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Redeeming the Unredeemable: Auschwitz and *Man's Search for Meaning*

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Viktor Frankl's Auschwitz memoir has been criticized for misrepresenting the cultural significance of the Holocaust. "The real hero of *Man's Search for Meaning*," Lawrence Langer once remarked, was "not man but Viktor Frankl."¹ Incorporating little-known biographical details and an analysis of how Frankl "worked through" his experiences in earlier writings, this article illuminates how Frankl arrived at his particular version of survival. It reinforces Langer's contention that Frankl distorted the reality of Auschwitz in an attempt to prove his own psychological and philosophical theories.

It is naïve, absurd, and historically false to believe that an infernal system such as National Socialism sanctifies its victims: on the contrary, it degrades them, it makes them resemble itself, and this all the more when they are available, blank, and lacking a political or moral armature.

Primo Levi, "The Grey Zone"²

Viktor Frankl's fame stems from his widely read Holocaust testimony, *Man's Search for Meaning* (1962), ranked by the Library of Congress as "one of the ten most influential books in America."³ *Man's Search for Meaning* has sold more than four million copies in the English-language version alone, has been translated into twenty languages (including Chinese and Japanese), and has sold more than ten million copies worldwide. Born in Vienna in 1905, Frankl was the founder of a school of psychotherapy known as logotherapy, an existential form of analysis he described as "therapy through meaning."⁴

Frankl included in the book a theoretical synopsis, "Logotherapy in a Nutshell," at the suggestion of renowned Harvard psychologist Gordon Allport. Allport wrote the preface to *Man's Search for Meaning*, which he praised as a "gem of dramatic narrative." Frankl, he wrote, rendered "hunger, humiliation, fear and deep anger at injustice . . . tolerable by closely guarded images of beloved persons, by religion, by a grim sense of humor, and even by glimpses of the healing beauties of nature." Allport attributed the mass appeal of Frankl's work to his ability to make "larger sense out of his apparently senseless suffering" by facing "fully the ubiquity of suffering and the forces of evil" and thus deriving "a surprisingly hopeful view of man's capacity to transcend his predica-

ment and discover an adequate guiding truth.” Moreover, Frankl’s book provided “a compelling introduction to the most significant psychological movement of our day.”⁵

Frankl’s heroic version of survival in the face of the apocalyptic destruction that was Auschwitz led to the book’s popular success, which he subsequently used to promote his meaning-centered psychotherapy. Lawrence Langer, however, has criticized Frankl for failing to recognize that Auschwitz represented a rupture in the values of Western civilization. Frankl, Langer wrote, relied upon Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, and others “to transform his ordeal in Auschwitz into a renewed encounter with the literary and philosophical giants” and thus to preserve “the intellectual and spiritual traditions they championed, and his own legacy as an heir to their minds.”⁶ More specifically, Frankl’s testimony “avoids the difficulty of altering the reader’s consciousness so that it can contend with the moral uncertainties of the Holocaust.”⁷ Frankl’s notion of meaningful suffering, Langer argued, lessened the horror by making the Holocaust seem survivable.

Langer also pointed out contradictions between Frankl’s myth of heroic survival and his descriptions of atrocity. It is “as if Frankl himself were unconsciously committed to a dual vision, torn between how it really was and how, retrospectively, he would like to believe it had been.”⁸ Reflecting on the pervasive Christian vocabulary in Frankl’s testimony, Langer suggested that “Frankl secretly yearned for a transfiguration of Auschwitz into nothing more than a test of the religious sensibility.”⁹ A detailed historical investigation of Frankl’s life supports Langer’s critique. The following overview, which examines both his camp experience and the way in which he subsequently “worked through” his trauma, illuminates the way in which he came to his peculiar version of survival.¹⁰

Before the Deluge

Frankl’s intellectual development began with a brief immersion in Freudianism in the early 1920s.¹¹ It is unclear why, but Ernst Federn, the secretary of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, rejected Frankl for training analysis. Frankl then joined Alfred Adler’s circle in 1924.¹² He became involved in youth counseling, and for a short time he was president of the Social Democratic student movement in Austria.¹³ In 1925 Adler’s journal, the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Individualpsychologie*, published an article by Frankl celebrating the Adlerian interpretation of neurosis as a form of compensation and rejected the Freudian vision of the unconscious as the source of neurosis.¹⁴ Frankl left Adler’s circle in 1927, and for the rest of his life he rejected the psychological reductionism he claimed to have discovered in both the Freudian and Adlerian explanations of neurosis.

At this time Frankl also began his lifelong association with Otto Pötzl, who in 1928 succeeded Wagner Jauregg as head of the University of Vienna’s psychiatric clinic. There Frankl pursued his medical degree, continued to counsel youths, and in 1929 designated Pötzl “honorary president” of his burgeoning youth-counseling move-

ment.¹⁵ Under Pözl's mentoring, Frankl began to formalize the tenets of logotherapy, which centered on helping troubled, often unemployed, youths find socially responsible ways of handling their problems. Later reflecting on his life and the influence of Freud, Adler, and Pözl, Frankl claimed Pözl was "the true genius."¹⁶ But Freud expressed reservations about Pözl and his membership in the Psychoanalytic Union, describing Pözl as a "*zweideutigen Charakter*" (ambiguous character).¹⁷ Pözl was clearly politically ambiguous because he claimed to have paid Nazi Party dues (without receiving a membership card) from 1930 to 1933, and he joined the Party in December 1943.¹⁸ For his part Frankl never expressed surprise, much less disgust, at his mentor's political commitment. After his youthful socialist affiliation, Frankl had become more conservative and eventually joined the Fatherland Front—a fascist organization in Austria—in February 1934.¹⁹

After receiving his medical degree in 1930 Frankl practiced as a doctor, first under Pözl, and then under Dr. Joseph Gerstmann at the Maria Theresien-Schlüssel Hospital. From 1933 until 1937 Frankl worked in the female suicide ward at the state hospital Am Steinhof.²⁰ In 1936 and 1937 he participated as a commentator in all four seminars conducted by the Austrian branch of the Göring Institute.²¹ Founded by Matthias Heinrich Göring, the cousin of Hermann Göring, the institute tried "to assemble in the spirit of the National Socialist German government" physicians who would "consider the whole personality of the patient" and "not ignore the person's soul; above all, those who [were] willing to acquire and practice a psychotherapeutic medicine in the spirit of a National Socialist worldview."²² Frankl wrote an article, entitled "Zur geistigen Problematik der Psychotherapie" (On the mental/spiritual problem in psychotherapy), for the Göring Institute's *Zentralblatt für Psychotherapie*.²³ It presented a vision of logotherapy that had crystallized during Frankl's youth-counseling work. He attempted to construct a new theory of psychology—"hohen Psychologie" ("height psychology," in response to the Freudian concept of "depth psychology")—that consisted of directing patients to find the unique meaning in their lives through a newfound sense of responsibility. Frankl believed this new form of therapy could surpass that of both Freud and Adler and thus constitute the genesis of the so-called "third school of Viennese psychotherapy." Elsewhere I have argued that Frankl's 1937 article is a "tactical accommodation" of the Nazi psychotherapy movement because his focus on worldviews, responsibility, and finding a mission in life offered a solution for those therapists who were uncomfortable with the Göring Institute's attempt to impose Nazi ideology onto the therapeutic situation.²⁴

After the 1938 *Anschluss*, Frankl was denied affiliation with the Göring Institute and was forced to give up his private practice. Eventually he took a job not as a doctor but as a "jüdischer Fachbehandler" ("Jewish specialist," meaning he could only treat Jewish patients), at the Rothschild Hospital, which at the time also functioned as the community center for Jews. But in April 1939 the hospital apparently was taken over by the Nazi authorities.²⁵ The hospital was one of the few places where Jews were al-

lowed to work, and Frankl became director of the neurological department. Frank applied for and, in November 1941, received a visa to go to the United States—but he chose to remain to care for his parents and let his request lapse.²⁶

As director, Frankl was given the opportunity to conduct experimental brain surgeries on suicidal patients. Reticent over the years about these experiments, he did not mention them in his original 1973 autobiographical statement.²⁷ He did describe the research in a private 1981 interview with Canadian filmmaker Tom Corrigan, but claimed the information “might be of interest . . . but it could not be of use.”²⁸ Frankl described these experiments in a short article published in 1942, and later, in 1995 (two years before his death), in his autobiography, *Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht* (published in 1997 in English as *Recollections: An Autobiography*).²⁹ In the latter, Frankl claimed that although he had no training in neurosurgery and “[Viennese brain surgeon] Professor Schönbauer did not even allow me to look on when he performed brain surgery,” he found himself nevertheless “able to conduct the surgery.” Frankl also admitted that the “primary surgeon Reich had refused to undertake the surgeries.”³⁰ When, in order to avoid deportation to concentration camps, patients had overdosed on sleeping pills and subsequently had been given up for dead by other doctors, Frankl felt justified in attempting relatively novel brain surgery techniques. First, “some injections intravenously . . . and if this didn’t work I gave them injections into the brain . . . into the Cisterna Magna. And if that did not work I made a trepanation, opened the skull . . . inserted drugs into the ventricle and made a drainage so the drug went into the Aquaeductus Sylvii. . . . People whose breathing had stopped suddenly started breathing again.” But he “could only keep them alive for twenty-four hours, no longer.”³¹ Frankl’s drugs of choice were the amphetamines Pervitin and Tetrophan. These ethically questionable experiments could be viewed as bordering on collaboration with the Nazis. Not only was Frankl’s research supported by the Nazis, but his actions stood outside a vision of Jewish communal solidarity.³²

Surviving

Despite Nazi support for his research, Frankl, his wife Tilly, and his parents were deported to the “model ghetto” of Theresienstadt on September 25, 1942.³³ At Theresienstadt privileged Jews expected to live in comparative comfort, but the reality was a living hell. The conditions were more akin to those in a concentration camp. Frankl’s father, as did many elder residents, starved to death.³⁴

At Theresienstadt Frankl wrote monthly reports for the so-called Public Health Department, and he was involved with the mental hospital. He was apparently in charge of “committing the psychopathic.”³⁵ At the urging of another doctor in the camp, Karl Fleischman, Frankl set up a “*Stosstruppe*” (shock troop) to help “new arrivals overcome the shock of Theresienstadt life.”³⁶ This *Stosstruppe* functioned as a suicide intelligence service where “any expression of a suicidal idea or intention would be immediately reported to Frankl. He would then contact the would-be suicide and

seek to dissuade him/her.”³⁷ Historian George Berkley claimed that Frankl’s work was “a major reason for a steep drop in the suicide rate,” from 254 in 1942 to 164 in 1943.³⁸ Without gainsaying what one would naturally take as a caring, humanitarian motive, in another sense Frankl’s work supported the camp administration in that:

Suicide was strictly prohibited. Offenders who survived were taken to the ill-famed “small fortress” [a prison attached to the camp], and the same punishment was meted out to others. Relatives were punished in keeping with the principle of “kinship liability”; fellow prisoners who kept silent about a suicidal act, contrary to camp regulations, which made reporting such events mandatory, were called to account. This affected the camp doctors in particular, who frequently hushed up suicides by stating “heart failure” as the cause of death.³⁹

Frankl’s activities at Theresienstadt were similar to his research at Rothschild Hospital. In both cases, the Nazis approved of his “humanitarian” work because they did not tolerate suicide. But, as at Rothschild Hospital, Frankl’s efforts put him in a precarious position “straddled” between the Nazis and the Jewish community.

After Frankl’s two-year internment in Theresienstadt, his life took a dramatic turn for the worse. Theresienstadt was “only five-eighths of a mile square and had only 219 houses” but “by late fall of 1942 . . . the population had grown to nearly sixty thousand.”⁴⁰ To ease overpopulation, the Nazis initiated a “shuttle train” to Auschwitz,⁴¹ and the deportations peaked in the fall of 1944. Frankl and his wife were transferred to Auschwitz on October 19, 1944. His mother followed four days later.⁴² Survivors of the ordeal stated that the Nazis disguised the destinations of the transports in order to induce the prisoners to “volunteer.” Although Frankl and the other prisoners were suspicious, they could not be certain these trains were headed for Auschwitz.⁴³ His wife chose to go with him, even though her work in the munitions factory exempted her from deportation.

Frankl remembered being selected at Auschwitz by Joseph Mengele “to the left for the gas chamber.” But he “switched behind Mengele’s back” to the right.⁴⁴ In a 1991 interview with the American minister Robert Schuller, Frankl confessed: “I was in Auschwitz only three or four days. . . . I was sent to a barracks and we were all transported to a camp in Bavaria.”⁴⁵ Frankl’s short time in Auschwitz is documented by the prisoner log from the subcamp of Dachau, Kaufering III, which listed his arrival on October 25, 1944, six days after his deportation from Theresienstadt.⁴⁶ The trip to Auschwitz usually took two days, although Frankl depicted a journey of “several days and nights.”⁴⁷ He said the train ride from Auschwitz to Kaufering III lasted “two days and three nights”;⁴⁸ it seems, therefore, that he was in Auschwitz for three days and two nights. Still, in *Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht*, Frankl suggested he was transported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz soon, rather than after a period of two years: “Nine months later [after their marriage] we arrived in Theresienstadt. Tilly was given a two-year exemption from deportation because her work in the munitions factory was important for the war effort. But I was summoned to be transported ‘to the east’ to Auschwitz.”⁴⁹

Exactly how and why Frankl was able to escape Auschwitz for another camp is also unclear. In his testimony he described numerous selections at Auschwitz and claimed “in those few minutes fate had passed [him] in many forms.” He described how a transport to a “rest camp” was arranged for “sick patients” and Frankl was put “on the list” as a doctor. Frankl added that no one knew if the transport was just a trick to get more work out of the prisoners or if it was actually a trip to the ovens. Frankl decided to risk it, claiming he “had learned to let fate take its course.”⁵⁰

At Kaufering III, Frankl was put to work digging ditches:

I was Number 119,104, and most of the time I was digging and laying tracks for railway lines. At one time, my job was to dig a tunnel, without help, for a water main under a road. This feat did not go unrewarded; just before Christmas 1944, I was presented with a gift of so-called “premium coupons.”⁵¹

He also volunteered for duty as a doctor in a typhus ward:

On my fourth day in the sick quarters I had just been detailed to the night shift when the chief doctor rushed in and asked me to volunteer for medical duties in another camp containing typhus patients. Against the urgent advice of my friends (and despite the fact that almost none of my colleagues offered their services) I decided to volunteer. I knew that in a working party I would die in a short time. But if I had to die there might at least be some sense in my death. I thought that it would doubtless be more to the purpose to try and help my comrades as a doctor than to vegetate or finally lose my life as the unproductive laborer that I was then.⁵²

Through his testimony we get a sense of the desperate reality Frankl experienced during the winter of 1944–45. He depicted how “in the winter and spring of 1945 there was an outbreak of typhus which infected nearly all the prisoners.”⁵³ According to the prisoner logs from Kaufering III, Frankl arrived at Türkheim on March 8, 1945.⁵⁴ Frankl therefore was in the work camp Kaufering III just short of five months. He was lucky to be deported to Türkheim because he likely would not have survived much longer under the conditions. At Türkheim Frankl was responsible for fifty typhus patients, and he eventually became the senior block warden. Liberated on April 27, 1945,⁵⁵ Frankl had endured about six months of concentration-camp experience, in addition to his two years at Theresienstadt.

Frankl described numerous near-death experiences in this period. Along with switching lines at Auschwitz, he recounted being rescued from the gas chamber by a “Viennese gangster” who apparently liked Frankl. When the gangster saw Frankl in line for a transport that he knew was “ill-fated,” he replaced Frankl with another prisoner.⁵⁶ At Türkheim, Frankl became infected with typhus and almost died. In the work camps, most likely Kaufering III, Frankl recalled being “protected” by a Kapo. At the end of the war, Frankl remained in the Türkheim camp as the Allies approached. The SS took his “other friends who had thought they were traveling to freedom,” locked them in huts, and burned them to death.⁵⁷ In sum, Frankl experienced a horrific or-

deal. “We know,” he said, “the best of us did not return.”⁵⁸ After working as the *Chef-arzt* (chief doctor) in the displaced persons hospital at Bad-Wörrishofen (Bavaria), Frankl arrived back in Vienna in August 1945.⁵⁹

During his internment at Türkheim, Frankl began to reconstruct the manuscript of *Ärztliche Seelsorge* (*The Doctor and the Soul*), which had been taken from him upon his arrival at Auschwitz. Writing on scraps of paper that a friend had given him for his fortieth birthday, Frankl described his efforts to rewrite his work:

In a barracks in a concentration camp lay several dozen men down with typhus. All were delirious except one who made an effort to avert the nocturnal deliria by deliberately fighting back sleep at night. He profited by the excitement and mental stimulus induced by the fever, however, to reconstruct the unpublished manuscript of a scientific work he had written, which had been taken away from him in the concentration camp. In the course of sixteen feverish nights he had recovered the whole book—jotting down, in the dark, stenographic cue words on tiny scraps of paper.⁶⁰

Frankl “distanced” this episode by rendering it in the third person. In a sense, he was already putting the entire concentration-camp experience behind him. Later, he described the book as his “spiritual child,” which helped him offset the delirium of illness and continue living.⁶¹

Working Through

Frankl’s literary output in his first year after the camps was truly prolific. He “dictated and dictated . . . three stenographer-typists worked in shifts to capture it all. . . . The floodgates had opened.”⁶² Within a year of the war’s end, he had published not only *Ärztliche Seelsorge* but also *Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager*, initially translated as *From Death-Camp to Existentialism: A Psychiatrist’s Path to a New Therapy* and in 1962 retitled *Man’s Search For Meaning*. Frankl also gave a lecture series entitled “Der unbewusste Gott,” which was translated and published as *The Unconscious God*. In addition, immediately after the war Frankl wrote a number of poems and a play, *Synchronization in Buchenwald*, later translated by Joseph Fabry and performed at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, in 1977.

How did Frankl explain his survival? In 1946 he claimed that the “apparent paradox that some prisoners of a less hardy make-up often seemed to survive camp life better than did those of a robust nature” was because these “sensitive people . . . were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom.”⁶³ More than twenty years later, in an interview with *Psychology Today*, Frankl said:

I was lucky. And I survived better as a person because I had a rich intellectual background, an inner life on which to draw. And I had a mission, to counsel other inmates. Do you know what my fantasy and finally compulsion became in those years? I wanted to live to go mountain climbing again. Can you understand that?⁶⁴

Insofar as his claims portray the Holocaust as a “manageable” experience that (with luck) was survivable, Frankl’s version clashes with what we know about the reality of the camps. To understand why Frankl viewed survival in these terms, we must reflect upon his character, his activities before 1942, his camp experience, and his subsequent intellectual production. His concept of “working through” implies that the Holocaust represented a new intellectual problem for him; however continuities exist between Frankl’s thinking before the war and his intellectual outpourings in the mid-1940s.

The issue of continuity was potentially problematic for Frankl because he had laid out the main tenets of logotherapy while working within the Nazi-affiliated Göring Institute. This association made him vulnerable to the charge that logotherapy and National Socialism are ideologically linked. Perhaps this is why Frankl took two different stances on how the concentration-camp experience affected his psychological theory. On the one hand, the original English subtitle of his testimony—*A Psychiatrist’s Path to a New Therapy*—suggests that logotherapy was itself derived from his camp experience, a suggestion supported by the claim that this form of psychotherapy was “not concocted in the philosopher’s armchair nor at the analyst’s couch; it took shape in the hard school of air-raid shelters and bomb craters; in concentration camps and prisoner of war camps.”⁶⁵

Frankl’s statement was deleted from later editions. But in 1963 a similar statement appeared on the back of the book jacket of *Man’s Search for Meaning*: “After three grim years at Auschwitz and other Nazi prisons, Dr. Frankl gained freedom only to learn that virtually his entire family had been wiped out. But during, and indeed partly because of, the almost incredible suffering and degradations of those years, he developed his theory of logotherapy.” Moreover in 1949 Frankl’s good friend Paul Polak, promoting logotherapy in the *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, described “Frankl’s Existential Analysis” as a “‘new start’ . . . that integrated the specific physical and mental suffering this generation had to endure during the last decade.”⁶⁶ Yet on the other hand Frankl declared, “People think I came out of Auschwitz with a brand-new psychotherapy. This is not the case.”⁶⁷ From the mid-1960s onward, Frankl claimed that his wartime experience had validated the basic tenets of logotherapy.⁶⁸

Frankl thus vacillated between the claim that logotherapy took shape in the camps and the claim that the camps justified preconceived theories. Both versions rely upon Frankl’s survival of the Holocaust to legitimate logotherapy. But his initial stance had the effect of disguising his connection to the Göring Institute. The second stance was both more accurate and allowed Frankl the opportunity to claim that Auschwitz confirmed his theory. In addition, he could argue that the insights of logotherapy had prepared him intellectually and spiritually to survive the test of the concentration camps.⁶⁹

Resolving Guilt

Complete comprehension of Frankl’s trauma is impossible. His mother and brother died at Auschwitz, and his father lost his life at Theresienstadt.⁷⁰ His twenty-five-year-

old wife died in Bergen-Belsen just before or after the British liberated the camp. Given the magnitude of Frankl's loss, his personal prescription for coming to terms with trauma deserves our unmitigated respect. When he extends his theory to the cultural realm, however, we have a responsibility to engage him and to work through the Holocaust for ourselves.

"Human existence takes the form of historical existence," Frankl wrote. "It is—in contrast to the existence of animals—always placed in a historical space."⁷¹ One of Frankl's chief post-Auschwitz concerns was distinguishing man from the animals. In his 1937 article for the Göring Institute, Frankl claimed human uniqueness was grounded in a sense of responsibility, but after the war he added the experience of temporality as a factor. *The Doctor and the Soul* cited the phenomenological work of Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Binswanger, and articulated that what made humans unique was the recognition of time. Simply put, historical consciousness gives human life a base in the past and a direction toward the future.

Frankl continued his evaluation of the human condition by examining the problem of the transitoriness of existence. In 1937 he had claimed that it is "death which gives meaning to life and makes our 'being there' as something unique."⁷² Now, after disaster had struck his family, he added the claim that life's transitory quality does not render it meaningless because: "Having been is also a kind of being—perhaps the surest kind. And all effective action in life may, in this view, appear as a salvaging of possibilities by actualizing them. Though past, these possibilities are now safely ensconced in the past for all eternity, and time can no longer change them."⁷³ Frankl sought to solve the problem of transitoriness, and the subsequent problem of meaninglessness, by making the past permanent. To what degree did this interpretation of the past help Frankl work through his own trauma? Arguably, by making the past and those in it permanent, and thus "eternal," he eased his sense of loss. "The future—happily—still remains to be shaped," Frankl claimed, "that is, it is at the disposal of man's responsibility."⁷⁴

Frankl connected the conception of the past as eternal to Karl Jaspers's description of man as a "deciding being." According to Frankl, humans were responsible for giving form to eternity by the choices they made in the present. But Frankl's traumatic experience manifests itself in his claim that although "it is fearful to know that at this moment we bear the responsibility for the next, that every decision . . . is a decision for all eternity . . . we bring to reality—or miss—a possibility that exists only for a particular moment."⁷⁵ Before the war Frankl focused on the individual's need to accept responsibility and to find a mission in life. After the war he focused on the relationship between time/eternity and decisions/responsibility. He began by asking:

But what is responsibility? . . . In truth there is something about responsibility that resembles an abyss. The longer and the more profoundly we consider it, the more we become aware of its awful depths—until a kind of giddiness overcomes us . . . there is something fearful about human responsibility. But at the same time something glorious!⁷⁶

Before the war, Frankl considered responsibility simply a foundational feature of human existence. After the Holocaust, responsibility resembled an abyss with “awful depths” that when plumbed lead to a state of “giddiness.” Frankl wrote, “so long as life remains, all guilt and all evil is still ‘redeemable.’”⁷⁷ This claim, along with the heightened focus on time, eternal choices, and individual responsibility as a sublime abyss, is more or less a caricature of Heideggerian existentialism. But these somewhat simple philosophical points also seem to reflect Frankl’s psychological state immediately after the war.

Frankl’s new connection between guilt and responsibility likely arose from his own guilt over his survival when so many others, including his family, perished. Yet contemplating the abyss of responsibility leads to “giddiness,” to a “glorious” experience. Once the past is confronted, one is capable of taking action and choosing which of one’s deeds will be stored for all eternity. Thus Frankl took the following maxim to guide the “post-Auschwitz period” of his life: “Live as if you were living for the second time—and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now.”⁷⁸ Frankl’s trauma and his relief at having survived are apparent in the statement “live as if you were living for the second time.” To counteract his newly discovered insight into the burdensome depths of responsibility and guilt, Frankl derived an ethic that would lead to a life of repentance: that is, “act as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now.” At the heart of this ethic is a stimulation of the conscience through the realization that a guilt-ridden past leads to a burdensome present. Therefore the impulse to act properly stems from a heightened awareness of the guilt or shame one experiences when acting improperly. After the Holocaust, the ethic by which Frankl guided his life focused on avoiding the accrual of guilt.

With this ethic as backdrop, the following passage seems to represent Frankl’s initial working through of his trauma, loss, and guilt. It is worth quoting at length:

To mourn for anything irrevocably lost must seem useless and foolish from the point of view of “sound common sense,” and this holds also for repenting an irredeemable wrong. But for the inner biography of a man, grief and repentance do have meaning. Grieving for a person whom we have loved and lost in a sense continues his life, and repentance permits the culprit to rise again freed of guilt. The loved person whom we have grieved for has been lost objectively, in empirical time, but he is preserved subjectively, in inner time. Grief brings him into the mind’s present. And repentance . . . has the power to wipe out a wrong; though the wrong cannot be undone, the culprit himself undergoes a moral rebirth. This opportunity to make past events fruitful for one’s inner history does not stand in opposition to man’s responsibility, but in a dialectical relationship. For guilt presupposes responsibility. Man is responsible in view of the fact he cannot retrace a single step; the smallest as well as the biggest remains a final one. None of his acts of commission or omission can be wiped off the slate as if they had never been. Nevertheless, in repenting man may inwardly break with an act, and in living out this repentance—which is an inner event—he can undo the outer event on a spiritual, moral plane.⁷⁹

This measured passage, blending loss and guilt with grief and repentance, seems to reflect Frankl’s initial resolution of some of the more profound trauma he suffered. The

grief and mourning likely had to do with the magnitude of Frankl's personal loss, but the meaning of "acts of commission or omission" or repentance as "an inner event" is unclear. These statements likely were tied to his ethic to live "this time" properly, since he claimed that ethic guided the post-Auschwitz period of his life. But repentance also allowed him to "inwardly break with an act" and thus resolve his past. Once this was achieved he had the "opportunity to make past events fruitful for . . . [his] inner history."

Although Frankl's first work, *Ärztliche Seelsorge*, did not constitute specifically a testimony, Aharon Appelfeld's characterization of the survivor's psychological needs seems apt: "The survivor's testimony is first of all a search for relief; and as with any burden, the one who bears it seeks also to rid himself of it as hastily as possible."⁸⁰ In 1981 Frankl described the "relief" he felt when he first conceived of "time as permanent."⁸¹ By 1946 (the year in which *Ärztliche Seelsorge* was published), it appears Frankl already had resolved some of the more profound psychological issues related to his survival.

After his wartime experience, Frankl continued to affirm responsibility as the key component of human existence. But he could just as easily have claimed that the Holocaust destroyed choice and with it the burden of responsibility. This view, however, would have left him to conceive of human existence as essentially absurd and tragic—an unlikely conclusion for one who had spent his life in search of meaning. Had Frankl viewed the past as absurd and tragic he would have faced unending grief. On the other hand, accepting responsibility entailed the "abysmal" terror of burdensome guilt. But he was able to sidestep this issue, and begin to resolve this guilt, by making the past a permanent repository of meaningful experiences.

This solution also enabled Frankl to conceptualize his Holocaust experience as a lesson in self-improvement, allowing one to make better choices in the present. Although emotional distress was clearly evident in his first post-Holocaust work, Frankl did seem to be resolving the terrifying horrors of the camps. Frankl's suggestion that his training as a psychiatrist helped him survive the camps may also apply to his post-Holocaust experience. His training allowed him "quickly" to work through and objectify his traumatic past. By the time Frankl dictated his popular testimony, he had apparently already put the "great horrors" behind him.

The Camps

Frankl dictated *Man's Search for Meaning* over a nine-day period shortly after the war. Although he initially wanted to publish his memoir anonymously, he decided at the urging of friends that he "should accept responsibility" for the book.⁸² Frankl used a sober tone effectively to convey the apocalyptic feeling of camp experience.

Nevertheless his presentation of "Auschwitz" seems deceptive and contradictory. He opens his memoir by stating that "many factual accounts about the concentration camps are already on record." In 1946 this was likely not the case. He then appears to contradict himself by stating that "here, facts will be significant only as far as they are

part of a man's experience." But given that he aims to describe the "exact nature" of the experiences of "an ordinary prisoner," the facts should have greater significance.⁸³

Most important, the revelation that Frankl spent only three days in Auschwitz is startling for any reader of *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl makes no mention of Theresienstadt in his book. Instead, the testimony begins with his arrival in Auschwitz and provides a detailed description of his experience there. Frankl claims that the first phase a prisoner experienced was shock.⁸⁴ He then describes the admission procedures: selection, shaving, numbering, delousing, and shower. Frankl's descriptions of sleep deprivation, the inability of prisoners to clean their teeth, and the wearing of "the same shirts for half a year" gives the impression that he endured a substantial amount of time in Auschwitz.⁸⁵ Frankl even portrays himself as an authority on the camp with the claim that "the prisoner of Auschwitz, in the first phase of shock, did not fear death. Even the gas chambers lost their horrors for him after the first few days."⁸⁶ This assertion is dubious at best, since Frankl was in Auschwitz only for a few days.

Frankl spent the majority of his internment in work camps and ghettos, and *Man's Search for Meaning* opens with the statement that "most of the events described here did not take place in the large and famous camps, but in the small ones where most of the real extermination took place."⁸⁷ But, disproportionately, the first third of the book describes his experiences in Auschwitz. Frankl also overlooks the fact that the death camps were where "the real extermination took place." Although his experience was no doubt horrifying, his suggestion that he knew "where the real extermination took place" is confused and apparently self-serving insofar as it positions him as an authority.

Frankl also played down the horrors of the camps. For example, he was once handed a picture of concentration camp prisoners and was asked, "Isn't this terrible, the dreadful staring faces—everything about it?" Frankl responded:

"Why?" I asked, for I genuinely did not understand. For at that moment I saw it all again: at 5:00 a.m. it was still pitch dark outside. I was lying on the hard boards in an earthen hut where about seventy of us were "taken care of." We were sick and did not have to leave camp for work; we did not have to go on parade.⁸⁸

His stoic response has an emotional appeal. Frankl also described the death of a young woman in the camps:

It may sound as if I had invented it; but to me it seems like a poem. This woman knew she would die in the next few days. But when I talked to her she was cheerful in spite of this knowledge. "I am grateful that fate has hit me so hard," she told me. "In my former life I was spoiled and did not take spiritual accomplishments seriously."⁸⁹

Frankl presented the dehumanization at Auschwitz in similar terms. Dehumanization, he said, led to a necessary detachment from reality through "a grim sense of humor" and "curiosity" because prisoners knew they "had nothing to lose except [their] ridiculously naked lives." He related this process of detachment to his previous experience of climbing:

Apart from a strange kind of humor, another sensation seized us: curiosity. I have experienced this kind of curiosity before, as a fundamental reaction toward a certain strange circumstance. When my life was once endangered by a climbing accident, I felt only one sensation at the crucial moment: curiosity, curiosity as to whether I should come out of it alive or with a fractured skull or some other injuries.⁹⁰

Frankl delineated how this detachment, although necessary and normal, could lead to a feeling of apathy. Thus “the prisoner passed from the first to the second phase: the phase of relative apathy, in which he achieved a kind of emotional death.”⁹¹ The root of apathy was the feeling that present reality was unbearable and that no future was in sight. Camp life destroyed not only hope in the future, but also any sense of normality:

His life seemed to him absolutely without future. He regarded it as over and done, as if he had already died. This feeling of lifelessness was intensified by other causes: in time, it was the limitlessness of the term of imprisonment which was most acutely felt; in space, the narrow limits of the prison. Anything outside the barbed wire became remote—out of reach and, in a way, unreal.⁹²

Frankl’s solution relied upon the promotion of attitudinal values. He claimed that, even in extreme circumstances, one can overcome apathy by choosing to find meaning in suffering:

Fundamentally, therefore, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what will become of him—mentally and spiritually. He may retain dignity even in a concentration camp. If there is meaning in life at all, then there must be meaning in suffering. . . . Here lie the opportunities of attaining the moral values that a difficult situation may afford him. And this decides whether he is worthy of his sufferings or not.⁹³

Frankl’s existentialist approach helped him find meaning in an oppressive and dehumanized situation. His testimony is peppered with such uplifting statements, which no doubt contributed to the book’s popularity. Frankl even found a certain “freedom” in the aestheticization of death: “For us, the meaning of life embraced the wider cycles of life and death, of suffering and dying. Suffering had become a task on which we did not want to turn our backs. We had to realize its hidden opportunities for achievement [and] . . . to find us suffering proudly—not miserably—knowing how to die.”⁹⁴

Lawrence Langer has described Frankl’s prescriptions for suffering and dying in Auschwitz as “almost sinister, certainly . . . insensitive.”⁹⁵ Langer also questioned how entering a gas chamber could “represent a hidden opportunity.” How could one “suffer proudly” and “know how to die” while being asphyxiated? But Frankl’s claims, insensitive as they may seem, represented his way of coming to terms with his experience. His narrative helped him resolve the psychic turmoil caused by, among other things, the knowledge of how his mother died:

Once those people—including my own mother by the way—had been crammed into gas chambers and they saw the canisters of Zyklon B gas thrown into a crowd of naked people, they saw there was no help. Then they began to pray, saying the Shema Israel, and sur-

rendered themselves to what God had bestowed on them—the Communists singing the “Marseillaise,” the Christians saying the Our Father, the Jews saying Kaddish upon each other.⁹⁶

There are no words to adequately depict the experience of dying in a gas chamber. But Frankl’s imaginary rendition, full of religious connotation, certainly stylizes the horror and misleadingly suggests that Jews, Christians, and others died together.

However, the affirmation of suffering and death overcame the meaninglessness only in a philosophical sense. On a more practical level, Frankl claimed that survival required retaining a sense of the future. In this regard he became fond of repeating Nietzsche’s prescription: “He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how.”⁹⁷

Frankl maintained that his conception of the future was sustained by two hopes: to see his wife again and to resume his work in logotherapy. In a telling and strangely prescient comment he imagined himself lecturing about his camp experiences. Reflecting upon “the trivial things” of daily survival, Frankl said:

I forced my thoughts to turn to another subject. Suddenly I saw myself standing on the platform of a well-lit, warm, and pleasant lecture room. In front of me sat an attentive audience on comfortable upholstered seats. I was giving a lecture on the psychology of the concentration camp! All that oppressed me at that moment became objective, seen and described from the remote viewpoint of science. By this method I succeeded somehow in rising above the situation, above the sufferings of the moment, and I observed them as if they were already of the past. Both I and my troubles became the object of an interesting psychoscientific study undertaken by myself.⁹⁸

His solution was thus to distance himself from his circumstances and to take flight into a possible future that ultimately became true.

Frankl demonstrated the necessity of “believing” in the future by recounting the following story. His senior block warden confided that he had dreamed the war would end on March 30, 1945. On March 29 the man fell ill, and he died two days later. Frankl interpreted the man’s death thusly:

Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man—his courage and hope, or lack of them—and the state of immunity of his body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect . . . the ultimate cause of my friend’s death was that the expected liberation did not come and he was severely disappointed.⁹⁹

Whether or not Frankl’s interpretation is valid, it falsely equates survival with having the proper attitude. He suggested that those who died were not strong enough to bear camp conditions, while the key to survival was maintaining a sense of destiny. Other critics of Frankl have recognized the questionable implications of his convictions. Langer had this response:

His own moral view is clear-cut, precise, almost self-congratulatory: “One could make a victory of those experiences . . . or one could ignore the challenge and simply vegetate, as

did a majority of prisoners.” It comes as no surprise to the reader, as he closes the volume, that the real hero of *Man’s Search for Meaning* is not man, but Viktor Frankl.¹⁰⁰

Langer saw through Frankl’s claims that Holocaust “survival [was] a matter of mental health.”¹⁰¹ Moreover, regarding Frankl’s claim that everyone needs a specific mission, Langer stated: “So nonsensically unspecific is this universal principle of being that one can imagine Heinrich Himmler announcing it to his SS men, or Joseph Goebbels sardonically applying it to the genocide of the Jews!”¹⁰² On Frankl’s claim that attitudinal values could turn tragedy into triumph, Langer wrote: “If this doctrine had been more succinctly worded, the Nazis might have substituted it for the cruel mockery of *Arbeit Macht Frei*.”¹⁰³ Langer recognized the close connection between Frankl’s claims and the cynicism of Nazi ideology. He did not go so far as to claim that Frankl was identifying with his oppressors, but Frankl’s empty heroics did seem to mirror the Nazi worldview.¹⁰⁴

Less critical readers regard Frankl as a quasi-spiritual figure who has transcended death. For example one commentator remarked, “Frankl’s experiences in the four concentration camps he survived, and the human heights which he reached in that setting, are almost legendary.”¹⁰⁵ And, more to the point: “The problem one faces in appreciating Frankl’s courage is that his heroics seem almost super-human, a model of reaction reserved for a saint.”¹⁰⁶

Frankl’s emphasis on stoic and heroic suffering in effect obscures the nihilistic evil of the Holocaust. In order to still the pain of loss and guilt, he constructed a narrative of meaning. He personalized this by suggesting that his background in psychology and his rock climbing experiences had prepared him to survive. Thus the Holocaust became a story of heroic survival that proved Frankl’s theories. The intellectual anchor for this vision was the “will” to derive meaning from human evil. Frankl’s own psychological “health” perhaps required just such intellectual gymnastics. Therefore, he successfully repressed the real tragedy of the Holocaust for himself and his followers. The millions of lives that had been cut short were no longer an issue. Either they had imbued their death with meaning, or they had given up; in other words, the meaninglessness of their death was their own responsibility.

To Redemption

Frankl’s focus on the prisoners’ psychological outlook led him to conclude that one must affirm life even when confronted with horrendous loss:

Someone who had lost a loved one around whom his life revolved . . . then despairingly raises the question of whether his own life any longer has meaning. There is something particularly pitiable about the man whose faith in the meaningfulness of his own existence totters in such a crisis. He has been left without moral reserves. He lacks that spiritual fiber which can be supplied only by a world-view unqualifiedly affirmative toward life. Lacking this fiber . . . he is unable in difficult times to “take” the blows of fate and to set his own strength against them.¹⁰⁷

Frankl's "unqualifiedly affirmative world-view" helped him overcome the devastating loss of his wife. He derived this optimism from an experience in the camp:

My mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise. . . . For the first time in my life I saw truth as it is set into song by so many poets. . . . I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: *The salvation of man is through love and in love.*¹⁰⁸

Frankl's longing for his wife obviously preoccupied him during his internment and eventually led him to have semi-mystical experiences:

The guard passed by, insulting me, and once again I communed with my beloved. More and more I felt that she was present, that she was with me; I had the feeling that I was able to touch her, able to stretch out my hand and grasp hers. The feeling was very strong; she was there. Then, at that very moment a bird flew down silently and perched in front of me, on the heap of soil which I had dug up from the ditch, and looked steadily at me.¹⁰⁹

In coming to terms with the loss of his wife, Frankl began to turn toward mysticism and religion. The anchor for his affirmative worldview and sense of salvation was a belief in a "super-meaning" or in God. Frankl claimed that "a good many men learned in concentration camp, and as a result of concentration camp, to believe in God again."¹¹⁰ He offered religion as the normative cure for loss: "It is self-evident that belief in a super-meaning—whether as a metaphysical concept or in the religious sense of Providence—is of the foremost psychotherapeutic and psychohygienic importance."¹¹¹

Frankl publicly declared his religious commitment in a speech to a youth meeting on June 15, 1947. He published the speech a month later as an article, "Der Platz der Religion in der Welt von Heute" (The Place of Religion in Today's World), in which he asserted the necessity of monotheism and the reality of "the concrete God of the Bible, the living God . . . to whom we have spoken in the ditches of the concentration camps and in the bombshelters."¹¹² He also revealed that the origins of his convictions about God were grounded not only in the circumstances of the camps. In order to buttress his claim for monotheism, Frankl called for a rejection of "gods we have come to know and learn in the last few years: Volk—Reich—Fuehrer; Blood and Soil; Race—and perhaps also Class."¹¹³ Thus his propagation of monotheism was motivated by both spiritual and political reasons. He wanted to replace the false gods of ideology with the one true and "living God."

Nazi Evil

Frankl's religious convictions seemed uneasy when confronting the evil of Nazism. Never hesitant when faced with overwhelming philosophical problems, Frankl attempted to resolve Nazi evil in his play *Synchronization in Buchenwald*. He later reflected upon the work, which was written within a few hours: "It was as if something

deep inside me dictated the play. I could hardly write fast enough.”¹¹⁴ *Synchronization* provides insight into the author’s consciousness, especially into how Frankl was working through his trauma and guilt.

Set in heaven, the play begins with a discussion among Socrates, Spinoza, and Kant. The philosophers decide to intervene in history to provide a moral lesson for humanity. Although they remain outside time and space, they arrive as observers at Buchenwald at the same time as Franz (who clearly represents Frankl), his brother Karl, and one other prisoner.

Karl expresses frustration at Franz’s rejection of his emigration visa, viewing it as “eternal self-sacrifice . . . you could have gone to America—but no: you didn’t want to leave your family.” Karl does not find Franz’s gesture heroic because “look what happened. To save you from the Gestapo, our sister sacrificed herself. And grief about Evi’s death killed father. And then it was *my* turn. And now mother is gone.”¹¹⁵ Directly from the play’s opening, it appears that Frankl was experiencing guilt about the fate of his family.

Franz and Karl’s mother looks down upon her sons from heaven. She provides a more heroic recounting of Franz’s sacrifice. She claims that he “stayed, with my husband and me. I know why: he didn’t want to leave us behind—yes, that was it. We implored him to go. No, he said, I want to remain. . . . He didn’t want us to know that he only stayed because of us.”¹¹⁶ The mother implores the philosophers to let her sons join her in heaven, showing them prayers and thoughts that her sons had directed toward her. And when her sons question whether she is alive, the mother asks the philosophers to reassure them that she is fine.

In order to fulfill the mother’s request to be with her sons a new character appears: a black angel. The angel—dressed as an SS man—is directed to test the sons. He tortures Karl for information about who switched numbers at the train station. If Karl talks, they will “all [be] finished.” Karl decides to adhere to Franz’s theory, which clearly mirrors Frankl’s: “Today I’ll give meaning to my life—according to your theory. Today I’ll catch myself a meaningful death! . . . I’ll stand the test.”¹¹⁷ When Franz realizes that his brother allowed himself to be beaten to death by the Gestapo in order to protect him, and in so doing fulfilled his theory of a meaningful death, he begins to feel overwhelming guilt. He then articulates the irresolvable dilemma of survival guilt, recalling that he traded a piece of bread for a coat that could have kept another alive through the winter. He extends guilt to everyone because “we have to make our choices, over and over again, every moment. None of us starts out as a devil, either—not even the SS-men.”¹¹⁸ Frankl links the guilt-ridden dilemma of survival with the evil perpetuated by the Nazis. In his play, he makes no clear distinction between the immorality required to survive and the crimes carried out by the SS. Everyone is initially innocent, but circumstances lead to guilt.

The author concludes with a glorification of death that reveals Frankl—not the philosophers—to have provided a moral lesson for humanity. As the philosophers watch Karl be put to death by the black angel, Socrates says to Kant and Spinoza: “Was

this not our fate, too? . . . At least, this was the way it worked with me: I became effective not through my dialogues but through my death.”¹¹⁹ Frankl then connects Karl’s heroic death to his own work on suicide prevention, and he uses the character of Kant to work through the lingering issue of suicide. Kant, who in the play is teaching a course to those who had committed suicide, excitedly describes how he plans to use Karl’s death as an example of the proper way to die. Kant also explains how those who chose suicide were to be punished and “regrouped into transports” destined for “Concentration Camp Sun-Planet Earth.”¹²⁰ Thus, committing suicide to escape the camps led back to the camps, not to heaven.

In using a concentration camp as “punishment” for those who chose suicide rather than capitulation to the Nazis, Frankl appears to suggest that they were cowards and that their deaths serve as examples of the wrong way to die. But by criminalizing the suicidal, Frankl could justify his own experimental research at Rothschild Hospital. The “lesson” also placed Frankl as a moral philosopher in the company of Socrates, Spinoza, and Kant. Yet Frankl’s “ascension” came at the expense of the dignity of those who refused to become pawns for the Nazis, and belittled incomprehensible human tragedy.

The Mountain Top

Frankl’s attempted resolution of Nazi evil and his belief in God are perhaps surprising responses to his devastating experiences. The dehumanization and the novel display of human evil in the Holocaust led many intellectuals to conclude that “God is dead.” If there were a God, how could six million people be put senselessly to death? How could God fail to intervene?

In response, Frankl claimed that if belief in God is unconditional “it will stand and face the fact that six million died in the Nazi Holocaust; if it is not unconditional it will fall away if only a single child has to die.”¹²¹ Frankl argued that his “personal experiences offer evidence—religion did not die in Auschwitz, nor ‘after Auschwitz,’ to allude to the title of a book that was authored by a rabbi (who incidentally had not been there).”¹²² Frankl’s remark referred to Richard L. Rubenstein’s controversial *After Auschwitz* (1966), which rejected “the traditional biblical theology of covenant and election” in the name of a “death-of-God” theology.¹²³ But for Frankl, working through the reality of Auschwitz did not require a profound reevaluation of theological propositions. In the final analysis, Frankl’s conclusions about the existence of God—deeply tied to his search for meaning, and born amid his trauma—offered psychological comfort for him and his followers.

Theodor Adorno famously originated the view that the Holocaust represented a rupture in Western civilization and that, after Auschwitz, poetry cannot be written.¹²⁴ But Adorno also made less well-known comments on survivors of Auschwitz:

It is not wrong to raise the . . . question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living—especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been

killed, may go on living. His mere survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz, this is the drastic guilt of him who was spared.¹²⁵

Although undoubtedly harsh, Adorno's insight seems directly to reference Frankl's testimony. "Drastic guilt" was evident in Frankl's writings, especially in his equation of survival with having the proper attitude. Langer originally recognized the mirroring of Nazi cynicism in Frankl's prescriptions for survival; similarly, Adorno pointed out the "coldness" of the survivor's "bourgeois subjectivity." Frankl's "coldness" perhaps was exemplified when, late in life, he told an interviewer "I do pity those younger people who did not know the camps or live during the war."¹²⁶ Although perhaps Frankl wanted the youth to gain more perspective and a deeper appreciation of life, nevertheless one would expect Frankl to express happiness, not pity, that today's youth had been spared such experiences. Furthermore, this "coldness" was suggested in his efforts to prevent suicide under Nazi direction and in the way he later interpreted those actions.

In sum, Frankl was a peculiar representative of the Holocaust. Although his testimony became one of the most popular Holocaust narratives, Frankl used it to promote logotherapy on a global scale. As Langer recognized, it seems as if Frankl was torn between how things really were and how he wished they had been in retrospect. We now know that Frankl had worked through his trauma before he dictated his testimony, which presents elements of atrocity as a mere backdrop to his heroic and mythical view of survival.

By the end of *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl had shed his burdens and claimed that the survivor "had nothing left to fear but his God." If we consider his fear of God equivalent to his multilayered guilt, it follows that Frankl's confrontation with God/judgment and his subsequent conquest of his fear allowed for the assertion of an ultimate meaning to his life and survival. After working through his fear of God, Frankl could claim this about the difference between a religious and irreligious man:

On his way to find the ultimate meaning of life, the irreligious man, as it were, has not yet reached the highest peak, but rather has stopped at the next to highest. . . . And what is the reason the irreligious man does not go further? It is because he does not want to lose the "firm ground under his feet." The true summit is barred from his vision; it is hidden in the fog, and he does not risk venturing into it, into this uncertainty. Only the religious man hazards it.¹²⁷

Langer was correct in pointing out that it was as if Frankl had transfigured Auschwitz into a test of religious sensibility. Frankl seemingly could make sense of his survival only if he were to venture toward a realm of providential destiny in which he could fulfill his urge for ultimate meaning and, finally, quell his psychic tension.

Notes

1. Lawrence Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), p. 24.

2. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage, 1988), p. 40.
3. See Viktor Frankl, *Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht* (Munich: Quintessenz, 1995), p. 99.
4. Frankl, *Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht*, p. 44. Frankl claimed that Wolfgang Soucek first dubbed logotherapy the “third Viennese school of psychotherapy,” after Freud’s and Adler’s. See Viktor Frankl, “Logotherapy in a Nutshell,” in *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), pp. 101–37.
5. Gordon Allport, preface to Victor Frankl’s *From Death-Camp to Existentialism: A Psychiatrist’s Path to a New Therapy*, trans. Ilse Lasch (Boston: Beacon, 1959), pp. ix–xii.
6. Lawrence Langer, “The Literature of Auschwitz,” in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, eds. Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1994), p. 604.
7. Lawrence Langer, *Versions of Survival*, p. 24.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
10. For a description of the concept of “working through” the Holocaust, see Dominick La Capra, *Representing the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), especially pp. 205–11. Also Saul Friedländer, “Trauma, Memory, Transference,” in *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, Geoffrey Hartman, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 260–61. La Capra derived his idea from psychoanalysis and subsequently from the notion of the unconscious. Since I am interested in the issue of survivor’s guilt my use of the term will be less psychoanalytical and instead will focus on how Frankl came to terms with his traumatic Holocaust experience and the layers of guilt created by his survival. For his part, Friedländer was concerned with how the historian “works through” the testimonies and documents “without giving in to the temptation of closure”—a concern we will heed when reflecting on Frankl’s production.
11. According to Frankl, he initiated a correspondence with Freud. Freud eventually published one of Frankl’s letters in the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*. See Frankl, “Zur Mimischen Bejahung und Verneinung,” *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* 10 (1924), pp. 437–38. Frankl was only nineteen years old when the article was published.
12. Viktor Frankl, interview by Tom Corrigan, tape recording, 1981, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California.
13. Viktor Frankl, “Viktor Frankl,” in *Psychotherapie in Selbstdarstellung*, ed. Ludwig J. Pongratz (Vienna: Hans Huber, 1973).
14. Viktor Frankl, “Psychotherapie und Weltanschauung,” *Internationale Zeitschrift für Individualpsychologie* (1925), pp. 250–52.
15. See Viktor Frankl, “Selbstmordprophylaxe und Jugendberatung,” *Münchener Medizinische Wochenschrift*, October 4, 1929, p. 1675.
16. Frankl, *Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht*, p. 48.
17. Freud, quoted in Karl Fallend, *Sonderlinge Träumer Sensitive: Psychoanalyse auf dem Weg zur Institution und Profession*, Veröffentlichungen des Ludwig-Boltzman-Instituts für Geschichte und Gesellschaft 26 (Vienna: n.p., 1995), p. 364, fn. 6.

18. For unknown reasons, Pötl had his application reconsidered and redated to January 1941. See Pötl's Nazi Party file, available at the Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes.
19. See Frankl's *Gutachten* in the Staatsarchiv Vienna, document PB 7223.
20. See *Index of Psychiatric Krankenhaus Baumgartnerhöhe, 1934–1938*, Wien Landes Stadt Archiv.
21. See *Zentralblatt für Psychotherapie* 10 (1937), pp. 7–8.
22. Matthias Göring, *Zentralblatt für Psychotherapie* (1933), quotation in Geoffrey Cocks, *Psychotherapy in the Third Reich: The Göring Institute* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 159.
23. Frankl, "Zur geistigen Problematik der Psychotherapie," *Zentralblatt für Psychotherapie* 10 (1937), pp. 33–45.
24. See Timothy E. Pytell, "Viktor Frankl and the Genesis of the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy," *Psychoanalytic Review* 88 (April 2001), pp. 1–24.
25. See Norman Bentwich, "The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Austria, 1938–1942," in *The Jews of Austria*, ed. Josef Fraenkel (London: Vallentine and Mitchell, 1970), pp. 475–76. Bentwich's article is based on personal remembrance, so this date may not be exact.
26. Frankl's decision was surprising because so many Jews were desperate to leave but didn't have the opportunity. See Walter Langer, "An American Analyst in Vienna during the Anschluss," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 14 (1978), pp. 37–54.
27. Frankl, "Viktor Frankl," *Psychotherapie in Selbstdarstellung*, pp. 177–204.
28. Frankl, interview by Tom Corrigan.
29. See Viktor Frankl, "Pervitin Intrazisternal," *Ars Medici* 1 (1942), pp. 58–60.
30. Frankl, *Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht*, p. 57.
31. For a description of these experiments see Frankl, interview by Tom Corrigan. Frankl's written documentation is Frankl, "Pervitin Intrazisternal," pp. 58–60.
32. See Timothy E. Pytell, "Was nicht in seinen Büchern steht: Viktor Frankl und seine Auto-Biographie," *Werkblatt: Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und Gesellschaftskritik* 39 (1997), pp. 95–121. Cf. also Timothy E. Pytell, "The Missing Pieces of the Puzzle: A Reflection on the Odd Career of Viktor Frankl," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35:2 (2000), pp. 281–306.
33. *Totenbuch Theresienstadt* (Vienna, 1971), p. 32. This was the so-called eleventh transport.
34. See George Berkley, *The Story of Theresienstadt* (Boston: Branden, 1993), pp. 41–60. Also Zdenek Lederer, *Ghetto Theresienstadt* (New York: Fertig, 1993), pp. 35–57. Finally, the 900-page tome, H. G. Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945* (Tübingen, 1960).
35. I thank Ernest Seinfeld for providing these monthly "Tätigkeitsberichte."
36. Berkley, *The Story of Theresienstadt*, p. 92.
37. Berkley, *The Story of Theresienstadt*, p. 123. See also Viktor Frankl, "Psychohygiene im Notstand," *Hygiene* (October 1952). Frankl described his suicide prevention activities in a lec-

ture given at the International Congress for Psychotherapy in Leiden, Holland, in September 1951.

38. See Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945*, p. 316.

39. Konrad Kwiet, “Suicide in the Jewish Community,” *Leo Baeck Yearbook* 38 (1993), p. 163. Kwiet based his claims on a “personal communication with Dr. Edith Kramer,” and he made no mention of Frankl’s suicide-prevention squad.

40. George Berkley, *Vienna and Its Jews: The Tragedy of Success* (Boston: Madison, 1988), p. 298.

41. For a list and a description of the outcome of transports from Theresienstadt, see Lederer, *Ghetto Theresienstadt*, pp. 192–242.

42. See *Totenbuch Theresienstadt*, p. 32. According to Lederer, *Ghetto Theresienstadt*, p. 241, only 250 of the 1,500 prisoners on this transport survived selection by Dr. Mengele. Frankl’s wife also survived selection, but later died.

43. Frankl, *Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht*, p. 68.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

45. Frankl, “Dr. Robert Schuller Interviews Viktor Frankl: How to Find Meaning in Life,” *Possibilities: The Magazine of Hope* (March/April 1991), p. 10.

46. The camps of the Kaufering group were numbered from I through XI and were established around Landesberg. Kaufering III was a work camp established in June 1944, and it held up to 2,000 prisoners. See Martin Weinmann, ed., *Das nationalsozialistische Lagersystem* (Frankfurt: Zweitausendeins, 1990), pp. 195, 558.

47. Frankl, *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*, p. 6.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

49. Frankl, *Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht*, p. 68.

50. Frankl, *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*, p. 54.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

54. I thank Ernest Seinfeld for this citation.

55. See Marianne Gruber, “Der Wille zum Sinn,” *Die Pestsäule* (December 1974), p. 224.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

57. Frankl, *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*, p. 62.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

59. Frankl, “There is no Collective Guilt,” *Austrian Information* 41:6 (1988), p. 5. Frankl’s c.v. from the Archiv Universität Wien reveals he worked at the DP hospital.

60. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), pp. 90–91.

61. Frankl, *Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht*, pp. 73–77.
62. Frankl, *Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht*, p. 83.
63. Frankl, *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*, p. 35.
64. “The main tenets of logotherapy were justified by the acid test of the concentration camp.” Frankl, quoted in Mary Hall, “Conversation with V. E. Frankl,” *Psychology Today* 9 (February 1968), p. 63.
65. Frankl, *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*. This passage is quoted from the book jacket. See also p. 104.
66. Paul Polak, “Frankl’s Existential Analysis,” *American Journal of Psychotherapy* III (1949), p. 518.
67. Frankl, quoted in David Cohen, “The Frankl Meaning,” *Human Behavior* 6 (July 1977), p. 60.
68. Frankl, quoted in Hall, “Conversation with V. E. Frankl,” p. 58.
69. Also note Gordon Allport’s claim about Frankl’s intellectual legitimacy: “How could he—every possession lost, every value destroyed, suffering from hunger, cold and brutality, hourly expecting extermination—how could he find life worth preserving? *A psychiatrist who personally has faced such extremity is a psychiatrist worth listening to*” (emphasis mine). Frankl, *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*.
70. Gabriel Frankl died on February 30, 1943; see *Totenbuch Theresienstadt*.
71. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, p. 27.
72. Frankl, “Zur geistigen Problematik,” p. 40.
73. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, p. 33.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
75. *Ibid.*
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
78. Viktor Frankl, “Facing the Transitoriness of Human Existence,” *Generations: Aging and the Human Spirit* 14 (Fall 1990), p. 7. See also Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, p. 64. But in the context of the Holocaust this is a curious claim. We know Frankl had other choices, but the atrocity of the Holocaust is that it left people little or no choice over their fate.
79. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, pp. 108–9.
80. Aharon Appelfeld, “After the Holocaust,” in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), p. 84.
81. Frankl, interview by Tom Corrigan.
82. Frankl, *Was nicht in meinen Büchern steht*, p. 84.
83. Frankl, *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*, p. 4.

84. Ibid., p. 7.
85. Ibid., pp. 14–16.
86. Ibid., pp. 16–17.
87. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 1.
88. Ibid., p. 47.
89. Ibid., pp. 68–69.
90. Ibid., p. 14.
91. Ibid., p. 18.
92. Ibid., p. 71.
93. Ibid., pp. 66–67.
94. Ibid., pp. 78–83.
95. Langer, *Versions of Survival*, p. 20.
96. Frankl, quoted in Cohen, "The Frankl Meaning," p. 61.
97. Frankl, *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*, p. 76.
98. Ibid., pp. 73–74.
99. Ibid., p. 75. Ironically, this is probably when Frankl became block warden. See also Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, p. 101.
100. Langer, *Versions of Survival*, p. 24.
101. Ibid., p. 26.
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid., p. 28.
104. What is perhaps most impressive about Langer's reading is that he was unaware of Frankl's 1937 article promoting a form of psychotherapy palatable to the Nazis. Frankl's language of "empty heroics" originates in that article and continues in his version of survival.
105. Reuven Bulka, "Logotherapy as a Response to the Holocaust," *Tradition* 15 (1975), p. 86.
106. Irving Halperin, *Messengers from the Dead: Literature of the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), p. 32.
107. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, p. 29.
108. Ibid., p. 36.
109. Ibid., p. 40.
110. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, p. 104.
111. Ibid., p. 33.

112. Viktor Frankl, "Der Platz der Religion in der Welt von heute," *Mahnruf: Für Freiheit und Menschenrecht* 6 (July 1947), p. 2.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
114. Viktor Frankl, *Synchronization in Buchenwald*, trans. Joseph Fabry (Berkeley, CA: Institute of Logotherapy Press), p. i.
115. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
117. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
118. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
119. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
120. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
121. Viktor Frankl, *The Unconscious God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975), pp. 15–16.
122. Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* (New York: Insight, 1997), p. 152.
123. See Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), especially "Part III: Theology and Contemporary Judaism," pp. 157–293.
124. Adorno's claim implied that the incomprehensible horror of the Holocaust cannot be aestheticized without reducing it to some type of norm.
125. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), p. 363.
126. Frankl, quoted in Matthew Scully, "Viktor Frankl at Ninety: An Interview," *First Things* 52 (April 1995), p. 43.
127. Frankl, *The Unconscious God*, pp. 56–57.