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ARTICLE

Meaning, will to meaning, and Frankl's existential psychiatry

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ABSTRACT
Recent decades have witnessed a growing interest in the topic of a meaningful life among philosophers, psychologists, and the general public. Yet despite this interest, the thinker who is perhaps most closely associated with meaning and mental health, the Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, has been largely overlooked by academic researchers. This article offers some redress to this situation by exploring the status of his central idea, the Will to Meaning, by locating it within contemporary philosophical discussions of Meaning in Life, and examining the coherence of the difference elements of Frankl's published works. A combination of biographical, historical and philosophical analysis, including reference to the thinkers who helped his ideas, such as Kierkegaard and Scheler, provides a constructively critical account of Frankl's existential theory of meaning. It is suggested that Frankl's theory, with amendments, provides a useful contribution to contemporary discussions in the field.

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Introduction

Viktor Emil Frankl, a young Jewish psychiatrist in Vienna, was arrested in September 1942, and spent the rest of the Second World War interned in concentration camps. As "Prisoner 119,104", he lost contact with his wife and family, and also the manuscript on the philosophy of psychiatry called "Ärztliche Seelsorge" ("Medical-Spiritual Care"), which was taken from him. Frankl began reconstructing this document in the war's final months, first in his mind, then on stolen scraps of paper. When his camp was liberated in 1945, he learned that all his family members, apart from his sister, had died. He returned to Vienna and completed his book, shortly followed by a second book that was part-prison camp memoir and part-summary of the principles of his developed approach to mental health,

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which he called “Logotherapy” (“healing through meaning”). This book became “Man’s Search for Meaning”, his best-known work (Frankl, 1963), rated by the Library of Congress as one of the “ten most influential books in America” (New York Times, 20 November 1991).

Frankl died in Frankl, 1997, aged 92, finding a new life in the United States, becoming a central figure in the emergent Existential Analysis movement. However, the years he spent imprisoned by the Nazis remained the focal point of both his life and work: “Life in a concentration camp tore open the human soul and exposed its depths” (Frankl, 1963, p. 100). Specifically, Frankl observed how those, even the old and frail, who were able to transcend their immediate circumstances were more likely to survive than those who saw their situation as hopeless. This corroborated his pre-war psychotherapeutic theories about the importance of meaning and the possibility of self–transcendence in even the extreme situations.

This article is concerned with an analysis of Frankl’s ideas, and especially his “Will to Meaning”, “perhaps [his] most important contribution” (Wong, 2014, p. 155). It begins by discussing some useful conceptual distinctions, before introducing Frankl’s central ideas through a loosely biographical narrative which seeks to demonstrate his evolving theories. This sets the scene for a discussion of the Will to Meaning. The article concludes with some thoughts about the value of Frankl’s theory for contemporary discussions of meaning and mental health.

Some conceptual distinctions

Concepts and definitions

The topic of a meaningful life in philosophy and psychology has had something of a resurgence of academic interest, after an extended period of relative neglect. Indeed, the relatively paucity of serious work in the field’s past has become something of a motif in recent writing (e.g., Wolf, 2010). Adorno (1974) blamed this predicament on philosophers’ retreat into methodological minutiae and away from robust doctrines about the good life. For the psychologists, the concept of meaning often seemed too value-laden to be addressed scientifically (Park & Peterson, 2009). Scholars’ avoidance of this issue may be partly attributable to psychology’s struggles to attain scientific respectability, and the concomitant emphasis on the measurement and the measurable, but it has also suffered from long-running conceptual ambiguities that continue to this day.

There is a probably apocryphal story of the British philosopher Bertrand Russell taking a taxi journey in London. When the cabbie realized who he was driving, he turned to the back seat and asked “Bertie, what’s the point of it all? What is the meaning of life?” He turned back to the road with crushing

disappointment when Russell admitted, "I really don't know!" "The Meaning of Life" is one of the "big questions", and many writers on the subject have concluded that its pursuit inevitably leads down a path ending with God (Cottingham, 2003). The theist Frankl (1963) dismissed this as "a naïve query" (: 39), and beyond intellectual efforts. Meaning in Life, on the other hand, is a more modest concept, which I equate with the pursuit and achievement of a meaningful life (Wolf, 2010); a fully satisfying life. It is this conception that has dominated recent debates, and which is the focus on this article.

Unfortunately, neither of the two most-cited philosophers currently writing about meaning in life offer formal definitions. The nearest Wolf (2010) comes to a definition is tautologous: "would make the person's life meaningful" (p.123). Others have suggested a list of conditions, such as purposiveness, transcendence, aptness of emotions, and narrative properties (Metz, 2013). Definitions have been more forthcoming in psychology, as would be expected where the concept is used as the basis of empirical testing. Here, the challenge is diversity, with definitions included coherence in one's life, the pursuit of important goals the development of a coherent life narrative, and the ontological significance of life from the point of view of the experiencing individual (Park & Peterson, 2009).

Theories of meaning

Much like discussions of well-being (Fletcher, 2016), it has become commonplace to categorize theories of meaning in life as either "subjectivist" or "objectivist". Generally speaking, subjectivist theories rely on mental states, while objectivist accounts maintain value is determined independently of such states. A third option, "hybrid theories", includes both subjective and objective elements.

Subjectivist accounts

The best-known subjectivist account of meaning in life comes from Taylor (1967). His approach was to "bring to our minds a clear image of meaningless existence" (p.167), and then consider what would need to be changed about this existence in order to make it not meaningless. The myth of Sisyphus offers a "perfect image of meaninglessness": condemned to roll a stone to the top of a hill, then to begin again after it rolls back down. The solution to this miserable predicament, Taylor (1967) claimed, is to implant in Sisyphus an impulse to roll stones: "Sisyphus" . . . life is now filled with mission and meaning . . . " (p.171). So, "the meaning of life is from within us, it is not bestowed from without" (p.142).

Frankfurt's (1988) account was different because he began from the premise that caring about things (activities, persons) other than ourselves makes the difference to our ability to live fulfilling lives. The act of caring about something matters more than the object of caring. He offered two, more circumscribed arguments for subjectivism. One is related to authenticity: if an agent's life is significant insofar as she is true to herself, then there are reasons to believe that meaning is a function of desire-fulfillment. The second argument began with the idea that meaning comes from becoming absorbed in an activity or experience: engrossing tasks seem central to meaning, so a subjective element seems necessary.

There is an intuitive appeal to subjectivism. Cottingham (2003) described meaningfulness as a hermeneutic concept, indicating the importance of understanding something of its import to the agent, herself. However, it is easy to find counterexamples: making handwritten copies of War and Peace (Wolf, 2010); lining up balls of torn newspaper in neat rows (Cottingham, 2003). These sorts of activities are no less pointless for being subjectively endorsed. As Wiggins (1988) pointed out, Taylor's portrait of Sisyphus' stone-rolling endeavors following the introduction of the gods' odd impulse bears a striking resemblance to a "fanatic". Whatever role might be attributed to personal experience, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that an adequate account of meaning in life requires some sort of evaluative condition, which is where the objectivists enter the discussion.

Objectivist accounts

Objectivist accounts of meaning currently dominate among philosophers working in the field. They typically hold that lives are meaningful if, and only if, there is some good that is valuable, irrespective of desires. Smuts (2013) maintained that a life is meaningful as long as an agent is causally responsible for goodness. Importantly, it is not necessary for an agent to understand life as meaningful for it to be so. A different statement came from Bramble: "1) one's life is meaningful at time t just in case one's surviving at t would be good in some way (either subjectively or objectively); and (2) one's life was meaningful considered as a whole just in case the world was (or will be) made better in some way for one's having existed" (Bramble, 2015, p. 447). Supporters of objective accounts refer to paradigm cases of meaningful lives, such as Gandhi or Mother Teresa. Their lives can be judged as meaningful through their contribution, irrespective of their intentions toward them.

The appeal of objective theories is their insistence on some worthwhile end. However, by removing the requirement on some sort of personal engagement, they also depart from everyday use and experience. No matter how worthy the contribution, the absence of an agent's decisions and motivations stretch the concept of meaningfulness beyond typical

understandings. At a minimum, an agent who consciously strives to achieve certain things is more engaged in meaningful activity than someone who inadvertently promotes the same amount of value. The root problem with these theories is a conflation of meaning and its instrumental or constitutive value. By reducing the role of an agent to a mere means to an end, they present meaning as something that very few people would find desirable.

Hybrid accounts

Wolf's "fitting fulfillment view" is the best-known hybrid theory: "A meaningful life is one in which a) the subject finds fulfilling, and b) contributes to or connects positively with something the value of which has its source outside the subject" (Wolf, 2010, p. 20). So, Wolf's theory is that life is made meaningful through active (subjective) engagement in projects of (objective) worth, or when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness. Wolf's first condition captured what is appealing about the purely subjective view, namely that intentional engagement is necessary for living a meaningful life. Her second condition treats meaning as a dimension of the good or value, offering people reasons to act. She interpreted this as a need to contribute to something of objective (i.e., super-personal) value. So, for Wolf, both subjective engagement and objective worth are necessary, but neither is sufficient.

This approach seeks to address the difficulties inherent in the others, but has its challenges, too. Wolf (2010) claimed that "a person's life can be meaningful only if she cares fairly deeply about some thing or things, only if she is gripped, excited, interested, engaged, or . loves something" (p.10). But surely this sets the bar too high as "the pursuit of one's agential values . may induce feelings of fulfillment, but what primarily matters is not those feelings themselves, but what gives rise to them" (p.365). In addition, hybrid (and subjectivist) theories offer little to explain the intentionality at the heart of subjectivism. So, in seeking to maintain an analytical perspective on the personal significance of certain objects or events, theorists have generally failed to address the first-person character of the creation of meaning, or what Davenport (2007) calls "existential meaning".

Crisp's (2006) distinction between the enumerative and the explanatory question – between the constituents of a good life, and what it is about them that makes them good for people – highlights a difficulty with this way of classifying theories of meaning. Ideally, a taxonomy of philosophical views should cover all relevant possibilities, distinguishing between them in a way that is intelligible. The classification of theories of meaning lacks these features: even if it captures the most promising views, it excludes other possibilities (e.g., religious views); it combines views that should be distinguished (e.g., talk of desires and caring); and it is not clear why the categories are used to classify the range of views. Most problematically,

contrasting the subjective with the objective or hybrid theories is to contrast enumerative views with a category partly defined by an explanatory theory. Subjectivism, as an enumerative view, could be combined with an objective explanatory theory. For example, the claim that a desire to do something could be combined with the claim that what makes impulses final goods is they have objective value. But that suggests the need for a new category.

These considerations raise difficult questions for the dominant theories of meaning. They also suggest exploring an alternative way of thinking about meaning.

Frankl's journey to meaning

Frankl trained as a doctor, specializing in psychiatry, in post-WW1 Vienna. Initially in thrall to Freud and then Adler, he soon became disillusioned with what he saw as their reductionism (Frankl, 1926). His second article (Frankl, 1926) included Frankl's first written statement of the importance of meaning in people's lives. His pursuit of a more human dimension in psychology had led him to existentialism and phenomenology.

The relationship between existentialism and phenomenology is complex and often ambiguous. Frankl alternated between treating them as two expressions of the same broad school of thought, treating existentialism and phenomenology as a complementary pair. Following Jaspers, Heidegger and Scheler, Frankl sought an alternative to an unreflective objectivizing intersubjectivity, but his interest was not in phenomenology *per se*, but in its application to psychiatry. Specifically, he wanted to save psychology from reductionism and psychologism. He wrote: "Such existential analysis … ought … to include the totality of the human being, that is it ought to consciously transcend the psychic real" (Frankl, 1938, p. 72). Frankl's discovery of existentialism led him to search for an account of motivation corresponding with being in the world, being oneself by finding one's identity and authenticity and re-orienting the constant changes within human existence into creative developments of "becoming" (Längle, 2013). Kierkegaard viewed despair, for example, as the result of denying one's true self and situation, which Frankl interpreted as the need for each human to accomplish a unique concrete task (Frankl, 1963).

Inspired by Scheler and his 'Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik' 1913), Frankl set out to build a model of psychotherapy (Frankl, 1967). This was most evident in three themes that run throughout Frankl's subsequent work: his rejection of psychologism; the concept of "dimensional ontology"; and the theory of "categorical values". He was particularly occupied with "psychologism", the "pseudo-scientific procedure [that] presumes to analyze every act for its psychic origin, and on that basis to decree whether its content is valid or invalid" (Frankl, 1955, p. 15), which

undermines Freudian and other therapeutic systems of the day. Frankl was not disputing the value of scientific, but wanted it balanced by existential understanding. He acknowledged a limited determinism, to the extent that agents live within some biological and psychological conditions that may not be able to change. Still, he rejected the idea that events at any level are "nothing-but" epiphenomena, determined by events at another level. Ignoring mental illness's existential character was "tantamount to 'metaphysical irresponsibility', as Scheler once called it" (Frankl, 1953, p. 12).

Frankl's intellectual debt to Scheler was even more apparent in his notion of "dimensional ontology". Scheler (1913) has proposed a stratification of feeling and the spiritual, with each level having its own relationship to values. He argued that humans are unique in their capacity to objectify the world and themselves, due to the presence of "spirit". This spirit allows humans to live autonomously of drives and attachment to specific environments. In Frankl's terminology, these ontologically distinct dimensions are somatic, psychic, and "noetic" ("the core or nucleus of the personality"; Frankl, 1955, p. 7). All of his key concepts, including values, self-transcendence, and the Will to Meaning, belong to this dimension.

Finally, Categorical Values were manifest in three values. Creative value encompassed acts give something life that would not otherwise exist, such as work, hobbies, or good deeds. The experiential value included experiences of truth and beauty discovered in the world and loving encounters with others. The attitudinal value was associated with nature, the arts, and relationships of love and acceptance. Frankl echoed Scheler in his assertion that values are not abstract ideas: they must be lived. In Scheler's words, "It is not only in 'inner perception'. but also in the felt and lived affair with world . in the course of performing such intentional functions and acts, that values and their order flash before us!" (p.68).

Death was not a Categorical Value, but ran as a motif through Frankl's writing. Following Kierkegaard, he maintained that finality of death allows the agent to become aware of her unique individuality: ". the transitoriness of our existence in no way makes it meaningless. But it does constitute our responsibleness; for everything hinges upon our realizing the essentially transitory possibilities" (Frankl, 1963, pp. 120–121). Specifically, Frankl wrote of a "tragic triad" (Frankl, 1963, p. 161), or those conditions of life from which no human being can escape: pain, guilt, and death. He saw in his fellow prisoners a "tragic optimism" that calls upon an agent to become what she could and should be and accept responsibility for herself in the face of transience in a way that she not only experiences life as meaningful, but also creates grounds for recognizing her worth by acting meaningfully. Nozick (1981) criticized what he took to be Frankl's "dual assumption that some limitation is necessary for meaning, and limitation in time is the only one that can serve" (p.580). But this was not Frankl's position.

While Nozick claimed Frankl's position was that reflecting on death is necessary for life to be meaningful, Frankl's argument was more modest. It can be summarized as follows:

(1) Mortality can generate or enhance motivation;
(2) Reflecting on finitude motivates an agent to make the most of life;
(3) Therefore, reflecting on finitude can enhance meaning in life.

Of course, death is not the sole route to meaning: "why believe . limit of time is a boundary that specifically must be crossed for one's life to be meaningful? Why would loving another person or creating a work of art not suffice" (Metz, 2013, p. 131).

Around this time, the Nazis starting vilifying psychiatry as "Jewish science", and Frankl's incarceration in death camps began. In Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, Dachau, and Türkheim, he worked as a doctor to fellow inmates. Suicide was widespread, and his autobiographical accounts portray him testing his emergent theories about meaning in these extraordinary circumstances. Around this time, his book manuscript was taken and destroyed. He responded by volunteering to work in typhus fever wards: "if I had to die there might at least be some sense in my death" (Frankl, 1963, p. 49). Eventually contracting typhoid himself, he began to reconstruct his manuscript: "I am convinced that my determination to reconstruct the lost manuscript contributed not in the least to my own survival . . . A comrade had given me a pencil stub for my 40th birthday and had conjured up a few small SS-forms, upon whose backside I now – with high fever – scribbled stenographic notes" (Frankl, 1997, p. 76).

Frankl's memoirs reveal prisoners' daily battles to maintain some sense of freedom and hope. Their absence resulted in an "existential vacuum", an "inner emptiness, the feeling of having lost the meaning of existence and the content of life" (ibid., p.162). The typical consequence of such an existential vacuum was death. However, his experiences suggested an escape. Freedom was not the "random ability to do as we please . . . not license in what we do or do not do" (Frankl, 1963, p. 307), as Frankl understood some existentialist to believe. It was the freedom to respond to the demands of a situation, not turn away from it: "Any attempt to restore man's inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal . . . Whenever there was an opportunity for it, one had to give them a why – an aim – for their lives, in order to strengthen them to bear the terrible how of their existence" (Frankl, 1963, p. 37).

The verification Frankl took for his ideas about the force of finding meaning in even the most severe circumstances gave him confidence that he was correct to reject Freud and Adler's assumption that motivation can be reduced to a concern with maintaining an inner equilibrium. In response

to Freud's belief that "the moment a man questions the meaning and value of life he is sick" (Freud, 1961, p. 436), Frankl wrote that only the person who does question the meaning and value of life is "truly a human being" (Frankl, 1967, p. 20). He argued, "man's search for meaning and values may arouse inner tension rather than inner equilibrium . . . precisely such tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health" (Frankl, 1963, p. 164). Frankl was using meaning in two ways here: as a goal; and an act of making sense of life. In striving for a worthwhile goal, individuals come to find compelling reasons to live.

After liberation, Frankl returned to Vienna, where he learned of the deaths of his family members. In his depression, he completed his lost manuscript, followed by a less technical book that became "Man's Search for Meaning" (Frankl, 1963). It utilized a double consciousness, as his experiences as doctor and sufferer allowed him to fuse the personal and scholarly in a way that would not have been possible for other psychiatrists (who were not also prisoners) or prisoners (who were not also psychiatrists).

Will to meaning

The importance of meaning as characteristic of mental health and "the primary motivation in . . . life" was the central principle of Frankl's (1963, p. 121) philosophy. The pull of the Will to Meaning is more basic than the pushes of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Humans, unlike other animals, will sacrifice pleasure or choose to undergo pain if it is understood to have a transcendent meaning for the sake of another person or for a goal to which she aspires. This was, for Frankl, the basis of the self-transcendence of human existence, denoting a sense of being human as always pointing to something or someone other than oneself, be it aim to fulfil or another human being to encounter.

The Will to Meaning embodied Frankl's interpretation of human agency. People can act or not, a choice dependent on their "inner decisions", and not their outer "conditions: "All freedom has a 'from what' and a 'to what'. The 'from what' of man's freedom is his being driven, and the 'to what' is his being responsible" (Frankl, 1963, p. 59). Thus, responsibility signifies a relationship between an agent and the world as the agent not only draws on larger values as she navigates her world, but she also helps shape that world with every consequent decision. There seems to be a tension here. Responsibility is necessary not because it offers the agent control of herself or situations, but because she can shape her psychic materials in different ways through an act of striving that offers lasting meaning. At this point, responsibility becomes an obligation to realize values, and freedom becomes a form of necessity. Translated into the clinical setting, Frankl (1955) stated boldly that leaving all decisions to the patient could be dangerous. Likewise,

Lukas (1979) claimed the task of the therapist "is to educate the patients to take charge of their own lives" (p.100). But directing people to be free and responsible seems to stretch those concepts beyond reasonable usage.

Another consequence of Frankl's stance is that non-intentional feelings, like sadness, anger, happiness, are marginalized. He claimed that feelings can hinder a focus on meaning, because they limit them from being free from the world and acting in a responsible way. Frankl might have argued that such feelings are often caused by a sense of meaninglessness, resolved as the agent pursues of meaning. However, people in misery would find this cold comfort, as feelings might be precisely the reason for seeking therapy in the first place. Perhaps this is why the therapist needs to remain somewhat authoritarian. If so, Frankl's hope of reconciling existential meaning with his Schelerian conception of objective values reached an impasse.

Frankl's theory of meaning

In many ways, Frankl's theory of meaning resembles objectivist accounts that equate a meaningful life with engagement with some good for which individuals are responsible. Metz's (2013) emphasis on the importance of "the good, the true, and the beautiful" finds a parallel with Frankl's "three chief groups of values … creative, experiential, and attitudinal" (Frankl, 1963, p. 123). Frankl wrote: "The will to meaning can only be elicited if meaning itself can be elucidated as something which is essentially more than his mere self-expression. This implies a certain degree of objectivity, and without a minimum amount of objectivity meaning would never be found worthwhile to be fulfilled" (Frankl, 1964, p. 57). It is in being responsible that one finds meaning, but in this awareness of responsibleness one must be free to choose for what, to what, or to whom an agent is responsible.

There is a problem. Frankl offered an account of meaning in terms of objective values. To do otherwise, he argued, would render the pursuit of meaning redundant. Yet, his account seems incoherent without an existential account of an agent with needs and wants, as is evident in his retention of subjective language (e.g., meaning is discovered through an act of choosing (Frankl, 1963, p. 150); it is motivated by a "deep-seated striving and struggling" (Frankl, 1967, p. 67). One solution might be to distinguish between different kinds of meaning, such as an objective meaning consistent with his account of values and transcendence, and some sort of existential meaning reflecting that is created subjectively by an agent who feels what is valuable for herself and plays an active role in the creation of meaning. This is discussed a little later.

There are some interesting similarities between Frankl's existentialist perspective and Frankfurt's (1988) concern with what makes a life significant, not just in a "third-person" sense, but in a "first-person" sense of

experiencing significance. In Frankfurt's account, meaning is important insofar as it depends on:

(1) the agent's evaluation of the goals of the activities;
(2) whether she finds the means to her ends or the activities involved in pursuing them intrinsically engaging and well-suited to her character.

Frankfurt was marking some key distinctions in his analysis:

- something is a final good if it is good for its own sake;
- not everything that is good is a final good;
- some things are good merely as means.

It is not only important merely to *attain* final ends; it is also important to *have* final ends. Without goals at which to aim for their own sake, there would be no meaningful purpose in any activity. Thus, the value of final ends lies in their role as a necessary condition of engaging in activities judged by an agent to be worthwhile. Frankfurt is typically considered a subjectivist, albeit one who placed a more stringent demand on the level of intentional agency. He (Frankfurt, 2004) rejected "the traditional view" that "the only value that a final end necessarily possesses for us, simply in virtue of the fact that it is a final end, must be identical with the value for us of the state of affairs which we bring about when we obtain that end" (p.58). A life is meaningful to the extent that it is spent devoted to things cares about.

In an overtly existential analysis of motivation, values, and ends, Davenport (2007) reached a position that reflected Frankfurt's reasoning. He began by distinguishing between the product value of an end, such as some worthwhile activity, and the derivative values of pursuing and possibly achieving that end. He summarized the relations using the Figure 1 below:

An agent (A) intends an end (E), which is grounded by E's terminal value (V), and pursuing E for this reason causes meaning (M), and other goods. Davenport argued that A's motive for intending E must be "projective" (i.e., it necessitates

$$
\begin{array}{l}
\mathbf{A} \rightarrow \mathbf{E} \Rightarrow \mathbf{M} \\
\qquad\quad \perp \\
\qquad\quad \mathbf{V}
\end{array}
$$

(where -> indicates intention; => indicates efficient causation; and ⊥ indicates a "grounding relation of rational support)

Figure 1. Relations between the product value of an end and the derivative values of pursuing it (source: Davenport, 2007).

striving) when V is an agent-transcending value, as M is an effect on A that derives from pursuing E on the basis on V, rather than being part of E.

This stance offers a way out of Frankl's apparent dilemma of retaining an objective perspective on value and meaning, without denying the agent's intentionality, as can be shown with a short case study from his life story:

> "Recently arrived at Dachau, Frankl (A) volunteered to work in typhus wards: "if I had to die there might at least be some sense in my death" (Frankl, 1963, p. 49) (E). His sense associated with this work was based on his belief that all life has value, irrespective of circumstance (V). This work helps him maintain a sense of meaning *(M).*

This helps make explicit some points that have generally been overlooked by commentators on Frankl's account, and meaning, in general:

(1) *Contra* the objectivists, volition toward some end is the driving force behind the realization of meaning;
(2) *Contra* the subjectivists, not all ends have equal value, even less are capable of motivating sustained striving;
(3) The will to achieve certain ends requires substantial motivation, but pursuing the ends themselves can generate further motivation.
(4) Meaningfulness, in the existential sense, is not a directly targetable goal; it can only be pursued by looking for objective grounds for seeking some other end. In other words, meaning is a fortuitous consequence of the willful pursuit of objectively valuable ends. It is the *effect* of an agent giving herself to a valuable activity.

If this argument is accepted, talk of search for meaning is misleading, as meaning is better understood as a *consequence* of an agent striving toward some *other* end. Indeed, this is more consistent with his accounts in the death camps. He described people in Dachau stripped of their dignity and treated as mere objects, causing most of Frankl's peers to collapse: "only a few kept their full inner liberty and obtained those values which their suffering afforded" (Frankl, 1963, p. 107), and strove to "fulfil those tasks which usually [life] constantly sets for each individual (p.122). In the extreme conditions, most prisoners became cut off from the goals that had previously given their lives meaning: "A man who let himself decline because he could not see any future goal found himself occupied with retrospective thoughts . . . causing the prisoners to lose their hold on life; everything in a way became pointless" (436). By Frankl's account, the survivors were not striving for meaning, *per se*, but were engaging in activities for their intrinsic worth, consequently benefiting in terms of a greater sense of meaning in their lives. At times, Frankl almost reached this conclusion himself, then seemed to pull away from the final step:

"Success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself" (p.5).

Finding meaning requires an outward focus on values, "found in the world rather than within man's own psyche" (Frankl, 1963, p. 175), which Jaspers (1955) called "that cause which he has made his own, in a commitment to an important job" (p.42). It is unclear why the same reasoning Frankl applied to success and happiness would also apply to meaning. Without it, Frankl would be facing a paradox: an agent is liberated by the experience of striving for some worthwhile goal, in which she moves out of herself, and toward a concern with others and the world. This amounts to a requirement for an agent to lift herself by her bootstraps! If Frankl is to be consistent in his reasoning about Will to Meaning, meaning cannot be considered a goal in itself, as it is a by-product of committing to a valuable activity. Resultant meaning emerges as a consequence of this committed striving, *not* as the goal.

This interpretation helps address the inconsistencies in Frankl's account of how engagement in certain kinds of endeavors are constitutive of a meaningful life, while others are not. It also helps address the challenges facing both objectivist and subjectivist accounts of meaning by offering a justification of the demand for an objectivist grounding of values. It also acknowledges the subjectivist assertion of the hermeneutic character of meaning. As it stands, however, it remains inadequate.

Will and meaning

In response to these criticisms, Frankl might have claimed that the Will ultimately drives motivated actions to Meaning. However, if he did he would be in danger of drifting toward precisely the sort of drive-based determinism he rejected in the works of Freud and Adler. It would also undermine his aspirations of providing an account consistent with existentialism. At least, a stronger account must go beyond the third-person sense employed by most philosophers, acknowledging a first-person sense of significance by the agent living it. Intrinsically worthwhile activities elicit an agent's volition, not an ephemeral sense of meaning. So, despite his reservations, Frankl needed a subjective element reflecting the intensity of willful striving and explaining why people strive for certain goals and why that striving matters to them. Analytical philosophers have been mostly silent on these questions, but so too was Frankl.

Frankl's worldview took inspiration from Kierkegaard and Jaspers, and his published work touched on their perennial concerns, such as the lived

experience of freedom and the conditions of morally responsible decisions. Explanations of Will within that tradition, however, are opaque. Kane (1998) identified at least three uses of the term:

- "Desiderative Will" - what is wanted, desired or preferred;
- "Rational Will" - what is chosen, decided or intended; and
- "Striving Will" - what is tried, endeavored or made an effort to do.

Striving Will comes closest to Frankl's sense. However, Kane presumed such purposes can only be found among sustaining intentions "already formed in the face or obstacles" (p.152). He understood such striving in terms of resolving conflicts between existing intentions and contradictory desires. In other words, Kane's account did not include scope for efforts to sustain purpose and to add motivation to that purpose, which is precisely the sense used by Frankl. Frankl's claim was that motivation can both lead an agent into an activity, and result from engagement with that activity. Humans can project, and not just accept goals. Davenport (2007) called this "projective motivation": "an essentially volitional type of purposive motivation that does not derive from pre-purposive motives what is generated by the agent in the process of setting new goals, forming new projects, or supplementing existing motives for carrying out already formed purposes" (p.662). Thus, Frankl's narrative is not usefully explained in terms of desire for meaning, as subjectivists might say. If an agent could be motivated to start a task merely by wanting to do something worthwhile then she would be equally able to satisfy it merely by picking another end arbitrarily (Davenport, 2007). Lightly chosen ends are uncompelling: if "the meaning that is waiting to be fulfilled by man" was just an intention, "it would immediately lose its demanding and challenging character; it could no longer call man forth or summon him" (Frankl, 1963, p. 156). Frankl's talk of' striving' and "pursuing", rather than "desiring" and "wanting" is of more than semantic interest. In opposition to Freud's claim that motivation involves resolving some tension, Frankl wrote that, in searching for intrinsically worthwhile values in possible goals, and devoting herself to them, the agent "may arouse inner tension rather thinner equilibrium" (Frankl, 1963, p. 164). Creating a need requires moving from a state of motivational equilibrium to a new state of tension caused by striving.

Frankl's theory of meaning contained a strong subjectivism, albeit different in form from the philosophers discussed earlier. It also assumed objective values to which an agent can respond. Sartre (1956) claimed that agents invent values by choosing projects, but Frankl's (1963) argument suggested that Sartre got the relationship between activities and values backwards. One cannot just "will to will" (p.157), without the grounding of meaning that provides an objective reason for forming a serious project. Humans need the

meaning provided by existential willing since this is their natural function, and finding meaning requires an outward-, and other-focus on values "found in the world rather than within man's own psyche" (Frankl, 1963, p. 175). Whether or not they are pursued depends on Will. There is a difference between subjectivity and willing, and recognizing that something has intrinsic worth need not mean there is a compulsion to do it. At most, "it is qualified to be desired for its own sake, and to be pursued as a final end" (Frankfurt, 1999, p. 158).

So, the ambiguous status of Frankl's theory of meaning can be clarified by engaging with existential meaning arising as a *consequence* of striving for objectively worthwhile goals. This interpretation captures the relationships among subjective willing, objective value, and human agency more closely than Frankl's theoretical discussions, *and* it remains consistent with his death camp observations.

Conclusion

Broad, 1930 wrote that philosophy is of no importance to anyone but philosophers; fortunately, the actual moral life of humankind is conducted without reference to the changing fashions in that specialized branch of academic entertainment. Frankl, in contrast, believed that philosophical questions affect people and events directly: "I believe it to be a straight path from [the] homunculus image of man to the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Maidenek" (Frankl, 1967, p. 123). The relevance of philosophy to questions of meaning becomes clearer in the ambiguous relationships among the conceptualizations of meaning, values, and worthwhile activities.

I have suggested that Frankl's account can be strengthen by acknowledging the existential basis on meaning, and, in turn, notions of projective motivation and striving Will. This reflects more closely than Frankl's interpretation, his descriptions of surviving and thriving. I do not, though, believe my interpretation is without its challenges. Perhaps the most pressing questions relates to objective value. The existential account makes clear that that volitional commitment is not mere choice devoid of criteria, The difficulty remains, however, in explaining how an agent, in real life, knows the task to which she commits has worth.

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