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The Art of Involving the Person: The Existential Fundamental Motivations as Structure of the Motivational Process

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Abstract: *Seen from an existential point of view, motivation consists essentially in moving the will, the human's way of realising one's freedom. To come to terms of a responsible motivation, it is necessary to refer to one's personhood into the decisions of the ego. Motivation as a process emerges in dialogical steps starting from the given reality towards what the person resonates with, and the ego intends. Seen in this light, motivation is an expression of the (mostly unconscious) human intention to come to existence. To be able to do so, the fundamental themes of existence must be referred to. Thus, motivation is related fundamentally to the structure of existence. As for its operating tools, holistic and responsible 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 relation between the structure of existence and the motivational process. According to the "four cornerstones of existence," the individual first must come to terms with his being in the world, then with his own life and with his own identity. Subsequently, he is open for and prone to enter relationships with a greater context, from which personal meaning derives. This has been found in our phenomenological empirical research in the 1990s. Moreover, these four fundamental aspects of existence form a matrix for the psychopathological understanding of psychic disorders and provide a background for clinical interventions. They represent the structural (or content) model of modern Existential Analytical Psychotherapy.*

What Makes for Motivation?

Talk about motivation is ubiquitous in social sciences such as psychology, psychotherapy, pedagogics, sociology, politics as well as in marketing and economics. It seems obvious that we need good motivation for the achievement of our life tasks, for creativity, growth, social functioning, and personal fulfillment.

But there a substantial question arises from the very beginning about the nature of motivation: do we really need to *become motivated from outside* or are we already and *originally motivated* due to our nature and humanness? Is the essence of what we call "motivational process" an act of *receiving* something? Or does the motivational process merely consist in shaping this process of being *primordially*, constantly, and generally moved? Then motivating someone would simply mean to provide a theme for that pre-established energy.

This would mean that we do not help people to be motivated but help them to find *what for* they can best implement the existent motivational force for their lives. The motivational process would provide a direction for the intentional power, a reason for the decision, and show the value of the particular action for one's life. In other words, motivating someone would be to help find possibilities, values, authenticity, and meaning for what one does.

Alfred Adler and George Kelly (cf. Brunner et al. 1985) took the position that humans are originally motivated by their nature and need not be moved from outside. So did Viktor Frankl, one of Adler's disciples or let us, rather say, an adherent of his circle. This position was also taken by the "potentialists" of the humanistic psychology movement like Carl Rogers (1961): if the circumstances are favorable for activity, humans develop all their activities and potentials of their own.

Frankl's "Will to Meaning"

For Frankl, we are indeed motivated by *biological* and *social* drives, but primarily and, most profoundly, we are motivated by our personal "Will to Meaning." This means that any person is fundamentally moved by a *spiritual* striving for a deeper *understanding* of what one experiences or does. This motivational force is regarded to be a direct result of the essence of human "nature." It is seen in the personal (= noetic or spiritual) dimension of man, and the will to meaning is rooted in this dimension.

In Frankl's theory (1973, XVIII ff.; 1959, 672), this spiritual dimension is marked by the three basic human potentials¹ which consist of ("psychological") spirituality, freedom, and responsibility. The quest for meaning and, with it, the primary motivational process can therefore be understood as a concomitant necessity inherent in this dimension. It basically consists in the challenge created by our freedom².

Freedom paradoxically brings along a compulsion of choice – being free means that we are forced to choose. A prerequisite of any real choice is the notion of the content and the understanding of the context in which the decision has to be made. The intentional goal of the will arises from this horizon and, if adopted by the subject, it turns out to be a value – probably the highest value one can see in the given situation. These are the elements of *existential meaning*: the greatest (or highest or deepest) value in the given situation, which can be seen and understood by the individual to be within the reach of his 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 motivational theory in an era that was dominated by determinism, reductionism, subjectivism and monadology³, all of which he fervently combated. His education took place in that period and, hence, his thinking was exposed to some of these ideas. Frankl's personal and scientific accomplishment was certainly the overcoming of these tendencies in his overall concept of logotherapy. He achieved this especially with his concepts of meaning and of self-transcendence, both cornerstones of his anthropology.

But it seems to me that in the motivational angle of his theory, he may have adopted some individualistic thinking by tracing back the concept of existential motivation to the concept of will. He even reinforced the pertaining concept by naming it "will" to meaning. Frankl himself explained the decision of calling his motivational concept "will" to meaning by his intention to formulate a counterweight to Nietzsche's "Will to Power." At the same time, he wanted to define the "true" content by replacing the instrumental value of "power" by the more spiritual value of "meaning."

The Modern Quest for Meaning

In our times, it is not the theme of freedom that dominates the discussion of social problems, of psychopathologies, and the scientific discourse. Freedom was a big question in the 1960s and 1970s because of the genetic discoveries bringing up neo-Darwinian discussions like seeing human

¹ Frankl calls them also "existentials" – referring to Heidegger's term "Existentialien."

² "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.

³ Theory that sees the human being as a "monade" (from Greek monos - alone, sole), i.e. isolated from the world like wrapped in a cocoon (G.W. Leibnitz, 1720).

behaviour as just evolutionary adaptation. The theme of freedom was covered by biological "necessities" which dominate. The year 1968 was a year of revolutionary outburst of free will against the social repression and rigid conformism. These are no longer the themes of our time.

Nowadays, different problems are predominant: marital and family life have widely evolved into broadly accepted forms of single life; the communities, social experiments and sexual promiscuity of the 70s have turned to fantasy games in virtual worlds, TV-channel-hopping, or internet surfing. For sexuality, the open acceptance of homosexuality and diverse gender-feelings is broadly achieved.

The social cohesion in politics and economy has been loosened in favor of a high degree of individualism, of liberal economic concepts with competition and rivalry, of a new feeling of freedom by utilizing and challenging the resources of the individual to the utmost degree. This new feeling of freedom brings along more isolation not only for the older people, but also for entire cultures.

The "*schizophrenic aspect*" of our times is that we have the best structures of communication mankind has ever had, that we travel more internationally—more than any generation before us—but that we feel lonelier and there is probably less real exchange between the cultures than before. The increase in contact between people of different cultures has led to a consumption of the pleasant aspects of cultures, but doubtfully to a true dialogue. This lack of profound dialogue and, consequently, lack of understanding provokes anxiety of alienation and of loss of identity.

This phenomenon can be observed in tourism and immigration. The increase of speed has brought along a decrease of contact, the increase of information has led to a decrease of communication, and the increase of traffic has destroyed much of personal encounter. September 11 can be seen as an example: it shows the huge and frightening failure in communication and encounter between different cultures.

Existential Paradigm

As children of our time and faced with its specific problems, we have to 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 to the individualistic one of freedom and personal will, which laid ground to the development of this postmodern era, we now need as a counterweight to the shadow of freedom an **interpersonal paradigm**.

This is the line we have adopted in modern Existential Analysis. We have enlarged our motivational concept by basing it on likely most original activity of personhood: on 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 Buber and Frankl stated. Being oneself as a person means being in communication, being in a continuous inner and outer exchange of contents, fine-tuning the outer with the inner reality and, vice versa, 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."

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 the understanding of 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 “speaking” to us, calling us, needing us, talking to us, looking for us, challenging us.

We get the necessary *provocation* through everything we are confronted with—that we have in front of us, that we are dealing with. At exactly that moment, the object before us starts “speaking” to us. Being provoked means being called. This provocation is the *starting point of 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 processual capacity of the person is described in the theory of the method of “Personal Existential Analysis (PEA)” (Längle 1994c). This method is an application of this concept with the goal of engaging personal potentials in a process of dealing with information and encounter.

This model, which is fundamental for any kind of involvement of 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. To see what a situation provokes in us means to recognize the situational meaning involved.
2. **Harmonizing** and bringing the perceived value, challenge or meaning into accordance with the inner reality. That is, examining the consistency with the rest of our values, with attitudes, abilities, and capabilities and with our conscience.
3. The final step in the development of motivation is the **inner consent** to one’s own **active** involvement. This consent and the act of harmonizing the new value with one’s personal reality leads to the presence of one’s inner person in one’s actions, and to the integration of the new value and the person himself into a **wider context** (meaning).

Without this involvement of the person in the motivational process, we would not deal with a question of motivation. Instead, there would be a sort of reflex or of reaction, but no “action.” Any act, any deed, is defined as a *decided* act and is, therefore, *voluntary* and free.

If we take motivation as a *free* decision to act, then we must also take into consideration the concept of *will*. Frankl (1970, 37-44; 1987, 101-104) saw meaning as the moving part in free will. An existential view of will takes it as the anthropological axis of existence. A *processual description* of will, however, relies on the fundamentals of existence and, therefore, shows more than just meaning as being basic 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** and leave for that act, emerging from an agreement with one’s concepts of life and morality.

Before we go into this, 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 from *outside*, or can the motivation only be shaped and canalized because

people are *intrinsically* motivated? Our theory is that this existential concept results in forming a bridge between two opposite positions:

- a) it is the *interrelation* with the vis-à-vis from which motivation emerges. Being touched and provoked, as well as understanding the situation, is like *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 equals the recognition of the situational or existential meaning. Furthermore, this means 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) By our *understanding* of the context and by our inner agreement, motivation gets its shape and receives its content.

Seen in that light, the notion of "being-in-the-world" provides the grounds on which the 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.

The four Fundamental Conditions for a Fulfilling Existence

In the first part we have elaborated the crucial point for motivation, which lies in attaining the *dialogical potential* of the subject. Its "pro-vocation" can be taken 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 building up motivation.

We have pointed out that for this reason there is *no motivation without cognition, accordance, bringing into harmony, inner consent and meaning*. For the aspect of freedom in motivation—seeing it as moving a person towards a *free* act within the world—the structure of will has to be taken in account. Will is fundamentally related to the structure of existence, which in turn is shaping the motivation substantially. This—the provocation into dialogue and the relation to the fundamental structure of existence—is the *central hypothesis* of this chapter.

If we look more closely, we see 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* where to place oneself = *development* through one's activities, opening one's *future*

Existence in our understanding needs a continuous *confrontation* and a dialogical *exchange* with each of these four dimensions. It is on this basis that the subject forms his specific notions about reality. These four realities challenge the person to give his response—they ask for his inner consent, activate his inner freedom.

But they are not only challenging dimensions—they are also structures which, at the same time, allow 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).

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 in free translation: “I don’t know where I am from, I don’t know where to, I wonder why I am so glad.”

I am there, there is me—how is that even possible? Questioning this seemingly self-evident fact can go to great depth once I go into it. And if I really think about it, I realize that I cannot truly comprehend this. My existence appears like an island in an ocean of ignorance and of 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 there at all.

But I am there, which puts *the fundamental question of existence* before me: *I am – but can I be?* For making this question practical I may apply it to my own situation. Then, I may ask myself: Can I claim my place in this world under the conditions and with the possibilities I have? This 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 there?
- Where do I find *support* in my life?

If this is not the case, the result will be restlessness, insecurity, and fear (cf. Längle 1996). But if I *do* have these three things, I will be able to feel trust in the world and confidence in myself, maybe even faith in God. The sum of these experiences of trust is the fundamental trust, the trust in whatever I feel as being the last support in my life.

But, in order to be there, it is not enough to find protection, space and support—I also have to *seize* these conditions, to make a *decision* in their favor, to *accept* them. My *active* part in this fundamental condition of being there is to accept the positive sides and to endure the negative sides. 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 the force to let be 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 to which I must bend myself. This idea is expressed in the word “subject” in the sense of “not independent.” 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 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 menace me anymore. Man procures himself the space he needs with his ability to tolerate and to accept conditions. If this is not the case, psychodynamics takes over the guidance in the form of coping *reactions*, which are to secure life (Längle 1998a).

Life – Dealing with Relationships and Emotions

Once someone has his space in the world, he 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. As much as we can be happy, as deeply can we suffer. 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—do I *like* this fact? Is it good to be there? It is not only strain and suffering that can take away the joy of life. It may as well be the shallowness of daily life and the negligence in one's lifestyle that make life stale. In order to seize my life, to love it, I need three things: *relationship, time and closeness*. In verifying the presence of life in one's own situation we may ask ourselves questions like this:

- Do I have *relationships* in which I feel closeness, for which I spend time and in which I experience community?
- What do I take *time* for? Do I take time for valuable things, worthy to spend my time for? To take time for something means to give away a part of one's life while spending it with someone or something.
- Can I feel close and maintain *closeness* to things, plants, animals, and people? Can I admit the closeness of someone else?

If relationships, closeness, and time are lacking, *longing* will arise, then *coldness* and finally depression. But if these three conditions are fulfilled, I 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 value* of life. In each experience of a value, this fundamental value is touched upon, it colors the emotions and affects and represents our yardstick for anything we might feel to be of worth. This is what our theory of emotion as well as the theory of values relate to.

Still, it is not enough to have relationships, time, and closeness. My own consent, my active participation is asked for. I *seize* life, engage in it, when I *turn to* other people, to things, animals, intellectual work or to myself—when I go towards it, get close, get into touch or pull it towards me. If I turn to a loss, *grief* arises. This “to turn to” will make life vibrate within me. If life is to make me move freely, my consent to being touched (to feeling) is necessary.

Being a Person – Dealing with Uniqueness and Conscience

As pleasant as this emotional swinging 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 must master my existence myself and that, basically, I am alone and maybe even solitary. But, besides, there is *so much more* that is equally singular. The *diversity, beauty, and uniqueness* in all of this makes me feel respect.

In the midst of this world, I discover myself unmistakably—I am *with* myself, and I am given *to* myself. This puts 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 plane of identity, of knowing oneself and of ethics. To succeed here, it is necessary to have experienced three things: *attention, justice, and appreciation*. Again, one can verify this third cornerstone of existence in one's own existence by asking:

- By whom am I *seen*?

- 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, *solitude* will be the result, *hysteria* as well as a need to hide behind the *shame*. If, on the contrary, these experiences have been made, I will find myself, find my authenticity, my relief, and my self-respect. The sum of these experiences builds *one's own worth*, the profoundest worth of what identifies my own self at its core: the self-esteem.

To be able to be oneself, it is not enough 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 delimitate myself and to stand by my own but 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, makes me find his essence as well as my own “I” in the “you.” Thus, I create for myself the appreciation requisite for feeling entitled to be what I am.

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 must transcend ourselves if we want to find fulfillment and to be fruitful. Otherwise, we would live as if in a house where nobody ever visits.

Thus, the transience of life puts before us *the question of the meaning of our existence*: I am there—*for what* is it good? For these three things are necessary: *a field of activity, a structural context, and a value to be realized in the future*. For a practical application we can ask ourselves questions of the following type:

- 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* in my life?

If this is not the case, the result will be a feeling of *emptiness, frustration, even despair* and, frequently, *addiction*. 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.

But 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, the *phenomenological attitude* is needed which we spoke about at the beginning. This attitude of openness represents the *existential access* to meaning in life; that is, dealing with the questions put before me in each situation (Frankl 1973, XV, 62).

“What does this hour want from me, how shall 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*, 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 open 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 with 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* based on 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 for which we possess an inner organ of perception capable of reducing this complexity to livable proportions: our sensitivity as well as our moral conscience.

Besides this existential meaning, there is 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 divination 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 cornerstones,” 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 cornerstones?” The man looked up at him, wiped the sweat from his brow and said, “I am working at a cathedral.”

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