

Frankl's theory of logotherapy – is it a remedy against the world moral crisis attack on university students?

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ABSTRACT: In the article, the author presents in detail the results of an experimental study of students' existential problems from the viewpoint of social psychology, namely, V. Frankl's logotherapy theory and existential analysis. This research is based on statistical data derived from respondent's completion of a representative questionnaire that judges the influence of the modern world and its moral crisis attack on university students. An interpretation of the basic test indices was used to determine how to tackle the problem in order to lend support to students' persuasion and aspiration to search for the meaning of existence.

INTRODUCTION

Psychology and psychiatry have now markedly progressed in the world, generating an appreciable influence on solving some social problems. Considerable interest in this area is connected with investigations in the direction of searching for the meaning of human existence. At present, the appraisal of the psychological status of the future technical elite of post-industrial societies, which have formed as a result of the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, is of prime importance. These processes will not fail to bring the bulk of people to feel social instability and a loss of the meaning of existence, ie the frustration of an individual's personality. Meanwhile, educational systems in countries of the former Soviet Union do not actually focus their attention on problems connected with the moral values in the student's social environment.

The present research is based on Frankl's logotherapy theory and existential analysis. The main thesis of the theory can be reduced to the doctrine about the search for meaning, namely that a person seeks meaning and feels frustration if this

tendency is not realised [1-6]. As a postulate, it is suggested that the meaning is easily understood for every person. The investigation being considered does not concern the problems connected with determining the human personality as a product of the integration processes realising the vital interests of a subject, ie social relations.

SPIRITUAL VALUES OF A STUDENT'S PERSONALITY FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF FRANKL'S THEORY

The basic theses of Frankl's doctrine can be summarised by the following elements:

- The unique aspiration for meaning is bound substantially with the universalities of creative work, values of emotional experience and relations with somebody or bearing a relation to somebody through a position taken up under restricted conditions in accordance with objective reality (see Figure 1);
- The meaning of life cannot be given by somebody, but it can be always searched for;

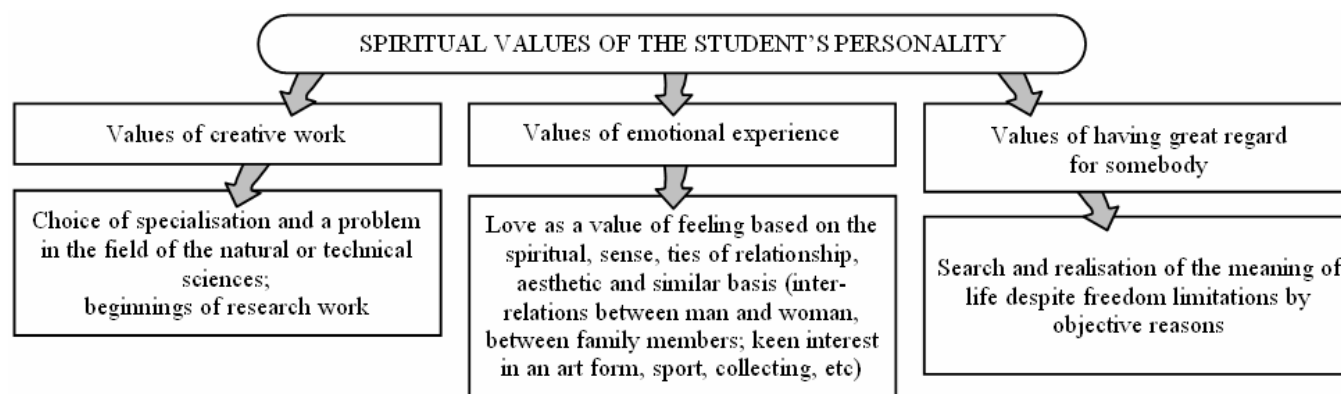


Figure 1: Block-diagram of Frankl's moral values.

- Realisation of the meaning of existence is an imperative necessity because a lack of meaning gives rise to an existential vacuum, which is one reason for so-called *noogenic neuroses* and feelings of personality frustration.

The ethical side of higher technical education and the successful realisation of the acquired knowledge, skills and practice depend, in many instances, on whether the specialist's personality is bound with social requirements. It is pertinent to note that personality and society should be considered as interdependent.

The hypothesis about the expediency of students' orientation for the above meanings, early in the process of teaching, seems to be right since two out of the three components form a meaning (see Figure 1); these are indifferent to social status, whereas the third one, being outside the possible restrictions, depends essentially on the student's progress in his/her studies. The answers to the questions connected with appreciating the level of students' personality frustration and intensity of their existential vacuum are of particular interest.

In connection with the above, students' status should be based on statistical data by carrying out student opinion polls by completing a representative questionnaire in order to assess the average statistical data of the object being investigated. As a starting point, the null hypothesis is based on the supposition that university students display a keen interest in the meaning of existence. The sample is assumed to be equal to the number of students at Donetsk National Technical University in Donetsk, Ukraine, who are being taught in the specialities of *Electrical Power Plants, Electrical Systems and Networks, Industrial Power Supply and Energy Saving Technology*. As a result, there are six academic groups in the Electrotechnical Department for each course of studies.

STATUS ESTIMATION OF THE RESEARCH OBJECT

As indicated Frankl, every time period requires its own type of psychotherapy that is capable of understanding the special features of the time and reducing dehumanising tendencies [6]. In countries of the former Soviet Union, the latter are stipulated by the following objective factors:

- Rise in the noogenic neuroses among intellectual workers;
- A decline of prestige of the engineering professions;
- Lower standards of living;
- Imperfections in the labour code;
- A high level of criminal activity in society;
- Indeterminate geopolitical orientations of governments.

It may be suggested that some students refer to the existentially frustrated person. In this case, a specific approach is required in order to identify stimulating reasons for the meaning of life against a background of the current situation. It is apparent that subjective meanings should be obviated. It is necessary to take into consideration the following specific character of the problem for students' association:

- A lack, as a rule, of personal family relations;
- The practical absence of life experiences;
- The transient nature of some spiritual values.

University staff need to take up the mission of students' inducement to search for meaning can be supported by the following factors:

- A person who has found his/her own meaning of existence quickly becomes noticeable and most favoured in advancing his/her career;
- Fostering people's consciences (the moral level) excludes the use of narcotics and excessive alcohol consumption;
- The spiritual make-up of a personality corresponds to the meaning found and commands a high level of respect in cooperation with the given person;
- The meaning searched for leads to a concentration of considerable moral strength and mental possibilities, which are greater than those based on the purposes needed to achieve economic or political advantages that generate tension in social and interpersonal relations.

AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF STUDENTS' EXISTENTIAL PROBLEMS

The aim of completing the forms proposed to students enrolled in the Department of Electrical Engineering is to collect statistical information in terms of short answers (*yes/no*) on five questions of the null (initial working) hypothesis, as shown in Figure 2. The basic questionnaire was supplemented with short, personal questions that comprise the variables of the investigation; these have been patterned after the test elements of a self-concept scale (ie respondents' social and economic status), the level of family income, some distinguishing features of personality, aptitude for learning (average marks attained for the last examinations). It is evident that the 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th questions are of universal significance for the problem under consideration, while the 2nd one reflects the present-day reality in developing countries of the former Soviet Union. The validity of the test is in line with the purpose being targeted.

1. The main objective of somebody's life is to search for his/her own meaning of existence.
2. There are the lowest necessities of life for an ordinary person and the highest material and cultural needs; satisfaction in the former is a necessary condition to meet the latter requirements (including the search for meaning).
3. There are some professions in power engineering that pursue objectives that are analogous to those being incorporated into the notion of meaning.
4. The human meaning of existence can be searched for through creative means or love (of somebody or something).
5. A person who focuses on entertainment and enjoyment frustrates the possibilities for searching and finding his/her own meaning of existence.

Figure 2: The basic questionnaire.

The quantity of students who took part in the questionnaire was reduced from 142 (first-year students) to 88 (fifth-year students). As can be seen from the data findings of the sociological questionnaire, which are given in Table 1 and Figure 3, students showed the following traits:

- As regards the first question connected with the main objective of somebody's life, three quarters of all respondents answered in the affirmative (74.8%) and 21.3% answered in the negative, while the rest (3.9%) did not express their opinion;
- A considerable number of students believed that a necessary condition when searching for the meaning of existence is connected to satisfaction with the so-called lowest necessities of life for an ordinary person (70.2%);

- Affirmative answers to the third question regarding the availability in some power engineering professions for pursuing objectives like the notion of the meaning of existence averaged between 43.2% and 60.5% (the quantity of students who evaded the question was, in this case, at the highest level);
- Most of the respondents (81.3%) agreed with the statement that the human meaning of existence can be searched for through creative means or love of somebody or something;
- Changes in the number of affirmative answers to the fifth question about the frustration of a person's possibilities to search and find his/her own meaning of existence in the event that he/she focuses on entertainment and enjoyment fell unexpectedly short of 34.0%, instead averaging just 26.4%.

Table 1: Quantitative results of students' answers.

Question Number	Quantity of Students	Students' answers (%)		
		Yes	No	Probably
1 st	142	74.8	21.3	3.9
2 nd	112	70.2	23.4	6.4
3 rd	118	48.7	42.9	8.4
4 th	103	81.3	14.4	4.3
5 th	88	26.4	69.7	3.9

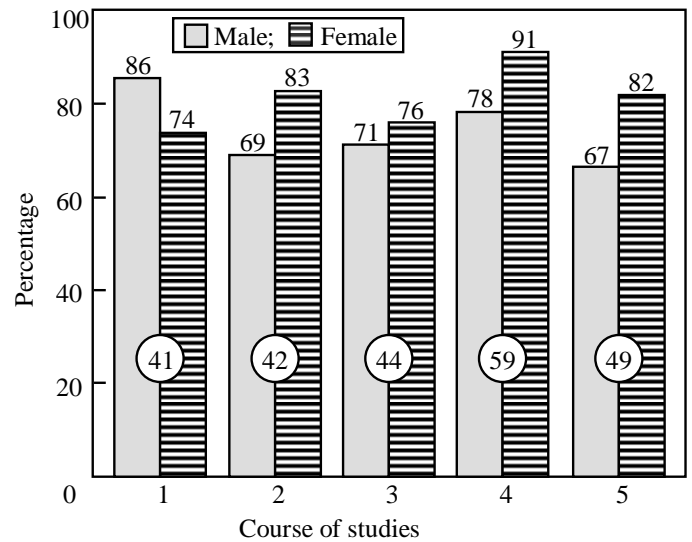


Figure 4: Variations in affirmative answers to the 1st question.

The teaching at the University, in a certain sense, can be considered as the initial stage of a scientific career. The choice of scientific field and the concrete subject are the most difficult tasks. In this case, the meaning of existence seems to be indeterminate.

As noted by Selye, the merciless and persistent pursuit of one's own objectives can lead to a serious problem, namely increased hostile feelings between students and stress arising from unconscious frustration [7]. In order to avoid these negative consequences, Selye recommended *altruistic egoism*, which he formulated as follows: *think about yourself but be necessary for others*. Furthermore, he believed that the aspiration for being always needed by others can be everybody's aim in life.

As for the value of emotional experience, love, in accordance with the statement of the Russian novelist and moral philosopher Tolstoy, is the source of the moral connection between a person and the world and surrounding people; the meaning of the human life consists of a confluence of the simplest interpersonal relations concerning moral relations. Hence, in Tolstoy's opinion, the meaning of human life is unthinkable without love, without loving and grateful affirmation by a certain person of another person; through the aid of love, a person becomes conscious of the true sense of life.

Frankl's opinion of love involves a co-feeling with the another person over all his/her originality, unique beauty and inimitableness; it is passive and not associated with the creation of constructive values. These points of view contradict the philosophy of Schopenhauer (*the will is the key to reason*), Nietzsche (*an enthusiastic love of life*), Sartre (*the concrete historical situation precedes essence*) and Kierkegaard. The solution of the sexual problem by Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, is perceived in bending the human spirit to the libido. On the other hand, works of art and literature of the world show a nontrivial understanding of love and directly mould a culture of feeling love. Compared to other spheres of human life, love occupies a predominant place in art.

The above well-known quotations, as was apparent after analysing students' responses (see Table 1, question 5), were disregarded against the background of false spiritual values fostered by the mass information media, which reflect on the influence of the current moral crisis in the world.

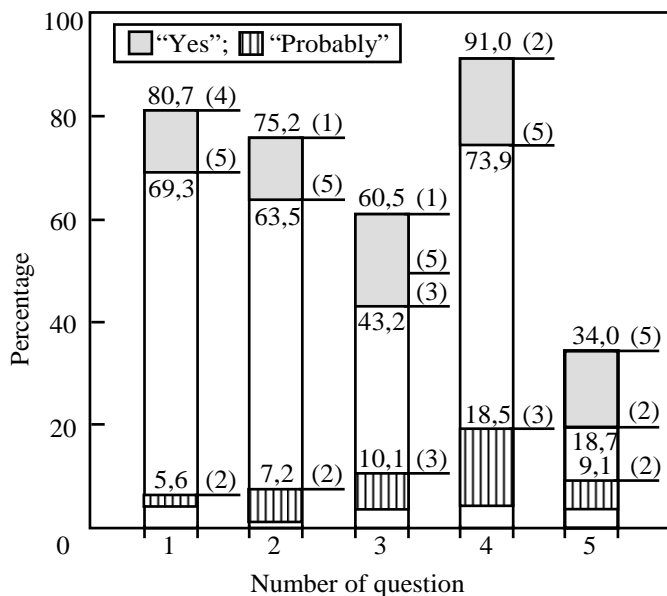


Figure 3: Variations in the quantity of answers within all five courses of students' studies (numbers in parentheses identify the courses of students' study that are extremes).

Figure 4 shows there to be a prevalent tendency in female students' choices when answering the first question of the form. Circles show the relationships between the number of female and male students (as a percentage).

LINE OF ATTACKING THE PROBLEM THROUGH WEAKENING THE WORLD MORAL CRISIS' INFLUENCE ON THE UNIVERSITY'S STUDENTS

It has been identified that the following motives and reasons are of decisive importance with regard to choosing scientific activities:

- Disinterested love for nature and truth (art and science elevate a person and give happiness);
- Desire for approval, thirst for authority, vanity, etc.

In accordance with Selue's opinion, 20% of neuroses are of a noogenic nature and social origin [8]. The medical treatment of such patients may be performed not only by a physician (including a logotherapist), but also by a pastor and priest who can help in searching for meaning, but do not hold a medical diploma. In this sense, the role of a university professor is of particular interest.

From the viewpoint of a person's search for meaning, the following unique situations and tendencies can be found at the University:

- To be educated in two specialities simultaneously;
- Aspiration (and possibility) to study English, French and German for technical applications;
- Aspiration to receive from Donetsk National Technical University not only a BS degree but, as a rule, the level of proficiency (for an electrical power engineer) and, in individual cases, the MS degree;
- The possibility of using an aptitude test to forecast success in electrical engineering and the activities of graduating students [9][10].

A point that should be mentioned is students' tendency to be educated in the technical specialties, as well as economic specialties. This phenomenon may be considered as evidence of aspiring to search for the meaning of existence by possible changes in students' aims. On the other hand, this tendency confirms the modern demand of integrating technical and economic knowledge in order to achieve considerable progress for production activities.

Some advice for university lecturers, within the context of sharp questions associated with the search for meaning, can be attributed to the following:

- Do not ignore the student's opinion that the meaning of existence comes from finding pleasure in life, because the latter, as contrasted to the joy of life, is attributed to the sphere of undirected emotional states [11];
- Cite examples of *successful* postgraduates and colleagues;
- Do not avoid discussing topics associated with aspiring for money considering that the mentioned topic substitutes the aspiration to search for meaning by following one's inclination for means of, as a rule, objectless purposes;
- Do not avoid the questions raised in general terms such as *What is the meaning of life?, Is there a meaning of life?* and similar queries being related to the sphere of philosophy and religion;
- Mutual relations with students should be guided by Goethe's opinion that taking somebody better than he is shall indeed help him to be such as he is able to be.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite enhancing the popularisation of false values that accompany the world moral crisis, the University's students still hold sufficiently high indices of life-asserting moral

principles. This is manifested in the answers to those questions that are connected with the main objective of somebody's life and the essence of the human meaning of existence.

Side by side with the above results, only 48.7% of students agreed that, in the field of power engineering, there are some professions pursuing the objectives analogous to those being incorporated into a notion of meaning. For first-year students, the index under consideration equals 60.5%. It is evident that the results obtained reflect poor understanding and knowledge of new ideas and prospects in the power engineering field.

The number of negative answers to a question as to whether a person who focuses on entertainment and enjoyment frustrates his/her possibilities for searching and finding the meaning of existence was unexpectedly high (81.3%). This index value indicates the need to inform students in the sphere of restricting sexual relations, particularly that devoid of the *romantic* element, and points to the negative consequences of the sexual entertainment industry being reflected in the media.

Measures to weaken the negative influence of the world moral crises on the University's students are suggested in the article.

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