

Alfried Längle, M.D., Ph.D.

International Society for Logotherapy and Existential Analysis, Vienna

## The Art of Involving the Person – Fundamental Existential Motivations as the Structure of the Motivational Process\*

### ABSTRACT

From an existential point of view, motivation essentially involves the person (with his or her<sup>1</sup> specific ability to make decisions) in his or her world. Thus, motivation may thus be defined as a process in dialogical movement from the present, given reality towards the person's goals and intentions. From this perspective, motivation is an expression of the (mostly unconscious) human intention to be-come, to come into existence. This process unfolds according to the fundamental themes of existence. Thus, motivation is fundamentally related to the structure of existence, which in turn shapes the substance of the motivation. Operationally, motivation relates to the (spiritual or noetic) power of the person as described in the Personal Existential Analysis (PEA).

The intention of this paper is to show the relationship between the structure of existence and motivational processes. According to the "four cornerstones of existence" a person must first come to terms with his or her being in the world, then with his or her own life and finally with his or her identity. Subsequent to these tasks, the person is open for and prone to enter into relationships with a greater context (horizon), from which personal meaning is derived. This process has been documented throughout 20 years of phenomenological empirical research.

Moreover, these four fundamental aspects of existence form a matrix for the psychopathological understanding of psychological disorders and provide the background for clinical interventions. They represent the structural (or content-based) model of modern Existential Analytical Psychotherapy.

**Key words:** Motivation, Existential Psychology, Existential Analysis, Fundamental Existential Motivations

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<sup>1</sup> The male formulation in general topics is used in a generic sense for easier reading and equally embraces both genders

## 1. What Makes for Motivation?

Discussion about motivation is ubiquitous in social sciences, including psychology, psychotherapy, pedagogy, sociology, and politics, as well as in marketing and economics. It seems obvious that we need sufficient motivation for the achievement of our life tasks, for creativity, growth, social functioning and personal fulfillment. However, the substantial question inevitably arises as to the nature of motivation: Do we really need to *become motivated by extrinsic or outside sources* or are we inherently and *originally motivated* due to our nature? Is the essence of what we term the "motivational process" an act of *receiving* something? Or does the motivational process merely consist of shaping this primordial, omnipresent process? If the latter is true, then motivating someone would simply require one to provide a direction for that preestablished energy. This would imply that we do not help people to become motivated, but rather aid them in finding the most appropriate avenue to implement the existent motivational force in their lives. The motivational process would thus provide a theme, a direction for the intentionality, a reason for the decision, and would reveal the value of a particular action for one's life. In other words, motivating someone would involve helping them find possibilities, values, authenticity and meaning for what they do.

Alfred Adler or George Kelly (cf. BRUNNER ET AL. 1985, 290) took the position that human beings are originally motivated by their nature and required no external source of stimulation. This view was shared by Viktor Frankl, one of Adler's disciples or adherents of his school. This position was also taken by the "potentialists" of the humanistic psychology movement, such as CARL ROGERS (1961) who argued that if the circumstances are favorable for activity, humans develop all of their activities and potentials on their own.

## 2. Frankl's "Will to Meaning"

For Frankl, we are indeed motivated by *biological* and *social* drives, but primarily and most profoundly by our personal "will to meaning". This means that any person is fundamentally moved by a *spiritual* striving for a deeper *understanding* of one's experiences or activities. This motivational force is regarded to be a direct result of the essence of human "nature". The *spiritual striving* as well as the *will to meaning*, is observed and rooted in the spiritual (= noetic or personal) dimension of the person.

According to FRANKL'S theory of Logotherapy (1973, XVIII ff.; 1959, 672) this spiritual dimension is marked by the three basic human potentials<sup>2</sup>: "psychological spirituality"<sup>3</sup> freedom and

<sup>2</sup> Frankl calls them also "existentials" – referring to Heidegger's term "Existentialien".

<sup>3</sup> "Psychological spirituality" explains what is meant. It captures the meaning of the situation and activates the person's potential of being free. – Responsibility on the other hand is also related to freedom – it imposes itself only there where humans are free. – Seen from these practical aspects freedom reveals itself as the decisive factor of the spiritual dimension. – The importance of freedom explains why it is more often treated in philosophical and psychological theories than meaning and responsibility.

responsibility. The quest for meaning and the primary motivational process can therefore be understood as concomitant necessities inherent in this dimension. They basically consist of the challenge created by our freedom.

Freedom paradoxically brings along a compulsion of choice – being free means that we are forced to choose. A prerequisite for making any real choice is the understanding of both the content and the context in which the decision is to be made. The intentional goal of the will arises from this horizon, and if adopted by the individual, it turns out to be a value, probably the highest value, in the given situation. These are the constituent elements of *existential meaning*: The greatest (or highest or deepest) value in the given situation, which can be envisioned and understood by the individual to be within the reach of his or her abilities. Frankl's primary motivation thus turns out to be an immediate consequence of the realisation of the person's will, the human expression of freedom.

Frankl developed this logotherapeutic concept of motivation in an era that was dominated by determinism, reductionism, subjectivism and monadology, all of which he fervently combated. In spite of exposure to these ideas during his education, Frankl's personal and scientific accomplishments in Logotherapy are evidence that he was able to transcend these tendencies. He achieved this holism especially with respect to the concepts of meaning and of self-transcendence - both cornerstones of his anthropology. However, in the motivational angle of his theory, Frankl may have adopted some individualistic thinking by tracing back and reducing the concept of existential motivation to the concept of will. He even reinforced his motivational concept by naming it the "will" to meaning. Frankl himself explained the decision of calling it "will" to meaning by his intention to formulate a counterweight to Nietzsche's "will to power". In doing so, Frankl replaced the instrumental value of "power" with the more spiritual value of "meaning". Later on in chapter four we bring this critical remark to its conclusion by describing a concept, which we have formulated on an existential ground.

### 3. The Modern Quest for Meaning

In our times, arguments about freedom do not dominate the discussion of social problems, of psychopathologies and the scientific discourse. The neo-darwinian debate, that arose as a consequence of the genetic discoveries in the 60's and 70's and that led to the polarity of "freedom and necessity" and to the outburst of free will against repression in 1968, is no longer pertinent.

Nowadays different problems are predominant: Marital and family life has widely evolved into broadly accepted forms of being single; the communities, social experiments and sexual promiscuity of the 70's have been replaced with fantasy games in virtual worlds, TV-channel-hopping and internet surfing. Homosexuality has been widely accepted as a normal version of sexuality. The social cohesion in politics and economy has loosened and been replaced by a high degree of individualism, competition and rivalry, and a new feeling of freedom which uti-

lizes and challenges the resources of the individual to the utmost degree. This new feeling of freedom brings with it isolation not only for older generations, but also for entire cultures.

The *"schizophrenic" nature of our times* is that we have the best structures of communication in human history, that we travel internationally, more than any generation before us, but that in the end we are lonelier and more culturally isolated than ever before. The increase in contact between people of different cultures has led to a consumption of the pleasant aspects of cultures but not to a true dialogue. This lack of profound dialogue, and consequently of mutual understanding, provokes an anxiety of alienation and of loss of identity. This phenomenon can be observed, for example, in patterns tourism and immigration. The increase in speed has brought along a decrease in contact, the increase of information has led to a decrease in communication, and the increase of traffic has destroyed much of the personal encounter. The tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup> is a prime example of the huge and frightening failure in communication and encounter between different cultures.

#### 4. Existential Paradigm

Considering the unique problems of our day and age, it is imperative that we adapt our theories to the needs and sufferings of today. We have therefore further elaborated the motivational concept in Existential Analysis into an approach that is by no means less humanistic or personal. Our new concept follows a different paradigm. As a complement and counterweight to the individualistic paradigm of freedom and personal will, which laid groundwork for the development of this postmodern era, we now propose an **interpersonal paradigm**.

This is the direction we have adopted in modern Existential Analysis. We have enlarged our motivational concept by basing it on the most original activity of personhood: Our being essentially dialogical, prone to and directed towards exchange with others. Being oneself, finding oneself needs the field of tension of the "inter-", the "between", the "aida" as the Japanese say (KIMURA 1982; 1995, 103ff.). This spiritual need for communication and dialogue is also underlined by the numerous personality disorders related to the loss of self! – There is no "me" without a "you", as both Buber and Frankl explaining. Being oneself as a person means being in communication – being in a continuous intrapersonal and interpersonal exchange of contents and values. It means fine-tuning the outer with the inner reality and vice versa, coordinating oneself with the objective meaning of the situation. Motivation is understood as engaging in that continuous flow which is established by nature between the person and his world. They are inseparably connected and interrelated, in uninterrupted reciprocal action. Or as Heidegger has defined it: Being a person, "Dasein", means "being-in-the-world", means dealing with "otherness".

## 5. Existential Concept of Motivation

From an existential point of view, dialogue (or "communication" as Jaspers says) is an essential constituent in human psychology and in understanding the essence of human existence. If we take the capacity for *dialogue as a characteristic* of being a person (i.e. a being with mind and spirit and a potential for decision-making), then humans are always waiting for their completion by a "partner" in the broadest sense. As dialogical beings we expect and look for something or someone who "speaks" to us, calls us, needs us, talks to us, looks for us, challenges us. We get the necessary *provocation* through everything which confronts us, which challenges us, which engages us. At exactly that moment the object before us starts "speaking" to us. Being provoked means being called. This provocation is the *starting point for any motivation*. In other words, seen from an existential point of view, **motivation means involvement of the person**, initiating the personal processes by provocation in some kind of vis-à-vis. Of course the best vis-à-vis is a partner speaking to us. This process-oriented capacity of the person is described in the theory of the method of "Personal Existential Analysis (PEA)" (LÄNGLE 1994c) which seeks to engage personal potential in a process of dealing with information and encounter.

This model, which is fundamental for any kind of involvement with the person, helps to distinguish **three steps** within the motivational process:

1. **Recognizing** something in its worth or value, in as far as it speaks to us. This is often a challenge demanding action on our part. What a situation 'pro'-vokes in us is indicative of or points to the situational meaning involved. To recognize this inner movement lays way to find personal meaning.
2. **Harmonizing**. Bringing the perceived value, challenge or meaning into accordance with our inner reality (i.e. examining the congruence with the rest of our values, with attitudes, abilities and capabilities and with our conscience etc.).
3. **Giving inner consent** to one's own **active** involvement. This consent and the act of harmonizing the new value with one's personal reality lead to the presence of the inner person in one's actions and to the integration of the new value and the person into a **wider context** (meaning).

Omitting the person in the motivational process, according to our opinion, misses the main thrust of human motivation. Instead it focuses on a sort of reflex or reaction, but no "action". Any act or deed is defined as a *decided* act and is therefore *voluntary* and free.

If we accept motivation as a *free* decision to act, then we must also take the concept of one's *will* into consideration. FRANKL (1970, 37-44; 1987, 101-104) saw meaning as the motor in free will. An existential view of human will views it as the anthropological axis of existence. A *process-oriented description* of will, however, relies on the fundamentals of existence and therefore requires more than just meaning as the basis for constituting will. Free and realistic will is based on three more elements:

1. On the real ability and **capacity** of the subject;
2. On the **emotional** perception of the situational **value**;
3. On the inner **permission** for that act, emerging from an agreement with one's concepts of life and morality.

Before proceeding further, let us conclude this part of the exposition dealing with the structure of motivation by adding a reflection on the initial problem of the two basic concepts of motivation: Do people need to be motivated externally or can the motivation only be shaped, and channeled, because people are *intrinsically* motivated? Our theory is that this existential concept *bridges two seemingly opposing positions*:

- a) Motivation emerges through the *interrelation* with the vis-à-vis. Being touched and provoked, as well as understanding the situation is akin to *being called* on by something or someone. This appeal activates the constitutional 'being-in-the-world' because of a recognition or understanding of what this particular situation is about. This process is the functional equivalent of the recognition of the situational or existential meaning. Furthermore, it implies that we *receive an impulse* from the recognition of the essential message from our vis-à-vis (outer world, but also body, feeling, thoughts).
- b) The motivation is shaped and constituted via our *understanding* of the context and by our inner agreement.

Seen in that light, the notion of 'being-in-the-world' provides the ground, on which personal forces are activated. This happens by a perceptive encounter with some form of otherness or with oneself.

Let us now have a closer look at the four fundamental motivations for a fulfilled existence.

## 6. The four Fundamental Conditions for a Fulfilling Existence

In the first part we have elaborated a crucial point for motivation, which lies in attaining the *dialogical potential* of the subject. Its *pro-vocation* or elicitation can be regarded as the starting point for any motivation. The need and the ability for dialogue are seen as the dynamic essence of the person (with subsequent potentials like freedom and will). This dialogue (with the world and with oneself) is a prerequisite for developing motivation. We have pointed out that, for this reason, there is *no motivation without cognition, accordance, bringing into harmony, inner consent and meaning*. The concept of motivational freedom - defined as the movement of a person towards a free act within the world - must take the structure of will into account. The human will is fundamentally related to the structure of existence, which in turn substantially shapes motivation. This provocation into dialogue and the relation to the fundamental structure of existence is the *central hypothesis* of this paper.

A closer look reveals that this concept of motivation implies a dialogical *confrontation* with the given facts of our existence. All preconditions of existence can be summarized in four fundamental structures, the "cornerstones of existence":

- the *world* in its factuality and potentiality
- *life* with its network of relationships and its feelings
- *being oneself* as a unique, autonomous *person*
- the *wider context* in which to place oneself = *development* through one's activities, opening one's *future*

Existence in our understanding requires a continuous *confrontation* and a dialogical *exchange* with each of these four dimensions. It is on this basis that the subject forms his or her specific notions about reality. These four realities challenge the person to respond, they ask for his or her inner consent, activate his or her inner freedom. But they are not only challenging dimensions – they are also structures which, at the same time, allow one to entrust oneself to each of these given realities. Their facticity is the fundament of what we call existence. As such they fundamentally move our existence and can be called "fundamental existential motivations" (LÄNGLE 1992a, b; 1994a; 1997a, b; 1998c).

## 7. The World – Dealing with Conditions and Possibilities

*The first condition* arises from the simple fact that I am here at all, that I am in the world. But where to go from here? Can I cope with my being there? Do I understand it? I am there, and as an old German saying from the 12th century goes: "I don't know where I am from, I don't know where to, I wonder why I am so glad?" I am here, here I am – how is that even possible? Questioning this seemingly self-evident fact lead one into great depths, if one permits oneself this exploration. And if I really think about it, I realize that I cannot truly comprehend this fact. My existence appears like an island in an ocean of ignorance and connections that surpass me. The most adequate and traditional attitude towards the incomprehensible is one of astonishment. Basically, I can only be astonished that I am here at all.

But I *am* here, which sets before me *the fundamental question of existence: I am – but can I be?* To ask a more practical version of this question I need only apply it to my own situation. In that case, I may ask myself: Can I claim my place in this world under the conditions and with the possibilities I have? A positive answer to this question demands three things: *Protection, space and support*. Do I enjoy *protection*, acceptance, do I feel at home somewhere? Do I have enough *space* to be here? Where do I find *support* in my life? If these conditions of existence are not met, the result will be restlessness, insecurity and fear (cf. LÄNGLE 1996). But if I *do* have these three things, I will be able to trust in the world and have confidence in myself, maybe even faith in God. The sum of these experiences of trust is the fundamental trust, the trust in whatever I consider to be the last and final support in my life.

But, in order to be here, it is not enough to find protection, space and support – I also have to *take hold of* these conditions, to make a *decision* in their favor, to *accept* them. My *active* part in this fundamental condition of being here is to accept the positive and endure the negative. To *accept* means to be ready to occupy the space, to rely on the support and to trust the protection; in short 'to be there' and not to flee. To *endure* means to have the strength to persist in spite of whatever is difficult, menacing or unalterable, and to 'support' what cannot be changed. Life imposes certain conditions on me, and the world has its laws, which I can only accept. This idea is expressed in the word 'subject' in the sense of 'being subject to or dependent upon'. On the other hand, these conditions are reliable, solid and steady. To let them be, to accept them as given, is only possible if I, too, can be at the same time. Therefore, to accept means to let each other be, because there is still *enough space* for me, and the circumstances do not threaten me anymore. Human beings procure the space they need with their ability to tolerate and to accept conditions. If this is not the case, psychodynamic forces take over the guidance in the form of coping *reactions*, which aim secure life (LÄNGLE 1998a).

## 8. Life – Dealing with Relationships and Emotions

Once one has space in the world, one can fill it with life. Simply being there is not enough. We want our existence to be *good*, since it is more than a mere fact. It has a 'pathic dimension', which means that it does not simply happen, but that we experience and suffer or enjoy it. Being alive means to cry and to laugh, to experience joy and suffering, to go through pleasant and unpleasant things, to be lucky or unlucky and to experience worth and worthlessness. We experience happiness to the same extent and depth that we experience suffering. The amplitude of emotionality is equal in both directions, whether this suits us or not.

Therefore I am confronted with the *fundamental question of life*: I am alive – but do I *like* this fact? Is it good to be here? It is not only strain and suffering that can take away the joy of life. It may also be the superficiality of daily life and the self neglect of one's lifestyle that make life stale. In order to seize life, to love it, I need three things: *Relationship, time and closeness*. To verify the presence of life in one's own situation we may ask ourselves the following questions: Do I have *relationships*, in which I experience closeness, in which I invest time and which give me a sense of community? – What do I take *time* for? Do I take time for valuable things, which are worth my time? To take time for something means to give away a part of one's life while spending it with someone or something. Do I feel close and maintain *closeness* to things, plants, animals and people? Do I permit myself to come close to another person? If relationships, closeness and time are lacking, *longing* will arise, then *coldness* and finally depression. But if these three conditions are fulfilled, I can experience myself as being in *harmony with the world and with myself*, and I can sense the depth of life. These experiences form the fundamental value, the most profound *feeling for the inherent value* of life. Our experience of any



and all values are shaped by this fundamental value, it colors the emotions and affects and represents our yardstick for anything we might feel to be of worth. Our theory of emotion and theory of values relate to this fundamental aspect of our existence.

Still, it is not sufficient to experience relationships, time and closeness. My own consent, my active participation is called for. I *seize* life (*carpe diem*), engage in it, when I *turn toward* other people, toward things, animals, intellectual work or to myself, when I move towards it, get close, get in touch or pull it towards me. If I turn toward a loss, *grief* arises. This 'turning to' will make life reverberate within me. If life is to make me move freely, my consent to being touched (to my feelings) is a prerequisite.

## 9. Being a Person – Dealing with Uniqueness and Conscience

As pleasant as this emotional movement may be, it is still not sufficient for a fulfilling existence. In spite of my being related to life and to people, I am aware of my being separate, different. There is a singularity that makes me an 'I' and distinguishes me from everybody else. I realize that I am on my own, that I have to master my existence myself and that, basically, I am alone and maybe even lonely. But in addition to my solitude, there is *so much more* that is equally singular. The *diversity, beauty and uniqueness* in all of this make me feel respect for it.

In the midst of this world, I discover myself unmistakably, I am *with* myself and I am given to myself. This places before me the *fundamental question of being a person*: I am myself – *may* I be like this? Do I feel free to be *like that*? Do I have the *right* to be what I am and to behave as I do? This is the domain of identity, of knowing oneself and of ethics. In order to succeed, it is necessary to have experienced three things: *Attention, justice and appreciation*. Again one can verify the presence of this third cornerstone of existence in one's life by asking: Who sees me? Who considers my uniqueness and respects my *boundaries*? Do people do me *justice*? For what am I *appreciated* – for what can I appreciate myself? If these experiences are missing, *loneliness* will be the result, *hysteria* (histrionic disorders) as well as a need to hide behind *shame*. If, on the other hand, I experience these qualities, I will find myself, find my authenticity, my relief and my self-respect. The sum of these experiences builds *one's worth*, the most profound worth of what identifies my own self at its core: My self-esteem.

In order to be able to be oneself, it is not sufficient to simply experience attention, justice and appreciation. I also have to say "yes to myself". This requires my active participation: To *look* at other people, to encounter them and, at the same time, to delineate myself and to stand by my own, and to refuse whatever does not correspond to myself. *Encounter* and *regret* are the two means by which we can live our authenticity without ending up in solitude. Encounter represents the necessary bridge to the other, causes me find his or her essence as well as my own 'I in the you'. Thus, I participate in my self-appreciation, attain my self-acceptance.

## 10. Meaning – Dealing with Becoming, Future and Commitment

If I can be there, love life and find myself therein, the conditions are fulfilled for the fourth fundamental condition of existence: The recognition of what my life is all about. It does not suffice to simply be there and to have found oneself. In a sense, we have to transcend ourselves, if we want to find fulfillment in life and to be fertile. Without this self-transcendence, moving beyond ourselves toward something greater, we are condemned to a life of loneliness and triviality.

The transience of life confronts us with *the question of meaning of our existence*: I am here – *but for what purpose?* To experience this sense of direction in life, three things are necessary: *A field of activity, a structural context and a value to be realized in the future.* To become pragmatic, we may ask ourselves the following questions: Is there a *place* where I feel *needed*, where I can be productive? Do I see and experience myself in a *larger context* that provides structure and orientation to my life? Where I want to be integrated? Is there anything that *should still be realized* or accomplished in my life?

If I cannot answer these questions in the affirmative, the result will be a feeling of *emptiness, frustration, even despair* and may frequently result in *addiction* or *suicidal* tendencies. If, on the contrary, these conditions are met, I will be capable of *dedication* and *action* and, finally, of my own form of *religious belief*. The sum of these experiences adds up to the meaning of life and leads to a sense of fulfillment.

It does not suffice to have a field of activity, to have one's place within a context and to know of values to be realized in the future. Instead, a *phenomenological attitude* is needed to which we referred at the beginning. This attitude of openness represents the *existential access* to meaning in life: the ability to deal with the questions put before me in each situation (FRANKL 1973, XV, 62). How am I challenged by this moment, and how should I respond? The meaningful thing is not only what *I* can expect from life, but, in accordance with the dialogical structure of existence, it is equally important what *life wants from me*. And what the moment expects *from me*, and what *I* could and should do *now* for others as well as for myself. My *active* part in this attitude of openness is to bring myself into *agreement* with the situation, to examine whether what I am doing is really a good thing for others, for myself, for the future, for my environment. If I act accordingly, my existence will be fulfilling.

VIKTOR FRANKL (1987, 315) once defined meaning as "a possibility against the background of reality". In another context (Frankl 1985, 57), he referred to the potentialities underlying the meaning: "The potentialities of life are not indifferent possibilities; they must be seen in the light of meaning and values. At any given time only one of the possible choices of the individual fulfills the necessity of his life task."

This notion of valuable possibilities, endorsed by the theory of the fundamental existential motivations, defines meaning even more concretely as the *most valuable, realistic* possibility of the given situation, for which I feel I should decide myself. *Existential meaning* is therefore what is

possible *here and now*, on the basis of facts and reality, what is possible *for me*, may it be what I need now, or what is the most pressing, valuable or interesting alternative now. To define and redefine this continually is an extremely complex task, which requires an internal "organ of perception" or ability capable of reducing this complexity to livable proportions: Our sensitivity as well as our moral conscience.

Apart from this existential meaning we may also consider an *ontological meaning*. This is the overall meaning in which I find myself and which does not depend on me. It is the philosophical and religious meaning, the meaning the creator of the world must have had in mind. I can perceive it in presentiments and in faith (cf. LÄNGLE 1994b for the differentiation between the two forms of meaning).

There is a *story* that Frankl used to tell and that illustrates in a simple way the importance of the ontological meaning for understanding life (cf. LÄNGLE 2002, 60ff). With this story I intend to *end* my presentation.

It was at the time when the cathedral at Chartres was being built. A traveler came along the way and saw a man sitting at the roadside, cutting a stone. The traveler asked him astonished what he was doing there. "Don't you see? I am cutting stones!" Nonplussed the traveler continued on his way. Around the next bend, he saw another man, also cutting stones. Again he stopped and asked the same question. "I am cutting corner-stones," was the reply. Shaking his head, our man traveled on. After a while he met a third man who was sitting in the dust and cutting stones, just as the others had been. Resolutely he walked up to him and asked: "Are you also cutting corner-stones?" – The man looked up at him, wiped the sweat from his brow and said: "I am working at a cathedral!"

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### Address of the author:

**Alfried Längle, M.D., Ph.D.**

Ed. Suess-Gasse 10

A-1150 Vienna, Austria

alfried.laengle@existenzanalyse.org