



Chapter 13

Logotherapy in the school environment and the area of religious sciences: interacting with people in situations of suffering

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic caused by the new coronavirus has bequeathed new questions that require more consistent responses and new alternatives for crises ranging from the global scope to the private sphere. The post-pandemic context will challenge the adoption of original and creative postures in social, cultural, and religious contexts. Postmodern ideology, which tried to mask all existential experiences as fleeting and ephemeral, is no longer adequate to answer the problem of human suffering,

which is not experienced as a passing and superficial emotion. Inserted in the Jewish tradition, the founder of logotherapy, the Jewish theorist Viktor Frankl admits that in circumstances of great suffering, as in the concentration camps, the search for meaning in life can be the only answer against total despair. Considering the transdisciplinary field open to the comparative history of religions and the psychosocial critique of the religious phenomenon, we will establish a dialogue between Frankl's thought and the Sciences of Religions.

Keywords: Logotherapy, Viktor Frankl, Suffering, School environment, Sciences of Religions.

1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to investigate the importance of logotherapy as a possible help to the challenge of suffering and existential emptiness in contemporary educational spaces.

The research is structured in two topics: what logotherapy intends and how it can be applied by ordinary people, not therapists by profession, in the school environment, and the area of Sciences of Religions.

The methodology carried out was bibliographical research of a qualitative nature and with a hermeneutic approach, in the works of Viktor Frankl within the general context of his time and the personal challenges arising from the suffering faced in the Nazi concentration camps in which he lived and deepened the postulates of logotherapy as the view of the human being as a being in search of the meaning of life. The main bibliographic reference consists of the books "La voluntad de senti" (1994) and "Psicoterapia y existencialismo" (2001). The choice of these works is because there is a deeper demonstration of the practice of logotherapy in assisting people in unavoidable suffering, in addition to clearly dealing with the "cure of souls", an expression used by Frankl to define the effect of counseling/care provided by non-therapists to people in great suffering, namely, the rediscovery of motivations to live with meaning, despite there being no solution for suffering or physical/psychic healing.

The other reference chosen was the book by Izar Xausa, “The psychology of the meaning of life” (2011). This work is considered the most in-depth, and the first to be published in Brazil on Viktor Frankl and logotherapy. Frankl himself wrote the preface, on the occasion of the first edition (1986), in which he highlights: “Your work is a wonderful and admirable synopsis of my work... knowledge of the literature in this field”.

2 THE POSTULATES OF LOGOTHERAPY

The era of new technologies, of scientific advances in all areas of knowledge, faces the paradoxical dilemma of the impoverishment of relationships, the experience of existential emptiness, the search for suicide, and, at the same time, a return to the sacred disconnected from religious institutions. More and more people close and isolate themselves in virtual relationships through social networks. More frequently, they are absorbed by the multiple possibilities of quick and superficial answers to personal dilemmas.

Due to technological advances and communications that have transformed the Planet into a "global village", the post-modern context expresses new demands and other aspects for which it requires more consistent responses. The current moment requires options for crises that are the most diverse, ranging from economic, political, and social problems, to family and religious ones, that is, both in a global scope and in the private sphere. Unlike in previous times, human beings no longer feel constrained by traditions and by traditional and universal values that tell them what to do. So, not knowing what he had to do or what he should do, the person of the current time does not know what he intends to operate and is constantly immersed in an inner void or with the feeling of a lack of meaning in life.

Well, it is precisely the will to meaning that is currently largely frustrated. With a growing measure, humanity today is seized by a feeling of meaninglessness, which normally appears together with a feeling of “inner emptiness” – this is the “existential vacuum” (FRANKL, 2012, p. 282).

As a result, either the individual enters a conformism that leads him to do what others do; or a totalitarianism, that is, that impels him to do what others want him to do. This means that the individual of the current moment needs to be motivated by the challenge of assuming an original and creative position in the most diverse social, cultural, and religious contexts.

It also means that, despite the respect for the human person, the recognition of civil rights, freedom of religion and expression, and technological evolution - evidence that society has evolved culturally -, the postmodern human being has not stopped experiencing the emptiness of existential and the most diverse types of suffering; on the contrary, new forms of suffering are being experienced in our time for which the sciences cannot find solutions.

Postmodern ideology tries to mask all existential experiences as fleeting and ephemeral, however, the problem of human suffering is not experienced as a passing and superficial emotion. Faced with the challenges imposed by the process of cultural globalization and the technological speed of the virtual

world, the problem of inevitable suffering is a demand that requires an attitude of clarity and discernment that is valid for people from all cultural and religious segments of today's society. It is, therefore, necessary to seek a meaningful answer to the demand of human suffering in Post-Modernity.

In this paradigm of fleeting experiences, which does not seem to favor helping people in conditions of unavoidable suffering, some questions are in order: in the context of the emergence of psychotherapies, are there any of them that take into account a positive dimension of inevitable suffering without falling into masochism or masking suffering? What are the contributions of

people who are not therapists, within the scope of religions, who guide people in conditions of inevitable suffering?

Viktor Frankl, the founder of logotherapy, faced different sufferings in the Nazi concentration camps, in which he deepened the postulates of logotherapy, having an anthropological vision of the human being as a being in search of the meaning of life. His work becomes the most up-to-date to face the challenges of the pandemic due to the new coronavirus.

In the context of logotherapy, "logos" means "meaning", because what matters to human existence is the realization of meaning for life. Founded by Viktor E. Frankl, born in 1905 in Vienna, logotherapy aims to recover human beings from despair based on the understanding that human existence is not ultimately aimed at the pursuit of pleasures or power; the person does not even aim, in the foreground, the full realization of himself, but has an inherent desire to fill his life with meaning (FRANKL, 2001, p. 23; 2010, p. 76). Logotherapy calls this the "will to meaning", the fundamental drive that moves human life. Logotherapy is psychotherapy centered on the meaning of life because it believes there is a therapeutic force there.

What is characteristic of humans, that is, what differentiates them from other beings, is the noetic dimension or the ability to ask about everything, including oneself (FRANKL, 2011, p. 28). This means that despite being conditioned by different factors like all other living beings – for example, feeling pain and pulsations, growing old and dying – human beings, due to their ability to ask questions, can find the best way to react to their conditioning. , finding answers based on which to make meaningful choices.

The human faculty of asking questions is the same ability to find meaning for each experience made during its existence. So the most basic answer to the question "who am I?" is "I am free" or "I can choose how to react to my destiny throughout my existence". Therefore, the human being is situated between "fate" and "freedom".

Frankl calls "destiny" situations that are not consequences of a personal decision, such as suffering from cancer, losing a loved one, etc. The human being is at the mercy of biological and climatic conditions and interaction with the environment, as with other beings of nature. In addition, human being also suffers psychological conditioning resulting from the way

how it interacts with events, feelings, and relationships. They are influences or constraints that restrict their choices, despite which, there will always be a set of options in a situated framework of possibilities (FRANKL, 1978, p. 157).

The concept of freedom, however, is not linked to the notion of being able to do whatever you want. Nor does it mean to be free of conditioning. Freedom means taking a stand or making choices in whatever conditions you find yourself in. It is precisely in the face of destiny, in the face of what conditions us the most, in front of something we didn't choose, that we are truly free because we can choose how to react to it. And where there is a choice, there is also responsibility for the choice made.

Therefore, it is necessary to point out a distinction between determinism and pan-determinism in the anthropological context. We cannot deny that human beings are determined, recognizing all the components or factors that influence their free will. When it is stated, however, that the human being is totally (pan) determined, one is accepting the theory that he is a result of certain factors without the possibility of making choices. Therefore, there would be no possibility of being different from what one is. Frankl does not accept anthropological pan determinism, that is, that the human being is completely determined by vital or social factors, because it is always possible to make choices about how one wants to react to these conditioning factors (LUKAS, 1989, p. 36).

In this sense, the human being is not his instincts, but he has instincts. This means that every instinctive directive is within a horizon of freedom. Instincts, here, appear as a synonym for drives, as inclinations from a psychic point of view. In such a way, in human beings, there are no instincts per se, there is no instinctive facticity. Freedom is the a priori to everything that instinct can determine (LUKAS, 1989, p. 37).

Freedom makes us recognize that there are other possibilities beyond what instinct suggests. We can always decide to do something different from what instinct wants to force us to do. Human beings are free and will always be able to choose how to react to everything that conditions them. Contingencies limit the possibilities of the individual, but within these possibilities, choices can always be made (FRANKL, 2005, p. 53).

Therefore, logotherapy criticizes all types of psychologism (psychophysical facticity), automatism, and naturalism, because these lead to a distorted understanding of the human being. Frankl has a conception of the human being as a biopsychonoetic unit, that is, as a being that integrates the somatic, psychic and noetic dimensions, which perfectly penetrate each other. Logotherapy understands the human being as in-dividuum (undivided totality), in-summabile (totality not reducible to one of the dimensions), as multiplex unitas (unity in multiplicity) (FRANKL, 2003, p.12). This is because, according to Frankl, a unified concept of the human being cannot be obtained only in the psychic and somatic dimensions. The unity of the person manifests itself in the noetic dimension, which is superior and encompasses the two other inferior dimensions.

Frankl (1995, p. 21) goes so far as to define logotherapy as psychotherapy based on the noetic dimension, which includes taking a stand (freedom) and personal decisions, ethical and aesthetic sense, intentionality and creativity, and the understanding of values and religious sense. This means that, unlike other beings, the human being is dynamic, that he fights for the concrete meaning of his existence and transcends himself.

According to logotherapy, each life situation is shown to the person in a concrete and unrepeatable way, therefore, the meaning of a given situation is unique. Therefore, the meanings of life cannot be transmitted by tradition. Only values are transmitted and become a universal horizon of possibilities to be implemented in choices made within particular situations (FRANKL, 2005, p. 31). Human beings are attracted to values, and it is through experiential, creative, and attitudinal values that meaning is achieved, depending on the circumstances, one value will seem more viable than another.

This is possible because of the human self-transcendence which consists of the essential fact that the human being always points beyond himself, towards a cause he serves, or some person he loves. It is because of its ability to distance itself from the psychophysical that its noetic dimension is manifested (FRANKL, 2003, p. 19). Self-transcendence is the primary dynamism that guides the elaboration of identity. It is the most effective antidote against the self-destruction typical of a culture of narcissism (FRANKL, 2003, p. 26).

The deepest yearning of human beings is to direct the vision beyond themselves in search of meaning. Indeed, the relationship with the transcendent reveals itself as a proper human characteristic. The relationship with the transcendent can be apprehended by the person as an inner dialogue with an interlocutor who is not identical to him, but a partner of his most intimate soliloquies, that is, God. Frankl defends the argument that this is possible because the dimension of homo religiosus is constitutive of the human being and is in each person, even if unconsciously; in this case, Frankl considers it as "unconscious faith", or ignored presence of God (FRANKL, 2010, p. 113-117).

Another important postulate in logotherapy is the concept of homo patients. This means that suffering, fate, and death are part of life. "Depriving life of necessity and death, of destiny and suffering, would be like taking away its configuration, its form" (FRANKL, 1989, p. 154). Suffering, therefore, is not equivalent to illness (including psychic), suffering is something inherent to humans. It is possible to suffer without being sick and to be sick without suffering, as there are unhealthy psychic states in which there is no suffering. The important thing to emphasize, however, is that the individual fulfills his orientation towards the realization of meaning, despite the failure and despite the suffering; mainly because homo religiosus allows the possibility of overcoming human existence transposed to the essence of homo patients. This is the fundamental contribution to our article.

3 THE INDIVIDUAL IN A SITUATION OF INEVITABLE SUFFERING AND ORIENTATION TOWARD MEANING

The first question that appears to those who suffer is: "why is this happening to me?". The answer is given not with the "why" of suffering, but with the "how" to suffer. And it is "[...] always a wordless answer". (FRANKL, 1978, p. 283). The meaning of suffering is found in the attitude we choose in the face of a tragic situation. Only human beings have the privilege of choosing an attitude toward inevitable suffering (XAUSA, 2003, p. 84).

The meaning of suffering, however, is not always evident, and, when evidenced, it is only at a later time, when the person remembers that some really painful fact in his life "[...] may have had a meaning that at that time occasion was not clear to them" (LUKAS, 1989, p. 198). Indeed, the motivation to find meaning in suffering is drawn from one's own experience, from previous situations; but also the examples that the person who advises/guides someone can tell you about how other people reacted to certain situations in life.

The person who guides, however, cannot fall into the temptation of creating a magical world for people, optimism is not imposed, nor is it a fraud. And yes, it should show that there are reasons why the human capacity to be optimistic is nurtured and can surface in difficult times. In this context, Frankl argues about the need to cite concrete examples from life, as Frankl did, mentioning the case of Jerry Long, who became quadriplegic after an accident and, using the challenging power of the human spirit, transformed tragedy into triumph (FRANKL, 2013, p. 169).

Frankl also highlighted his own experience of suffering in the Nazi concentration camps, when he stated that, in the prison camps, "[...] it was possible to see the power of decision: while one allowed himself to be transformed into a scoundrel, another became a saint." (FRANKL, 1978, p. 133). Even in such an adverse social environment and determined to the worst, human beings still had the ultimate freedom with which, in one way or another, they managed to configure their existence. In the "[...] concentration camp one can deprive the person of everything, except the ultimate freedom to assume an alternative attitude towards the given conditions" (FRANKL, 1995, p. 66).

Frankl addresses human suffering primarily as fate. As we explained a moment ago, fate is the biological, sociological, or psychological conditioning resulting from the way we interact with events, feelings, relationships, and with the environment in which we live. Destiny is everything that is not part of our choices and restricts our decisions and, in some way, determines us, and conditions us. Everything that is part of destiny, however, invites us to perceive a set of options, even within a restricted framework of possibilities (FRANKL, 1978, p. 157), as we have already advanced.

When suffering is part of destiny, treatment proves to be ineffective because there is no way to remove suffering. In this context, taking care of the patient's attitude toward his suffering is the only possible way out, since the person under these conditions can decide to shorten his own life if he does not find a meaning to living with the situation.

Second, Frankl addresses suffering based on what he called the tragic triad. This triad consists of situations that inevitably circumscribe human existence: suffering, guilt, and death (FRANKL, 2010, p. 90). As a reaction to the tragic triad, Frankl proposes tragic optimism, in the triple latent capacity of human beings to face life's greatest challenges (FRANKL, 2013, p. 161)¹.

A life with meaning can positively overcome suffering, transforming personal tragedy into self-overcoming, triumph, conquest, human fulfillment, and even happiness, when one discovers a meaning for one's suffering (FRANKL, 2013, p. 161).). Those who believe in meaning in their lives are also able to endure great suffering because their lives permeated with suffering do not lose their meaning, despite having their pleasure reduced (LUKAS, 1990, p. 173).

And, it is the finitude of life, the fact that we are mortal, that makes our time and our possibilities limited and, it is this fact, mainly, that makes it full of sense to undertake something, to take advantage of an opportunity, to accomplish, to satisfy, to enjoy and fill the time. Death means the pressure to do so (FRANKL, 1990,

P. 75). At this point, Frankl parodies Kant and his categorical imperative, launching what has become known as the Franklian imperative:

Live as if you were already living for the second time and as if the first time you did as wrong as you are about to do now (FRANKL, 2013, p. 134).

This maxim invites us to consider the finitude of life and the meaning with which current acts lead to the future. "Live as if you were living for the second time", that is as if the current moment were a new chance, or rather, a unique chance that cannot be wasted. At this point in our reflection, we return to what was exposed a moment ago regarding the tragic triad.

Awareness of the transience of life gives us the sense to carry out responsible actions. "Live as if the first time you had acted as wrongly as you are about to act now" means that the awareness of finitude can awaken the responsibility of not indefinitely postponing a meaningful life, wasting the opportunities that appear along the way.

Therefore, the finitude of life motivates us to do something with meaning and responsibility. This brings us back to the issue of values. We saw, in the first point of this article, that the link between meaning and values is part of logotherapy. There are three categories of values: creative, experiential, and attitudinal (attitudinal). While in the first category, the human being is realized through doing, in the second, he is realized through a passive acceptance (through art, for example); already in the third category, it only comes true when it has to accept something precisely as it is.

This means that, in a situation of inevitable suffering, we will still be able to respond to existence with the support of attitudinal values, which call for an attitude of courage and courage to find meaning,

¹ Tragic optimism would be: transforming suffering into triumph or self-overcoming; using guilt for self-transformation into someone better; making sense of the transience of life to carry out responsible actions

and not despair, in what is tragic. And this means that human life can reach its fullness, not only in acts of creation and enjoyment but also in suffering.

The anthropological foundations of logotherapy presuppose that human beings can transcend biological, psychological, and social destinies through the choices based on which they react to everything that happens to them. Thus, human beings can transform the negative aspects of life into something positive, that is, they can make the best of each situation. This human capacity for optimism is not an escape from reality and does not mean that painful events are overlooked. The human capacity to be optimistic means that one can always say yes to life, despite the tragic triad.

4 HEALING SOULS: CARE PROVIDED BY NON-THERAPISTS TO PEOPLE IN DISTRESS

Anyone with a little reading and understanding of the postulates of logotherapy can help a person to endure inevitable suffering, guiding them to find meaning in life. The person, who advises/takes care of someone who is going through great suffering, must guide him/her in a concrete and personal sense. It makes the sufferer aware of his responsibility so that he decides which meaning must be fulfilled about "that" before which he interprets his existence as a responsibility (FRANKL, 1995, p.155); "it" can be conscience, society, or someone important to you or God.

The therapeutic effect of a mere conversation is known, in which the pain of the soul is "shared", bringing relief. However, when therapies do not consider the human being's noetic dimension, they can increase (or even trigger) the frustration of the desire for meaning, as there are problems that are beyond the psychic sphere, whose cause is found in a moral conflict or an existential crisis, that is, in the noetic dimension.

Logotherapy provides elements that can and should be used in counseling/care practiced by non-therapists in helping people in distress. In Frankl's texts, the term is *Seelsorge*, translated into Portuguese as "healing of souls", it is generally a form of assistance provided by non-therapists to sufferers of existential tragedies. It is intended to help the person who has an irreparable illness to endure his inevitable suffering (LIMA, 2012, p. 59).

When one is faced with a situation of inevitable suffering, in which any act of heroism requires a sense, standing firm in such circumstances is only possible when one glimpse – supported by the wisdom of one's own heart – the presence of a greater witness, of a spectator even if unconscious, who can be called God, or named with another term, by which the human being feels challenged and, before which he is responsible for the realization of a meaning for life (FRANKL, 1995, p. 129).

It is in this way that the postulates of logotherapy can collaborate with the exercise of solidary help in the school environment and the area of Sciences of Religions. When in the school environment the aim is to help the person who suffers, it is the case of making him discover that, even when all the suffering, all the struggles, and all the problems seem to make no sense, there is still a sense that it transcends all

human experience and before which even the most absurd human tragedy becomes bearable (FRANKL, 2013, p. 161).

Using logotherapy in a school environment, as a way of helping people in situations of suffering, means focusing on the desire for meaning as the primary motivation of human beings (FRANKL, 1989, p. 61). Due to the impossibility of answering the question “why did this happen to me?”, one adheres to the hypothesis that there is an unconditional meaning to life, and therefore, there is a meaning to the adverse event. The objective is to awaken the person to the awareness of a primary, essential meaning, especially when the existence of any meaning seems absurd.

In ancient times, this type of assistance was carried out within churches and was called "spiritual direction" and was the responsibility of ecclesiastical authorities, such as priests, monks, or pastors. In modern times, this activity has come to be exercised as counseling carried out by anyone, as long as they are properly prepared for this function.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the context of the emergence of psychotherapies, despite their importance, since suffering is an anthropological reality, care for the person who suffers can be delegated to someone who is not a therapist, provided they are mature enough to perform the task of counseling or guidance.

The use of logotherapy in a school environment has the specific function of helping people to intensify their experiences of faith in themselves, in something, or God (if the person is religious). When there are situations in which suffering is inevitable, we believe that logotherapy, supported by its anthropological foundations and its postulates regarding the meaning of suffering, contributes significantly to the effectiveness of counseling in the school environment.

An accurate reading of Frankl's texts allows those who are not therapists to find subsidies that can consolidate the practice of counseling in a school environment because Frankl's work brings an understanding of the human being as a being in search of meaning and not as someone predetermined or reducible to somatic and psychic dimensions (FRANKL, 2013, pp. 152-153). In addition, logotherapy goes beyond the internal boundaries of psychotherapy, denoting ethical values such as commitment to freedom and responsibility and appreciation of the human being.

In the school environment, the person who advises will be able to use the postulates of logotherapy to help the sufferer to face the inevitable, to guide him to find the meaning of life in the "edge situations" before which every human being truly confronts himself. Through the reading of Frankl's work, the person who guides can awaken in those who are suffering the awareness that the lack of a solution for a tragic circumstance does not mean a lack of meaning in life because neither the suffering nor the guilt or even death can deprive life of meaning.

In counseling, the person who guides should never try to convince the sufferer that his anguish is the result of sin, guilt, or lack of faith. Guidance should never be an apology for religion or doctrine, but

a way of showing solidarity with the sufferer and helping him to find meaning in everything that happens to him.

The mystery of suffering, one of the most impressive aspects of reality, must be adequately considered in the practice of counseling and, on this point, Frankl's work is of paramount importance, as it elucidates that the fundamental concern of those who want to help the person who suffers, must be to awaken him to the need to find meaning in life and not to give the sufferer abstract and pre-established answers.

The practice of counseling in the school environment, when it is elucidated by the principles of Frankl's logotherapy, is not tempted to explain suffering but is concerned with favoring anamnesis so that the sufferer brings to memory the experiences of meaning that are part of his past so that at the time of existential crisis he finds the strength that comes from the different senses experienced throughout life.

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