inclinations are truly God-given and not merely expressions of “wish-fulfillment”?

- Frankl: It is unnecessary to believe in God in order to have a relationship with him.
  - ▶ VF: “God is the partner of our most intimate soliloquies.... [W]henver you are talking to yourself in utmost sincerity and... solitude – he to whom you are addressing yourself may justifiably be called God.... [S]uch a definition circumvents the bifurcation between atheistic and theistic *Weltanschauung* [worldviews].... The differences between them emerges only later on, when the irreligious person insists that his soliloquies are just that, monologues with himself, and the religious person interprets his as real dialogues with someone other than himself.... I think that what here should count first and more than anything else is the ‘utmost sincerity’ and honesty. And I am sure that if God really exists he certainly is not going to argue with the irreligious persons because they mistake him for your own selves and therefore misname him.” [151]

[NOTE: Sincerity is necessary, but it is insufficient. The question is: Do our subjective feelings and beliefs correlate to reality?

Hebrews 11:6 – “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”]

- ▶ VF: “In a book of mine, *The Unconscious God*, I [conclude] that a religious sense is existent and present in each and every person, albeit buried, not to say repressed, in the unconscious.” [151]

[NOTE: Every individual is made in the image of God with a sense of God-consciousness (ref. Romans 1-2). However, this intimation, along with moral consciousness, is often suppressed and violated by mankind due to our sin nature.]

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