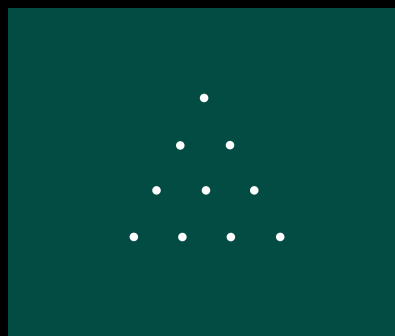




**TURUN  
YLIOPISTO**  
UNIVERSITY  
OF TURKU



# The Existential Nature of Meaningfulness

Advancing Theorising on Meaningfulness and  
Research on Meaningful Work through  
Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy

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Mia Salo





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*For personal commitment to the searching for truthfulness*

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

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Department of Management and Entrepreneurship

Management and Organisation

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## ABSTRACT

This theoretical monograph discusses the philosophical foundation and basic concepts of the experience of meaningfulness. It explores meaningfulness as an existential experience of what matters in life and work, including the perception of what is valuable and right. As a human phenomenon and an existential experience, meaningfulness is inseparable from values and meanings. Values and meanings are important because they guide behaviour and choices. While the research area of 'meaningful work' recognises the need for further research into the relationship between meaning and values, and calls for understanding meaningfulness as a profoundly human, existentially meaningful experience, there is a lack of research addressing these themes. Positioned at a meta-theoretical research level, this dissertation argues that, to understand the existential nature of meaningfulness, we need to identify the philosophical assumptions concerning the phenomenon and experience of meaningfulness and the experiencer.

The aim of this dissertation is to advance theorising and research on meaningfulness in the research area of meaningful work based on Viktor E. Frankl's thought. Frankl is the pioneer of scholarly research on 'meaning in life' and the founder of 'logotherapy'. Through logotherapy, Frankl highlighted existential themes concerning values, life's meaningfulness, and personal meaning in life in the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry. The central research area on meaningfulness within organisational science, 'meaningful work', exploits Frankl's ideas or individual logotherapeutic concepts, such as the motivational concept of 'will to meaning'. However, logotherapy as a comprehensive axiomatic system of thought, or meta-level theoretical framework remains inadequately understood.

This dissertation is guided by the question: *How can integrating logotherapy advance theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience and research on meaningful work?* To answer the research question, the dissertation compiles a meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy and conceptualises it as 'logotherapy'. The proposition is that logotherapy consists of four interrelated meta-level theories that pertain to the view of human nature, the ontology of values and meanings, epistemology, and the view of motivation. Grounded on problematisation methodology, philosophical inquiry, and phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis, the dissertation uses logotherapy as a theoretical lens through which assumptions

about meaningfulness are revealed and a new understanding of the existential experience of meaningfulness is developed. The research process is based on a hermeneutic circle that narrows towards a reasoned interpretation. The dissertation's central hermeneutic interpretation processes concern integrating logotherapy and understanding meaningfulness as an existential experience.

This dissertation makes two theoretical key contributions. First, it highlights logotherapy as a scientific-philosophical approach, where the existential experience of meaningfulness is based on the individual striving for truthfulness. On this quest, our freedom is responsible, we use our conscience as a meaning organ, and our motivation stems from 'meaning fulfilment'. The second key contribution consists of conceptualising the relationship of meaning simultaneously as a relationship of value. This theoretical argument opens up the possibility to explore and understand the experience and criteria of meaningfulness in relation to one's value-orientation and various value bases. Overall, this dissertation contributes to understanding meaningfulness as an existential experience in the research areas of meaningful work, meaningful life, and logotherapy, as well as within the disciplines of organisational science and psychology. In addition to the key contributions, the theoretical novelty of this dissertation contains three conceptual frameworks: the basic structure of the existential experience of meaningfulness; conceptual meaning contexts; and meaningfulness as a social phenomenon in organisational science. Theoretical contributions also involve developing a value-based typology of meaningfulness, highlighting meta-level motivation, and revealing meta-level assumptions related to meaningfulness in the research area of meaningful work and within organisational science. The adoption of the meta-level research approach further makes a methodological contribution. For the research areas of meaningful work and logotherapy, the dissertation proposes future research avenues.

This theoretical monograph structures research on meaningfulness in a fundamental way, as it discusses critically the basic concepts employed in the field. Our conceptual understanding of meaningfulness impacts what and how we strive for in life and work – just as the management theories impact the management and leadership practices in organisations. The immediate practical implications of this dissertation are summarised into five calls for action finalising the book. Leaning on these, the reader can embark on a personal journey towards existentially meaningful work and life.

**KEYWORDS:** meaningfulness, meaningful work, logotherapy, logotherapy, Viktor Frankl, existential, subjective experience, values, meta-level, problematisation

## TURUN YLIOPISTO

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## TIIVISTELMÄ

Haluamme tehdä merkityksellistä työtä. Pohdimme oman elämän tarkoitusta ja merkityksellisyyttä. Arkielämässä perustelemme keskeisiä valintojamme sillä, että jokin asia on meille merkityksellinen tai että jokin valinta tuntuu oikealta. Mitä itse asiassa tarkoittamme merkityksellisyydellä ja miksi se on meille tärkeää?

Tämä teoreettinen monografia käsittelee merkityksellisyiden kokemuksen filosofista perustaa ja peruskäsitteitä. Lähtökohtaisesti merkityksellisyys tarkoittaa väitöskirjassa yksilön perustavaa kokemusta siitä, että jokin on hänelle tärkeää ja arvokasta työssä tai elämässä, sekä sitä, että omalla elämällä on väliä. Tällaisena eksistentiaalisena kokemuksena merkityksellisyys sisältää yksilön käsityksen arvokkaasta ja oikeasta. Inhimillisenä ilmiönä ja eksistentiaalisena kokemuksena merkityksellisyys on sidoksissa arvoihin ja merkityksiin. Arvot ja merkitykset ovat tärkeitä, koska ne ohjaavat käyttäytymistä ja valintoja. Merkityksellisen työn tutkimusalue tunnistaa merkityksellisyiden ja arvojen välisen suhteen lisätutkimuksen tarpeen ja peräänkuuluttaa merkityksellisyiden ymmärtämistä inhimillisenä, eksistentiaalisesti merkitsevänä kokemuksena. Tämä metateoreettiselle tutkimuksen tasolle sijoittuva väitöskirja esittää, että merkityksellisyiden eksistentiaalisen luonteen tavoittamiseksi ja ymmärtämiseksi meidän tulee tunnistaa merkityksellisyiden ilmiöön, kokemukseen ja kokijaan liittyvät filosofiset oletukset. Näihin nykytutkimus ei ota kantaa, vaikka osittain havaitsee ongelman.

Väitöskirjan tavoitteena on edistää merkityksellisyiden teoretisointia ja tutkimusta merkityksellisen työn tutkimusalueella Viktor E. Franklin ajatteluun perustuen. Väitöskirja erottaa merkityksellisyiden kokemuksen monitieteisessä kentässä kolme tutkimusaluetta: merkityksellinen elämä, merkityksellinen työ ja logoterapia. Frankl on merkityksellisen elämän tutkimuksen pioneeri ja logoterapian kehittäjä. Logoterapian avulla Frankl nosti eksistentiaaliset eli arvoja sekä oman elämän tarkoitusta koskevat filosofiset teemat esiin psykologian ja psykiatrian tieteenaloilla. Organisaatiotieteelle keskeinen merkityksellisen työn tutkimusalue hyödyntää Franklin ajatuksia tai yksittäisiä logoterapeuttisia käsitteitä, kuten motivaatiokäsitettä 'tarkoituksen tahto' (*will to meaning*). Merkityksellisyiden tutkimuksesta kuitenkin puuttuu kokonaan tai osittain ymmärrys logoterapiasta kokonaisvaltaisena aksiomaattisena ajatusjärjestelmänä eli metateoreettisena viitekehyksenä.

Tätä väitöskirjaa ohjaa kysymys: *Kuinka logoteorian integrointi voi edistää merkityksellisuuden teoretisointia eksistentiaalisena kokemuksena sekä merkityksellisen työn tutkimusta?* Tutkimuskysymykseen vastatakseen väitöskirja koostaa Franklin logoterapian metateoreettisen viitekehyksen, käsitteellistää sen logoteoriaksi ja tarkastelee merkityksellisyyttä ja sen perusoletuksia logoteorian linssin läpi. Väitöskirja ehdottaa, että logoteoria koostuu neljästä metatason teoriasta, jotka koskevat ihmiskäsitystä, arvojen ja merkitysten ontologiaa, tietopopia ja motivaatiokäsitystä. Tutkimusasetelma perustuu problematisointi-metodologiaan, jossa dialektista kyseenalaistamista logoteorian ja merkityksellisen työn välillä käytetään metatason oletusten tutkimiseen ja paljastamiseen. Teorian ja tutkimuksen edistämiseksi väitöskirja tukeutuu filosofiseen tarkasteluun (*philosophical inquiry*) ja fenomenologis-hermeneuttiseen analyysiin. Tutkimusprosessi perustuu hermeneuttiseen kehään, joka kapenee kohti perusteltua tulkintaa. Väitöskirjan keskeiset hermeneuttiset tulkintaprosessit koskevat logoteorian integrointia ja merkityksellisuuden ymmärtämistä eksistentiaalisena kokemuksena.

Väitöskirjalla on kaksi teoreettista päälöydöstä. Ensinnäkin se nostaa logoteorian esiin tieteenfilosofisena lähestymistapana, jossa merkityksellisuuden eksistentiaalinen kokemus perustuu yksilön pyrkimykselle totuudellisuuteen. Tällöin yksilön vapaus on vastuullista, hän käyttää omaatuntoa tarkoituksaistina ja häntä motivoi henkilökohtaisen tarkoituksen täyttäminen. Toinen päälöydös koskee merkityksuhteen käsitteellistämistä samanaikaisesti arvosuhteeksi. Löydös avaa mahdollisuuden tutkia ja ymmärtää merkityksellisuuden kokemusta ja kriteerejä suhteessa yksilön arvo-orientaatioon ja erilaisiin arvopohjiin. Kaiken kaikkiaan väitöskirja edistää merkityksellisuuden ymmärtämistä eksistentiaalisena kokemuksena merkityksellisen työn, merkityksellisen elämän ja logoterapian tutkimusalueilla sekä organisaatiotieteen ja psykologian tieteenaloilla. Päälöydösten lisäksi väitöskirjan tieteellinen uutuusarvo sisältää kolme käsitteellistä viitekehystä: merkityksellisuuden eksistentiaalisen kokemuksen perusrakenne, merkityksen käsitteelliset kontekstit ja merkityksellisyys sosiaalisena ilmiönä organisaatiotieteessä. Tieteellistä uutuusarvoa tuottavat myös väitöskirjan esiin nostama metatason motivaatio ja sen kehittämä merkityksellisuuden arvotypologia. Väitöskirjan metatason tutkimuslähestymistapa muodostaa itsessään metodologisen uutuusarvon. Merkityksellisen työn ja logoterapian tutkimusalueille väitöskirja ehdottaa jatkotutkimuskohteita.

Tämä teoreettinen väitöskirja jäsentää merkityksellisuuden tutkimusta perustavanlaatuisesti, koska se ottaa kantaa merkityksellisuuden kokemuksen tutkimuksessa käytettäviin peruskäsitteisiin. Käsitteellinen ymmärryksemme merkityksellisyydestä on yhteydessä siihen, mihin ja miten pyrimme elämässä ja työssä – kuten johtamisteorioilla on yhteys siihen, miten johtamista organisaatioissa toteutetaan. Väitöskirjan käytännön vaikutukset on kiteytetty kirjan loppuluvussa viiteen toimintasuositukseen. Niihin nojautuen lukija voi aloittaa matkan kohti eksistentiaalisesti merkityksellistä elämää ja työtä. Tämä matka on henkilökohtainen tehtävä: kukaan ei voi kasvaa henkisesti täysi-ikäiseksi toisen puolesta.

ASIASANAT: merkityksellisyys, merkityksellinen työ, logoteoria, logoterapia, Viktor Frankl, eksistentiaalinen, subjektiivinen kokemus, arvot, metataso, problematisointi

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Writing a dissertation was one of my dreams in this life. When the opportunity to realise it began to open in 2018, I was ready. I had discovered Viktor E. Frankl's thoughts in 2008 and started studying logotherapy in 2009. I began to *see* differently. This new way of seeing was something I wanted to verbalise in my dissertation. The journey to what the reader will find on these pages has been long, rewarding, and has deepened my vision. Although this dissertation is theoretical, it is written in light of my life experience. I know what I am writing about. I know what it means to strive for truthfulness. Science also lives on truth. As a sincere quest for truth, science is important to me. Ultimately, this dissertation is not about me, but about the thoughts and insights that my existence can make visible. In my research, I have been encouraged by the idea that my reasoned interpretation may be a necessary step towards the development of better interpretations. I am immeasurably grateful to have been able to make this journey in the fascinating world of science, surrounded by the intellectual and human brilliance of my fellow travelers.

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# 1 Introduction

This dissertation explores the existential nature of meaningfulness. It aims to advance theory and research on meaningfulness as an existential experience across the research areas of meaningful work and logotherapy, and by extension, in organisational science, psychology, and practice. Along the lines of philosophical-phenomenological tradition, the dissertation studies meaningfulness as a phenomenon that reveals itself in an individual's subjective experience, where we interpret and form the subjective meanings that guide our understanding, behaviour, and actions. Essentially, one could argue that this dissertation unpacks Viktor Frankl's phrase: "*Logos* is deeper than logic" (1992/1959, p. 122; italics in the original), hence, focusing on understanding what makes life worth living. This is an existential question that cannot be solved by solely resorting to cognition, reasoning, and empirical methods.

Studying meaningfulness and the experience of meaningfulness from an existential perspective is timely. Today, many yearn for something beyond affluence, happiness, and success (Frankl 2010/1986, p. 203; Leontiev 2005; Lepisto & Pratt 2017, p. 100). In light of this dissertation, this *something* is related to meaningfulness as an existential experience, in which the search for a meaningful life and work is both a deeply personal journey and closely tied to the reality around us. We are increasingly aware of and concerned about the growing geopolitical instability, as well as the kind of future the Earth as a habitat can offer us and future generations. At this time, we face simultaneously two intertwined existential questions: a micro-level question about the meaning of our personal existence in the world today, and a macro-level question that concerns the entire planet and the human way of life as we know it. How and on what basis do we answer these questions with our lives and work? By examining meaningfulness as an existential experience, building on Frankl's thinking, this dissertation proposes that, fundamentally, meaningfulness is grounded in the individual's pursuit of truthfulness, value-apprehension, being responsible, and acting responsibly.

This introductory chapter first tentatively defines the existential experience of meaningfulness and explains why it is worth studying. To position this dissertation and define the research problem, Section 1.2 identifies the key research areas of

meaningfulness, their current state, and the blind spot. Section 1.3 depicts the adopted research design, research questions, and the structure of this dissertation.

## 1.1 Meaningfulness as an existential experience

Meaningfulness is an age-old and contemporary human phenomenon, rooted in the philosophical and ethical contemplation on life's meaning. Studying meaningfulness is important because the experience of meaningfulness and the subjective meanings based on it are connected to our behaviour and to what we consider important (Morin 1995, p. 42). As a research topic, the phenomenon of meaningfulness concerns the phenomenological world, yet it is also connected to the real world (Cornelissen, Höllerer & Seidl 2021, p. 4). Within sociology, organisational studies, and social psychology, meanings are regarded as non-physical entities not fully reducible to physical events in the brain, yet they are real in the sense that meanings have a potential to organise the natural and social realities and the individual's experience of them. Meanings thus possess causal importance; they exert a real impact on natural, social, and organisational phenomena. (Baumeister & Landau 2018, pp. 2–4).

Ultimately, meaningfulness concerns the question of what makes life worth living (Pihlström 2020, pp. 297, 304; Reker & Wong 1988, p. 220). This question is existential in two senses: It relates to being and the meaning of being. For the individual, an existential question calls for personal reflection and conscious stance-taking on what is important, valuable, and right, and on what basis. The nature of the question is such that the individual cannot base his or her answer, that is, a value judgement, solely on scientific knowledge or resort to theory, norm, or rule, but must also rely on intuitive knowledge. Thus, a characteristic feature of an existential experience is that, while it is intertwined with all modes of being, it especially requires understanding the so-called normative sphere: the realm where questions of right and wrong, valuable and valueless, fair and unfair, or good and evil initially arise.

Streams of meaningfulness research grounded in the thinking of the Austrian psychiatrist, neurologist, and philosopher Viktor E. Frankl (1905–1997) consider the search for meaning a universal human motive. According to Frankl, man does not primarily pursue happiness, success, well-being, or, for example, self-actualisation in his or her life, but these can follow as a byproduct of 'meaning fulfilment'. Frankl argues that man's main motive, which cannot be returned to or derived from other motives, is his or her 'will to meaning'. As an internal motivation concept, it combines being and meaning, the will and the in-itself-valuable (an ought). Frankl stressed that "a strong meaning orientation" [will to meaning] is a life-prolonging, even life-preserving agent that is central for physical and mental health (1966a, pp.

103–104). Bypassing existential questions was not an option for Frankl, as it might lead to existential frustration or even to an existential crisis. In fact, from the Franklian perspective, climate and environmental anxiety or increased mental health problems in today's performance society can be considered healthy reactions to the prevailing situation (the current lifestyle) rather than as disorders. (Frankl 2010/1958, pp. 86–87; 1953, p. 12).

The existential approach to meaningfulness is rooted in existential philosophy, existentialism's precursor. It directs the focus on understanding meaningfulness for its own sake, not as a means to something (Batthyány & Russo-Netzer 2014b, p. 15; Lips-Wiersma & Wright 2012, pp. 657–658; Michaelson 2021, p. 421). Then, studying the experience of meaningfulness has a philosophical-phenomenological focus: It aims to produce knowledge of what matters and what for, not “what makes for the flourishing of persons, institutions and practices”, that is, “well-being” (Tsoukas, Sandberg, Fayard, & Zundel 2024, p. 1236). Essentially, the existential approach of this dissertation leads to scrutinising and justifying how an individual comes to know about values and ethics. While recognising the argument's radical nature, this dissertation seeks, building on the thinking of Frankl and early phenomenologists, to argue for the necessity of studying the themes of value-apprehension and ethics within meaningfulness research, organisational science, and science in general. For truly, the world is not changed or improved by mere factual knowledge based on empirical research on human behaviour. Even science is based on philosophical intuitions (ibid., p. 1235). To this end, Tsoukas et al. (2024, p. 1236) remark that

both scientific statements and decisions in organizations are similarly grounded in value judgements: just as science evaluates as well as explains, so decision makers' judgements and decisions are based on value-infused appreciations (Flyvbjerg, Landman, & Schram, 2012; Vickers, 1983).

In broader terms, the existential approach to meaningfulness joins the wider post-secular turn in management and organisation studies and the transition toward a humanistic management theory or “an evaluative science of organizations”, both challenging the prevailing reductionist model of organisational theory and its naturalistic and materialistic assumptions (Aktouf 1992; Ghoshal 2005; Neubert 2019, pp. 253–254; Pirson 2017, p. 52–54; Tsoukas et al. 2024, pp. 1236).

## 1.2 Research on meaningfulness

Traditionally, meaningfulness has been studied in the sphere of the humanities by philosophers and theologians (Baumeister & Landau 2018, p. 8; Metz 2019). Today, meaningfulness is a multidisciplinary research topic extending from philosophy,

psychology, sociology, organisational studies, education, medicine, and nursing to different research domains, such as disaster mental health, positive psychology, existential psychiatry, meaningful work, and logotherapy (Baumeister & Landau 2018, p. 1; Bailey, Lips-Wiersma, Madden, Yeoman, Thompson, Chalofsky 2019, p. 482; Vos, Russo-Netzer & Schulenberg 2023). Numerous studies conclude that experienced meaningfulness is connected to indicators of well-being, general and mental health, life satisfaction, and work motivation (Allan, Batz-Barbarich, Sterling & Tay 2019, pp. 514, 515; King & Hicks 2021, p. 564; Schulenberg, Nassif, Hutzell & Rogina 2008, p. 448; Steger 2012, p. 381; Vos et al. 2023, p. 133; Ward & King 2017, pp. 63, 77). Simultaneously, meaninglessness is recognised as a modern malaise associated with, for example, depression, anxiety, and disengagement (Batthyány 2011, p. 177; Batthyany & Russo-Netzer 2014b, pp. 3–4; Frankl 2010/1972, p. 41). Meaningful work has emerged as a “double-edged sword” (Bunderson & Thompson 2009): Meaningless work can lead to stress, burnout, and detachment from one’s work (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 486; Lips-Wiersma & Wright 2012, p. 657); however, deeply meaningful work can result in work-life imbalance and damage well-being (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, pp. 486, 489, 490).

Existing research on meaningfulness can be mapped in different ways. Based on a wide reading of the subject in the fields of organisational studies, psychology, and logotherapy, and numerous explorative searches in Scopus, Web of Science, APA PsycINFO, PubMed, and Business Source Complete electronic databases, this dissertation distinguishes between three broad research areas or literature domains (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, pp. 57, 70) addressing meaningfulness from an experiential perspective: ‘meaningful life’, ‘meaningful work’, and ‘logotherapy’. For organisational scholars, the most central of these is the research area of meaningful work. To form an overview, the following briefly outlines the current state of each research area.

### 1.2.1 The research area of meaningful life

The research area of ‘meaningful life’ contains the more psychologically oriented ‘meaning *in* life’ and the more philosophically oriented ‘meaning *of* life’ research. Some scholars call for a clear distinction between the two, while others strive to combine them to study and understand meaningfulness. In their review of the science of ‘meaning *in* life’, King and Hicks (2021, pp. 562–563) exhort separating ‘meaning *in* life’ and ‘meaning *of* life’ to advance research on meaningfulness as a subjective experience. They draw on Klinger’s statement that “[M]eaningfulness is something very subjective, a pervasive quality of a person’s inner life” (King & Hicks 2021, p. 562). For King and Hicks, the meaning *of* life concerns the vague and mysterious

one principle through which life makes sense (*ibid.*). In the same vein, Martela and Steger (2016, p. 532) delineate that the meaning *of* life, as a philosophical question, does not fall within the scope of psychology—an empirical science drawing on “modern objectivist scientific methodology”. Instead, like King and Hicks, they urge scholars studying meaning in life to investigate subjective experiences and what makes individuals “experience meaningfulness in their lives” (Martela & Steger 2016, p. 532; King & Hicks 2021, p. 563).

Meaningful life scholars inclined toward combining the perspectives of ‘meaning in life’ and ‘meaning of life’ in the study of meaningfulness build on the idea that evaluating meaningfulness cannot only depend on the beholder’s subjective criteria, even though meaningfulness is tied to subjective conditions (Metz 2021, p. 20). For example, philosopher Susan Wolf (2010, pp. 26, 34–35) states that “meaning in life arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness”, where the “subjective attractions are to things or goals that are objectively worthwhile”. Michaelson (2021, pp. 415, 421), in turn, highlights that most philosophers consider meaningfulness an inherently normative phenomenon and, instead of empirically studying what is experienced as meaningful, as psychologists and social scientists do, philosophers question “whether or why they [individuals] may be right or wrong to experience” something as meaningful. In this spirit, philosopher Thaddeus Metz (2013, p. 408) specifies Wolf’s delineation by noting that “objectively attractive projects are centrally those that involve the exercise of reason done for the sake of ‘the good, the true, and the beautiful’”. He also claims that the study of “life’s meaning” remains “an under-developed normative perspective in English-speaking academic philosophy” (Metz 2016, p. 295). Overall, in current philosophical theorising about meaningfulness, the prevailing propositions that combine the perspectives of ‘meaning in life’ and ‘meaning of life’ are argued to be grounded in analytical philosophy. Thus, emphasis is on explaining meaningfulness based on reason and logic, as Wolf, Michaelson, and Metz above (Metz 2021, pp. 1–2), and not, for example, on experientiality and contextuality, as in continental philosophy, from which Frankl’s thinking draws.

The development of meaningful life research has been hampered by the diversity of definitions of the basic concepts, which may at least partly stem from the different terminology used across the scientific disciplines that various scholars represent. To illustrate, according to Steger (2012, p. 382), ‘meaning in life’ corresponds with global meaning, a concept first introduced by Reker and Wong (2012, p. 433), who, however, consider the global meaning as the other of the two aspects of ‘meaning in life’ addressing the experience of meaning (global and situational meaning). In turn, Baumeister and Landau (2018, p. 1) equate the concepts of ‘meaning *of* life’ and ‘existential meaning’ and define that ‘meaning *of* life’ involves purpose, value, mattering, continuity, and coherence. Yet, King and Hicks’s (2021 p. 561) as well as

Martela and Steger's (2016, pp. 531, 534) definition of 'meaning *in* life' contains practically the same components: "comprehension/coherence, purpose, and existential mattering/significance". In summary, even the basic concepts of 'meaning in life' and 'meaning of life' are conceptualised ambiguously. Moreover, the terms 'meaningfulness' and 'meaning in life' are often treated interchangeably. For instance, instead of delineating that "coherence, significance, orientation, and belonging" are the key elements of 'meaning in life', in Schnell's (2021, pp. 7–8) theorising, they are those of 'meaningfulness'.

An important aspect of meaningfulness concerns whether it is viewed as a normative or descriptive construct<sup>1</sup>. Martela and Steger (2016, pp. 534, 536) particularise that, in their 'meaning in life' conception, 'coherence' is an epistemic and descriptive component, while the other two, 'significance' and 'purpose', are ethical and normative ones referring to "what we value in evaluative and motivational terms". One frailty of this theorising is in that normativity is understood in a weak sense, that is, it is linked to the individual's subjective valuations. This is commonplace in the psychologically oriented research stream of 'meaning in life', where the aim is to empirically study what the individual experiences as meaningful, and where personal valuations serve as criteria for meaningfulness. Thus, meaningfulness is reduced to a descriptive phenomenon detached from normative elements. Notably, this dissertation distinguishes between the terms 'descriptive', 'prescriptive', and 'normative', as elaborated on later (2.3.1).

Another common frailty in the current theorising of meaningfulness is related to the implicit emphasis on the empirical, predominantly positivist approach to studying the experience of meaningfulness, which reduces subjective experience to subjective meaning, and thus, from a phenomenological perspective, creates a validity problem in equating the 'experience of meaningfulness' with 'experienced meaningfulness' (Cornelissen et al. 2021, p. 11). In other words, studying the experience of meaningfulness itself is one thing, but studying what makes individuals experience meaningfulness is another. Furthermore, while meaningfulness at the level of definitions is associated with values, evaluation or judgment, as well as with feelings, senses or emotions (George & Park 2016, p. 208; Martela & Steger 2016, p. 534), in the current approaches, meaningfulness is nevertheless based on reasoning and cognitive evaluation, reducing the phenomenon of meaningfulness to a cognitive rather than an experiential one.

<sup>1</sup> According to Cornelissen et al. (2021, p. 16), "constructs are essentially concepts (Podsakoff et al. 2016; Suddaby, 2010)", and often involve "definitional work in support of the particular purpose of empirically measuring and testing concepts (Bacharach, 1989; Osigweh, 1989; Suddaby, 2010)". The implicit goal of Martela and Steger's conceptual paper is the operationalization of meaningfulness (2016, p. 541).

## 1.2.2 The research area of meaningful work

Within organisational studies, the focal area of research on meaningfulness lies in the literature of ‘meaningful work’. It extends across multiple research domains, including human resource development, organisational culture, leadership, corporate responsibility, business ethics, workplace spirituality, and sustainability (Bailey, Yeoman et al. 2019, p. 83; Lips-Wiersma & Wright 2012, p. 656; Michaelson et al. 2014). Traditionally, organisational research capitalises on psychological and sociological theorising and findings. This also applies to the research area of ‘meaningful work’, which is heavily influenced by the psychological research stream of ‘meaning *in* life’ – not least because some scholars, such as Steger, Martela, and Schnell, operate in both research areas. Empirical research on meaningful work is widely regarded as beginning in the 1970s with Hackman and Oldham’s (1975, 1976) influential job characteristics model (Bailey, Yeoman et al. 2019, p. 100). There, ‘experienced meaningfulness of the work’ is considered a psychological state influenced by three job characteristics—skill variety, task identity, and task significance—and defined as “[T]he degree to which the individual experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile” (Hackman & Oldham 1976, pp. 250, 256).

In their systematic review of the empirical literature on meaningful work, Bailey, Yeoman, Madden, Thompson, and Kerridge (2019, pp. 85, 89–92) examined the experience, antecedents, and outcomes of meaningful work, and distinguished six dominant perspectives: (1) meaningful work as a psychological state drawing from the job characteristics model, (2) meaningfulness as a multifaceted eudaimonic psychological state or (3) an occupation-specific phenomenon, (4) meaningfulness in the context of workplace spirituality or (5) humanities tradition, or simply, (6) other perspective. The authors note that the humanistically oriented research line differs from others in that it considers the search for meaning (the will to meaning) to be an inherent, basic motivation for humans (*ibid.*, p. 90). The key source of theoretical frameworks for empirical research on meaningful work is positive psychology, and the majority of studies adopt a positivist, quantitative approach (*ibid.*, pp. 92, 100–101). The underlying goal of the empirical research perspectives and the theoretical frameworks used seems to be to achieve a sense of meaningfulness (*ibid.*, pp. 84, 105); the greater the amount of experienced meaningfulness, the better (Rosso et al. 2010, p. 95).

As yet, the research area of meaningful work has generated a rich but diverse understanding of conceptualisations and respective measurements (e.g. Hackman & Oldham 1975; Lips-Wiersma & Wright 2012; Schnell et al. 2013; Steger et al. 2012), together with sources, antecedents, mechanisms, outcomes, and accounts (Allan et al. 2019; Lips-Wiersma et al. 2020; Michaelson 2021; Pratt & Ashforth 2003; Rosso et al. 2010) of meaningful work. Simultaneously, an overlapping, interchangeable,

or conflating use of terms impedes the research area's theoretical progress and a convergence of diverse perspectives. In general, meaningfulness refers to something that matters to the individual – and frequently to others – and is subjectively experienced, sensed, or perceived, in essence, positive, worth striving for, even central to the human condition (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, pp. 482, 490, 491; Frémeaux & Pavageau 2022, p. 55; Lips-Wiersma & Wright 2012; Madden & Bailey 2019, p. 148; Rosso et al. 2010, p. 93; Steger & Dik 2009, p. 133). Once meaningful work is treated as an experience, it becomes a multifaceted concept (Allan et al. 2019, pp. 501–502). Mostly, meaningfulness is considered a more comprehensive term than meaningful work (Lepisto & Pratt 2017, p. 101). Unfortunately, there is a tendency to use the terms 'meaningfulness' and 'meaningful work' interchangeably (e.g. Allan et al. 2019, p. 501; Bailey, Yeoman et al. 2019; Lepisto & Pratt 2017, p. 101; Madden & Bailey 2019; Mitra & Buzzanell 2017), and conflate the use of the terms 'meaning', 'meaningful', and 'meaningfulness' (Michaelson 2021, p. 415; Rosso et al. 2010, p. 94). Following Pratt and Ashforth (2003), Rosso et al. (2010, pp. 94–95) suggest in their influential review of meaningful work (meaning of work) a view that has subsequently been widely adopted. Accordingly, as an individual-level concept, 'meaning' is "the output of having made sense of something", and 'meaningfulness' concerns "the amount of significance something holds for an individual".

To conclude, a consensus on the definition of meaningful work remains evasive (Both-Nwabuwe, Dijkstra & Beersma 2017, p. 2; Michaelson 2021, pp. 415–416; Lepisto & Pratt 2017, p. 101). Salient in the recently suggested meaningful work definitions is the emergence of the term 'existential' (e.g. Allan et al. 2019, p. 502; Both-Nwabuwe et al. 2017, p. 7; Lips-Wiersma & Morris 2009, p. 492) that is used to capture an extra layer or dimension of meaningfulness or human existence – something particularly meaningful and significant to an individual in terms of experiencing work as meaningful. Indeed, in their introductory article to the *Journal of Management Studies Special Issue on Meaningful Work*, Bailey, Lips-Wiersma, Madden, Yeoman, Thompson, and Chalofsky (2019, p. 481) argue for the necessity of "a deeper understanding of meaningfulness". They suggest meaningfulness is characterized by five "non-resolvable paradoxes, or intricate tensional knots" establishing the core debates on meaningful work (ibid., p. 489). While these paradoxes are phrased to concern meaningful work, they seemingly focus on the 'meaningful' aspect of the two-word term, thus, treating 'work' more as the context for the experience of meaningfulness or meaninglessness. Similarly, this dissertation focuses on the study of meaningfulness, not work. In fact, meaningful work scholars often do not define the noun 'work' (Michaelson 2021, p. 415). Chapter 5 discusses the five paradoxes in detail.

### 1.2.3 The research area of logotherapy

The research area of logotherapy stems from the work of Viktor Frankl, widely considered the founder of the “scientific study of meaning in life” (King & Hicks 2021, p. 563; Steger 2019, p. 210). More specifically, Frankl introduced the topic of meaningfulness to psychology, psychotherapy, and psychiatry (Batthyány 2010, p. 22; Batthyány 2011, p. 181; Frankl 2000, p. 59). Following the footsteps of neurologist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and psychiatrist Alfred Adler (1870–1937), and in reaction to their psychoanalysis and individual psychology, Frankl developed his complementary approach to medical and psychological treatments in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He named this non-reductionist and humanised approach first ‘logotherapy’ in 1926 (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 185) and ‘existential analysis’ in 1933 (Frankl 2000, p. 64), where the first term can be considered analogous to *psychotherapy* and the latter to *psychoanalysis* and individual *analysis*.

To distinguish his approach from psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger’s *Daseinanalyse*, which American writers also translated as existential analysis, Frankl’s English writings ended up using the term ‘logotherapy’, admitting the risk that it is used “in a context where no therapy in the proper sense of the word” is involved (Frankl 2010/1967, p. 122; 1967, p. viii). For Frankl, Binswanger’s *Daseinsanalyse* deals only with being, whereas in logotherapy, meaning shows the way to being (Frankl 2010/1967, p. 125). Alongside the terms ‘logotherapy’ and ‘existential analysis’, Frankl also infrequently used the term ‘logotherapy’ to describe the theoretical basis of logotherapy (Frankl 1982a, p. 258; 1986, p. 57). Then, “logotherapy” (*Logo-Theorie*) referred to the intuitively developed theorising of the three groups of values, that is, the “creative, experiential, and attitudinal values”, first published in 1938 (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 184; Frankl 2024, p. 10).

The prefix ‘logo’ originates from the Greek word ‘logos’, which, in the logotherapeutic context, denotes ‘meaning’ and ‘spirit’ (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 74; 2019, p. xix). According to Frankl, the term ‘existential’ (2010/1961, pp. 61–62, italics in the original)

may be used in three ways: to refer to (1) *existence* itself, i.e. the specifically human mode of being (2) the *meaning* of [human] existence, and (3) the striving to find a concrete meaning in personal existence, that is to say, the *will* to meaning.

This dissertation’s existential perspective is based on the above statement. From a philosophical perspective, logotherapy builds most of all on philosopher Max Scheler’s (1874–1928) philosophical anthropology and philosopher and psychiatrist Karl Jaspers’ (1883–1969) life-affirming form of existential philosophy (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 28, 76; Lukas 2020a, p. 28). More broadly, Frankl’s

thinking can be situated within the existential-phenomenological branch of phenomenology, which is often traced to philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) (Purjo 2014, p. 72).

Frankl is widely known for his bestselling book *Man's Search for Meaning* (1992/1959<sup>2</sup>), originally published in German in 1946, immediately after WWII, and based on his experiences as a concentration camp inmate number 119104 (Frankl 1992/1959, p. 21). Frankl is also considered an existential or humanistic psychologist for addressing themes such as freedom, responsibility, meaningfulness, suffering, guilt, values, spirituality, and death (DuBois 2004, p. ix; Schnell 2010, p. 366; Wong 2005, p. 195). To be precise, Frankl was a psychiatrist, neurologist, and philosopher. He completed his doctorate in medicine in 1930 and his doctorate in philosophy in 1948 at the University of Vienna. After World War II, he was a professor of neurology and psychiatry at the same university, teaching until 1990, and served as head of the Vienna Neurology Clinic for 25 years (1946–1971). Since the 1950s, Frankl lectured at 209 universities on five continents, was a visiting professor at five American universities, and, in the United States alone, made 92 lecture tours. (Frankl 2000, p. 116; 2020, p. 135<sup>3</sup>). Most of all, however, Frankl was a physician in whose work philosophy and practice were intimately related (DuBois 2004, p. x; Frankl 2008, p. 153). For him, anthropological, ontological, and epistemological assumptions about man and the reality experienced by man formed the foundations of medical care and therapeutic treatment (Frankl 2024).

Frankl developed the foundational elements of logotherapy in the 1920–30s based on his studies, observations, and phenomenological analysis, specifically: (1) studies in medicine (psychiatry and neurology), psychology, and philosophy; (2) observations in patient work, especially the treatment of depressive and suicidal patients, and in counseling unemployed youth (Batthyány 2010, pp. 7–24); and (3) phenomenological analysis – as Max Scheler outlined – of the subjective experience of human existence (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 118; DuBois 2024, p. xii, xlv). For Frankl, the subjective experience of meaningfulness is based on a tensional relationship between the subjective pole of human existence and the objective pole of the reality of meaning and values, and on man's 'will to meaning' that bridges them. Specifically, the experience of meaningfulness involves a three-dimensional view of man, value realism presented by early phenomenologists, a value-ethical apprehension, a phenomenological orientation of normative ethics, and, based on

<sup>2</sup> Original title in German *Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager* (*A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp*) and, in English, *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*. With the title *Man's Search for Meaning* only in 1963 (Batthyány 2010, pp. 29–30).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.viktorfranklinstitute.org/about-viktor-frankl/>

these, ‘being responsible’ and acting responsibly. Last, one cannot ignore the fact that Frankl did not change the basic tenets of logotherapy due to his experiences during the WWII; he did quite the opposite. Based on them, Frankl (2000, p. 97) argues: “The two basic human capacities, self-transcendence and self-distancing [self-detachment], were verified and validated in the concentration camps”. Chapter 4 discusses these concepts in more detail.

The link between theory and practice, that is, between the theoretical development of logotherapy and the study of its clinical efficiency, has been integral since the beginning, from Frankl’s early works, in which the formation and progression of logotherapy have been documented (Thir & Batthyány 2016, p. 54). Initially, the evidence was based on Frankl’s case studies (ibid., p. 55). In their annotated bibliography (2006) summarizing empirical research on logotherapy between 1975 and 2004, Batthyány and Guttman suggest three consecutive and somewhat overlapping periods of logotherapy research conducted by people other than Frankl:

1. In the 1950s and 1960s, following the English publication of Frankl’s two key books, *The Doctor and the Soul* in 1955 and *Man’s Search for Meaning* in 1959, researchers in clinical, social, and experimental psychology and psychiatry sought to verify the clinical effectiveness of logotherapeutic interventions through scientific study primarily based on case studies, such as the therapeutic effect of paradoxical intention<sup>4</sup> (Batthyány & Guttman 2006, p. 2; Thir & Batthyány 2016, p. 55).
2. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, the focus of the empirical research shifted to developing new instruments to objectively measure logotherapeutic concepts, such as ‘will to meaning’ and ‘existential vacuum’. Specifically, this second period started in 1964, with Crumbaugh and Maholick’s article on the ‘Purpose in Life’ (PIL) test. The test is based on a questionnaire Frankl developed in 1959; he also consulted on its development (Crumbaugh & Maholick 1964, pp. 200–201). Today, alongside the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler (2006), the PIL test is the most widely used psychometric measure of ‘meaning in life’ (Bronk 2014, pp. 22–23).
3. The third period of empirical research begins in the 1980s and revolves around how logotherapy impacts clients’ mental health and broadens the context of logotherapeutic research from clinical settings to, for example,

<sup>4</sup> A logotherapeutic technique building on the capacity of self-detachment, and, based on it, humorous exaggeration. Developed and practiced by Frankl since 1929, and published for the first time in 1947 in ‘*Die Psychotherapie in der Praxis*’ (Frankl 2024, pp. 13, 17).

organisational psychology and pedagogy (Batthyány & Guttmann 2006, p. 2; Thir & Batthyány 2016, p. 55).

Since the genesis of the 21st century, a fourth period has seemingly emerged and is associated with “a rediscovery of Frankl’s works in the behavioural and clinical sciences, especially in positive and existential psychology” (Batthyány 2016, p. vi). To illustrate, Stefan Schulenberg, a professor of clinical psychology, and his colleagues have investigated and developed the PIL test (Melton & Schulenberg 2011, p. 31; Schulenberg, Schnetzer & Buchanan 2011, pp. 862–863). Conversely, another logotherapy-based test, the SONG (Seeking of Noetic Goals) developed by Crumbaugh, is examined to determine how it complements the PIL test (García-Alandete, Rubio-Belmonte & Lozano 2018; Reker & Cousins 1979). In this case, the goal is to combine the presence of meaning measured by the PIL and the search for meaning of the SONG (Bronk 2014, p. 27). Information is also available on logotherapy’s connection to positive psychology (e.g. Batthyány & Russo-Netzer 2014b; Wong 2014) and to trends in psychotherapy (e.g. Ameli & Dattilio 2013; Martinez & Floréz 2015; Schulenberg, Nassif, Hutzell & Rogina 2008). Logotherapy has also been used as a springboard for developing existential and meaning-centred psychotherapeutic methods (Vos & Vitali 2018; Correia, Cooper, Berdondini & Correia 2018), such as Meaning-Centered Counseling and Therapy (MCCT) (Wong 2012c) and Existential Analysis (EA) (Längle 2012).

In addition to individual articles or book chapters, recent information about logotherapy is in compilations, notably *Logotherapy and Existential Analysis. Proceedings of the Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna*, Volume 1 edited by Batthyány (2016, Springer); *Meaning in Positive and Existential Psychology* edited by Batthyány and Russo-Netzer (2014a, Springer); *The Human Quest for Meaning. Theories, Research, and Applications. 2nd edition* edited by Wong (2012a; Routledge); *Existential Psychotherapy of Meaning. Handbook of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis* edited by Batthyány and Levinson (2009, Zeig, Tucker & Theisen); *Viktor Frankl und die Philosophie (Viktor Frankl and Philosophy)* edited by Batthyány and Zsok (2005, SpringerWienNewYork); and *The Wiley World Handbook of Existential Therapy* edited by van Deurzen, Graig, Längle, Schneider, Tantam, and du Plock (2019, John Wiley and Sons Ltd). From a practitioner perspective, the combination of logotherapy and meaningful work has been examined for the first time in von Devivere’s book *Meaningful Work: Viktor Frankl’s Legacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2018, Springer).

Overall, positive psychology or newer approaches to psychotherapy, such as cognitive behavioural therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, or Wong’s MCCT, largely emphasise the same things as logotherapy, but are less comprehensive and less specific than logotherapy from a meta-theoretical perspective, that is, regarding their underlying philosophical assumptions about the

view of human nature, for example (Tsoukas et al. 2024, p. 1235). Professor Alexander Batthyány, director of the Viktor Frankl Institute and the Viktor Frankl Archives in Vienna, summarises that today, empirical research on logotherapy provides evidence for its theoretical assumptions and clinical efficacy (Batthyány 2010, p. 32; Thir & Batthyány 2016, pp. 66–67). According to him, logotherapy is considered “an integral part of the non-reductionist tradition in the clinical, theoretical, and empirical behavioural, social, and human sciences” (Batthyány 2010, pp. 35–36). However, an ambiguous view opens up when logotherapy is examined in light of today’s scientific databases.

Most logotherapy literature is in the disciplinary areas of medicine, psychology, social sciences, the humanities, and nursing (Scopus 1.12.2024). Scientific electronic databases (e.g. Scopus, PubMed, or APA PsycINFO) contain a subset of the extant empirical and theoretical literature on logotherapy. This stems from the paradox that logotherapy is studied and applied across different disciplines, yet, as a rule, it is not taught in higher education institutions. Especially in the 1960s, the situation differed due to Frankl’s professorship at the University of Vienna and his visiting professorships at Harvard and Stanford University, among others. Unfortunately, the level of logotherapy training currently varies among the numerous institutes that provide it around the world, which is inevitably reflected in the quality of logotherapy research. To illustrate, the main logotherapy journal in the U.S., *The International Forum for Logotherapy*, published by VFIL (Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy), is listed in the APA PsycINFO; however, other major scientific electronic databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, or APA PsycArticles, do not include it for quality reasons (see e.g. Schulenberg 2003, pp. 307–308; DuBois 2024, pp. xxxvii–xxxviii). Indeed, the journal is more targeted at a broad audience of logotherapy professionals than the academic community. Regarding the study of mental health, DuBois (2024, pp. xxxvii–xxxviii) highlights two reasons for the current paradoxical situation of logotherapy in science: first, lack of rigorous empirical research, and second, the tendency of the academic community to identify the scientific method with the positivist one, for example, favoring “experimental designs over case reports or phenomenological analysis”.

Overall, the scientific status of Frankl and logotherapy has been and still is controversial (Batthyány & Russo-Netzer 2014b, pp. 4–5; García-Alandete 2023, p. 2; Reitinger 2015; Schnell 2021, pp. 197–198; Weisskopf-Joelson 1975, pp. 238, 240). This is arguably due to several reasons: First, the basic assumptions on which logotherapy rests openly and intentionally combine psychological and philosophical elements. They challenged the prevailing scientific view of humans and human behaviour a century ago and continue to do so today. Specifically, logotherapy builds on the basic tenets of human ‘free will’, ‘meaning in life’, and ‘will to meaning’, taking these assumptions seriously when treating mental health patients, consulting

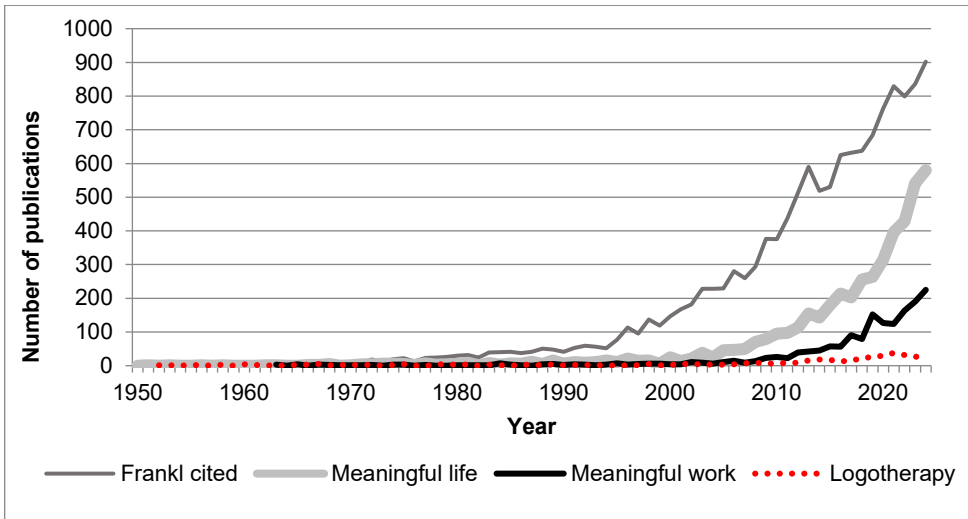
customers, or searching for the spark in life and work. Second, as a person and lecturer, Frankl was considered charismatic, for example, “a mixture of prophet, guru and preacher disguised as a psychiatrist”, as Weisskopf-Joelson (1975, p. 240) puts it. It seems that criticism or suspicion directed at logotherapy is often more or less intertwined with Frankl’s persona (Biller, Levinson & Pytell 2002). Third, based on Frankl’s books and articles, especially if using sources other than German-language ones, logotherapy as a consistent axiomatic system of thought is difficult to grasp, since the information about the various aspects of logotherapy is scattered throughout Frankl’s writings. This scatteredness, combined with the varied (in the sense of conceptually inaccurate) translations of Frankl’s books, and the non-standardised and non-academic teaching around the world, have created a paradoxical situation in which logotherapy is becoming increasingly well-known and widely applied, but the mainstream scientific community remains unaware or puzzled about Frankl as a scientist and about logotherapy as a self-standing and comprehensive theoretical framework.

#### 1.2.4 The blind spot

Numerous studies conclude that meaningfulness matters to well-being, physical and mental health, and life and job satisfaction, and that it predicts personal and organisational benefits (Ward & King 2017, p. 63). Scholars across the three above-reviewed research areas of meaningful life, meaningful work, and logotherapy seemingly subscribe to the idea that meaningfulness ultimately stems from the question of what makes life worth living. In other words, meaningfulness provides us with the *sense* that our lives or work matter. In this spirit, meaningfulness is approached as a “profoundly human experience” (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 490). However, the three research areas, especially when logotherapy is compared to the other two, involve different ways of seeing (Hines 1988), that is, paradigmatic assumptions about the nature of meaningfulness. This opens a window of opportunity for theory elaboration, which this dissertation will seize upon.

To provide an overview of the scope of meaningfulness research and Frankl’s influence on scientific research, they are examined using the data from the Scopus database. **Figure 1** depicts academic publications in the three research areas of meaningfulness as well as references to Frankl’s works from 1950 to 2024: ‘meaningful life’ (n=4650), ‘meaningful work’ (n=1634), and ‘logotherapy’ (n=439), with citations to Frankl’s works (n=13429)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Scopus electronic database keyword, title, and/or reference searches. Updated 5.3.2025. The number of publications in all domains is indicative. For example, Frankl has published articles since 1920s; however, most relate to medical care. Or, according to



**Figure 1.** The trajectory of meaningfulness research between 1950 and 2024.

The general proliferation of meaningfulness research is salient, especially since the second half of the 2010s. In parallel, a growing number of studies cite Frankl: 32% (n=1492) of the publications in ‘meaningful life’ and 9% (n=143) in ‘meaningful work’, of which during the last six years (2019–2024), 54% (n=804) in ‘meaningful life’ and 64% (n=91) in ‘meaningful work’. The growing trend in the volume of research also holds true for the research area of ‘logotherapy’, where the numbers

Scopus, Frankl is only cited from 1972 onwards in the domain of meaningful life, although several authors had done so before this, e.g. Weisskopf-Joelson (1955, 1958), Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964), and Maslow (1966). For illustrative reasons, three publications of meaningful life literature from 1925 (no author attribution), 1931 (Adler), and 1948 (Houf) are not included in the figure. Notably, in the figure, the domain of logotherapy does not include publications from any logotherapeutic journal or periodical listed in Batthyány and Guttman’s annotated bibliography (2006, pp. 339–340), since these publications do not meet the scientific criteria required by the Scopus database. The language of the publications was not limited to English, as almost a quarter (n=105) of the logotherapy publications (n=439) did not have information about the language. Search strings: ‘**Meaningful life**’: keyword OR title meaning in/of life, meaningful life, life meaning\*, purpose in/of life, life purpose, purposeful life, existential meaning\*. ‘**Meaningful work**’: keyword OR title meaning in/of/at work, meaningful work, work meaning\*. Further information about the specific significations of each term, e.g. Bailey et al. 2017, p. 417; Yeoman et al. 2019, pp. 2–3. ‘**Logotherapy**’: keyword logotherap\* OR Frankl, V\*; title logotherap\*. **Frankl cited**: references Frankl, V\* AND NOT Frankl-Vilches AND NOT Frankl-Hochwart. The selected search terms are based on those used in articles in each research area and have been discovered gradually. No criteria for language, subject area, year of publication, or paper type.

are still low, and as in others, a significant portion of the publications, 42% (n=183), are recent, published from 2019 to 2024.

The first article within the research area of ‘meaningful work’ citing Frankl was published in 2006. In the discipline of psychology, Frankl is referred to 50 years earlier – since 1957; however, as in the research areas of ‘meaningful work’ and ‘meaningful life’, the highest number of references to Frankl is in 2023 or 2024, indicating the topicality of his work within meaningfulness research. Overall, 79% of studies citing Frankl originate from psychology (26%), social sciences (21%), medicine (18%), or arts and humanities (15%). A significant portion, 40% (n=5314) of the research citing Frankl’s works is conducted in the United States. Interestingly, based on academic publications in the Scopus subject area of ‘business, management, and accounting’, organisational scholars draw on Frankl’s ideas (n=1046), but not on logotherapy (n=3; none in the research area of meaningful work).

While Frankl’s work is increasingly referenced in scholarly research, this dissertation argues, based on reading the meaningfulness literature across the three identified research areas, that ignorance of the comprehensive meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy is widespread across disciplines, particularly in organisational science, including the research area of meaningful work (Bailey 2022, p. 1; Salo 2023). Hence, the logotherapy’s influence on theorising the topic of meaningfulness remains weak. To illustrate, a few examples of the current situation:

- (1) The motivational concept of ‘will to meaning’ (Frankl 2010/1962, p. 49) is the most widely used logotherapeutic concept in the research area of meaningful work. However, when scholars (e.g. Amabile & Pratt 2016; Bailey, Yeoman et al. 2019, 90–91; Deeg & May 2022; Pratt & Ashforth 2003; Yeoman 2014) cursorily refer to the ‘will to meaning’ or incorporate it into their nomological networks and paradigmatic approaches (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, p. 70; MacInnis 2011, p. 141), the concept is stripped of its inherent ontological and epistemological assumptions. Consequently, the original content of the ‘will to meaning’ has become obscured: specifically, its foundation in intentionality and self-transcendence, in realist epistemology and multidimensional ontology, its connection to the underlying view of human nature and to different levels of meaning, together with the concept’s inherent link to ethics and values, are lacking.
- (2) The multidimensional, process-oriented measure of meaningful work, Lips-Wiersma and Wright’s (2012) Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale (CMWS), draws heavily on the concept of ‘will to meaning’ while ignoring logotherapy. In this particular paper, Frankl is not cited at all. Lips-Wiersma has elaborated on the model and its theoretical basis in her dissertation and several co-authored papers thereafter, in which Frankl’s thinking is used to

confirm selected ideas or findings. However, for example, tensionality, which is a founding element in CMWS and a central logotherapeutic concept (noodynamics), is informed to emerge from empirical data (Lips-Wiersma 2002, p. 504). In total, CMWS is inspired by Frankl but not by logotherapy and operates in a different paradigmatic setting.

- (3) Recently, meaningful work scholars have proposed that self-transcendence is emerging as central to the experience of meaningfulness (Madden & Bailey 2019; Schnell 2011; Steger & Dik 2009; Steger 2019). In logotherapy, self-transcendence is the fundamental feature of human existence (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 76). In fact, Maslow agreed with Frankl that man's main concern is not self-actualisation, but self-transcendence (Frankl 1966a; Maslow 1966). Except for Tatjana Schnell, Dmitry Leontiev, Gary Reker, and Paul Wong, most meaningful life and meaningful work researchers are unaware of the focal role of self-transcendence in logotherapy. Furthermore, the conceptual understanding of self-transcendence, i.e. its relationship to other concepts in logotherapy, is weak, almost non-existent, in English-language meaningfulness research.
- (4) Values and worth are focal themes in meaningfulness research, incorporated into practically every definition of 'meaningful work' and 'meaning in life'. In addition to those previously presented (1.2.2), for example, in George and Park's (2016, p. 208) 'meaning in life' definition, two sub-constructs (purpose and mattering) out of three contain the word 'value' and implicitly involve value-apprehension. While some meaningful work scholars have called for further research on the connection between values and meaningfulness (Rosso et al. 2010, p. 96; Lips-Wiersma & Wright 2012, p. 663), this dissertation argues that, from the Franklian existential-phenomenological perspective, the relationship between meaningfulness, values, and subjective experience remains an uncharted territory in the research areas of 'meaningful work' and 'meaningful life'.

Currently, it seems that while Frankl's ideas inspire contemporary research on meaningfulness, Frankl himself is not considered a serious scholar, but rather a concentration camp survivor who wrote a thought-provoking book about his experiences. Further, logotherapy is not considered a relevant theoretical framework for research in 'meaningful life' and 'meaningful work'. For example, although Frankl is regarded as "the seminal founding figure" (Steger 2019, p. 210) of the research of meaning in life, logotherapy as a theoretical framework is repeatedly bypassed in conceptual (e.g. MacKenzie & Baumeister 2014; Martela & Steger 2016; Michaelson 2021; Steger 2019) and review papers (e.g. George & Park 2016; King & Hicks 2021; Lepistö & Pratt 2017; Rosso et al. 2010) aiming to advance the

theorising of meaningfulness – even though the same papers may also consider or criticise some of Frankl’s ideas, albeit mostly based on erroneous or incomplete understanding. Therefore, some contemporary proposals to advance theorising on meaningfulness seem strange from a Franklian viewpoint, as they might already be included in the theoretical framework of logotherapy – for instance, the aspects raised by the four examples above. That said, contemporary research on ‘meaningful life’ and ‘meaningful work’ has strongly and repeatedly demonstrated how important meaningfulness is in modern society and for modern people. It is also unfair to blame today’s distinguished meaningful life and meaningful work researchers if the theoretical framework of logotherapy is difficult to grasp. On the contrary, the task of describing logotherapy as a consistent theoretical framework calls for scholars versed in logotherapy.

In aiming to advance theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience and research on meaningful work, this dissertation, set in organisational science, focuses on studying the research area of ‘meaningful work’ from the paradigmatically different perspective of Frankl’s ‘logotherapy’. Within organisational science, ‘meaningful work’ is the main research area of meaningfulness, and ‘logotherapy’ is the one about which the least is known, even though ‘meaningful work’ has generally capitalised on the logotherapeutic concept of ‘will to meaning’ and Frankl’s ideas. The third research area, ‘meaningful life’ is more the domain of psychologists and philosophers but is, nevertheless, closely linked to the other two research areas. To elaborate, the prevailing theorising about the topic of meaningfulness in the research areas of ‘meaningful life’ and ‘meaningful work’ is intertwined and comparing them with each other does not offer as fruitful a perspective for theory development as comparing either area with ‘logotherapy’. Moreover, ‘logotherapy’ is an approach that theoretically combines the perspectives of ‘meaning in life’ and ‘meaning of life’. Unlike the approaches presented in Section 1.2.1, logotherapy stems from the tradition of continental philosophy<sup>6</sup>, not analytical philosophy. Thus, it offers an alternative perspective to the theorising of meaningfulness, also based on its philosophical foundation.

### 1.3 Research design, questions, and structure

This dissertation explores meaningfulness as an existential experience related to mattering. As such, meaningfulness embraces an empirical dimension yet is not reduced to it, but also enters a philosophical dimension (Pihlström 2020, p. 297, 304; Wong 2012b, p. 3). While linguistics, semiotics, and logical semantics, for example,

<sup>6</sup> [https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:mannermainen\\_filosofia](https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:mannermainen_filosofia)

also study meanings and meaningfulness, they do not deal with an ‘experience of meaningfulness’. Instead, they focus on language or signs, such as denotative meaning or the meaning of images and symbols. To illustrate, an artificial intelligence cannot reach the experiential dimension of meaningfulness as it operates at the level of signs. Studying meaningfulness as an existential experience means acknowledging there is a facet in meaningfulness that extends beyond the linguistic or symbolic meaning (Michaelson 2021, p. 415), sensemaking (Weick et al. 2005, p. 409), meaning maintenance (Proulx & Inzlicht 2012, p. 317; Steger 2012, pp. 381–82), current rational-scientific logic or methods (Ashforth & Vaiadyanath 2002, p. 361; Neubert 2019, p. 253), even human reason and comprehension (Frankl 1992/1959, pp. 121–22; Little 2014, p. vii). Latterly, meaningful work scholars have highlighted the existential facet of meaningfulness to grasp a deeper level of the individual’s subjective experience of meaningfulness (Sections 1.2.2 and 3.1). However, researchers remain hazy in defining this profound or deeper facet of human experience and its inherent philosophical assumptions.

The level of theorising about the philosophical foundation of meaningfulness is called meta-theory (DuBois 1993, p. 54; Tsoukas et al. 2024, pp. 1235, 1238). Frankl emphasises that all forms of psychology, psychotherapy, and medical care – or, more broadly, whenever we study human persons, behaviour, or action – by necessity rest on a philosophy of human nature and a philosophy of life underlying them (DuBois 2004, p. xi). These assumptions affect, for example, what is the nature of the world given in an experience, what is considered to motivate humans, on what basis change in behaviour occurs, what is the role of ethics and values in the subjective ‘experience of meaningfulness’, and what are the appropriate methods of studying the human being or the ‘experience of meaningfulness’. For Frankl, the essence of the “wittingly or unwittingly” chosen meta-theoretical basis of each psychological approach was whether it preserved the humanness of man (DuBois 2004, p. x; Frankl 2014a, p. 3; Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 502). With humanness, Frankl refers to a uniquely human dimension of being and reality that captures human existence “as free, responsible, and oriented toward meaning” (DuBois 2004, xxiii). Thus far, only a few meaningful work scholars have raised questions about the philosophical assumptions underlying the ‘self’, i.e. the human person, and the “processes by which meaningfulness arises” (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 490).

This dissertation argues that if aiming to understand meaningfulness as a profoundly human experience related to mattering – that is, as an existential experience – we must direct our research attention to the phenomenological world, which is open not only to empirical but also to the philosophical method, and further, to a posteriori and a priori knowledge. In this experiential realm, it becomes possible to explore the content and criteria of value-judgements related to mattering, as well

as the meta-level philosophical assumptions related to the human mode of being and the subjective experience of meaningfulness. Furthermore, the experiential realm allows for examining values and meanings as something that are felt and lived, as in logotherapy (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 388; Frankl 2010/1966, p. 179), rather than being reduced to something that can be captured through the “exercise of reason” (Metz 2013, p. 408).

From the above perspective, in current research on meaningfulness, distinguishing the study of ‘experienced meaningfulness’ from the study of ‘experience of meaningfulness’ is necessary. The first, ‘experienced meaningfulness’, relates to an individual’s subjective interpretation or evaluation, captured in a subjective meaning. For example, the study of subjective meanings through measures, such as the Purpose in Life Test (PIL) or the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ), form the foundation of research on ‘meaning in life’ (George & Park 2017, p. 26). In the case of Hackman and Oldham’s job characteristic theory, which is influential in the research area of meaningful work, the ‘experienced meaningfulness’ refers to measurable job characteristics of ‘skill variety’, ‘task identity’, and ‘task significance’ (1976, pp. 257, 263). Consequently, arguments about ‘experienced meaningfulness’, or subjective meanings, are based on the operationalised context of these three characteristics (Turunen 1995, pp. 64–65). Instead, the latter, the ‘experience of meaningfulness’ is a phenomenological state and fundamentally asks to reveal the underlying philosophical assumptions of the experience itself (Kukkola 2018, pp. 45–46): In Tsoukas and Chia’s (2011, p. 3) wording, the “metaphysical presuppositions regarding the nature of reality, our relation to it and the nature of knowledge thus produced”.

Currently, in the research area of meaningful work, the study of ‘experienced meaningfulness’ and ‘experience of meaningfulness’ is often confused. Thus, while scholars claim to study the subjective experience of meaningfulness, precisely, “the subjective experience of existential significance” (Lips-Wiersma & Wright 2012, p. 657; Both-Nwabuwe et al. 2017, p. 7), for example, they most often move on to studying subjective meanings, thus affecting the validity of knowledge claims (Morgan & Smircich 1980, p. 493; Tsoukas & Chia 2011, p. 6). To understand meaningfulness as an existential experience, the focus needs to shift from studying ‘subjective meaning’ to exploring the ‘experience of meaningfulness’ as a phenomenological state.

## Research Design

To reveal new insights and to advance theorising on meaningfulness and research on meaningful work, this dissertation explores the ‘experience of meaningfulness’ through the lens of Viktor Frankl’s thought. For this purpose, the meta-theoretical

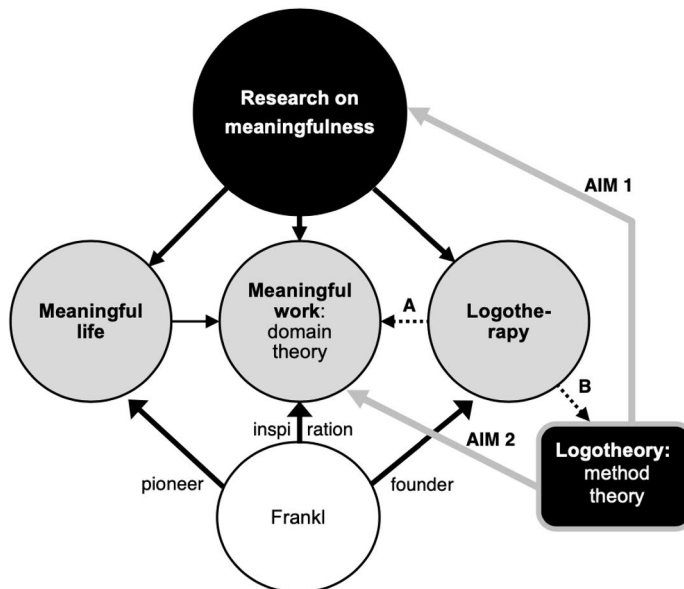
framework of Frankl's logotherapy is first pieced together and conceptualised as 'logotherapy'<sup>7</sup>, consisting of four interrelated meta-level theories. This effort is necessary because, based on existing logotherapy literature, grasping the meta-level "axiomatic system of thought" (Cornelissen et al. 2021, p. 3, referring to Merton 1947) underlying logotherapy is difficult, especially regarding comprehensiveness and coherence. As Section 1.2 showed, the use and application of logotherapy in modern research on meaningfulness is fragmented, incomplete, or nonexistent.

Methodically, and for reasons of conceptual clarity, theorising in this dissertation distinguishes between domain and method theories (Lukka & Vinnari, 2014, p. 1309): the domain theory indicates "a particular set of knowledge on a substantive topic area situated in a field or domain", whereas the method theory is "a meta-level conceptual system for studying the substantive issue(s) of the domain theory" (ibid.). In this dissertation, meaningful work is used as a domain theory, and the here conceptualised logotherapy is used as a method theory to study the subject of interest, meaningfulness. The overall research design builds on problematisation methodology (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013), where dialectical interrogation is used to explore and expose meta-level assumptions, and philosophical inquiry is adopted to advance theorising on meaningfulness and the experience of meaningfulness. **Figure 2** illustrates this dissertation's research design.

In the middle of Figure 2, the grey circles portray the three identified research areas of meaningfulness. Frankl is connected to all of them: He is regarded as the pioneer of the scholarly research on 'meaningful life' and the founder of 'logotherapy', also called 'logotherapy and existential analysis' or only 'existential analysis' (see 3.2.1). 'Meaningful work' scholars, especially the humanistically oriented ones (Bailey, Yeoman et al. 2019, p. 90), have used Frankl's thinking as a source of inspiration. The two black-dotted lines indicate the gaps in current research on meaningfulness that this dissertation explores. The horizontal black-dotted arrow

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the term 'logotherapy', in Finnish logotherapy training organisations and in practice, the terms 'logotherapy' and 'logophilosophy' are used for the theoretical basis of logotherapy. To the best of the author's knowledge, the first to suggest Frankl's term 'logotherapy' as an umbrella term for 'logotherapy' and 'existential analysis' was PhD Timo Purjo in his self-published book (2012, p. 13; Porrum). The author is indebted to Purjo for highlighting the term. 'Logophilosophy', a term introduced by Lukas, originally referred to ideas about how to deal with suffering, guilt, and death, that is, Frankl's 'tragic triad' (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, 180–181). For either term, however, no comprehensive meta-theoretical framework, related descriptions or meta-level theories, or schematic representations have been proposed. Instead, for example, Purjo complements Frankl's thinking with the existential-phenomenological approach of the psychologist and philosopher Lauri Rauhala (1914–2016) (Purjo 2010). In theorising the meta-level framework of logotherapy, this dissertation does not build on Purjo's work.

(A) concerns the lack of research using logotherapy within the research area of meaningful work. The black-dotted arrow pointing downwards (B) concerns the lack of knowledge of Frankl’s consistent meta-theoretical framework of logotherapy. Moreover, the grey arrows depict the aims of the dissertation: (1) to advance theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience and (2) research on meaningful work through a logothereotic exploration.



**Figure 2.** Research design.

Studying meaningfulness from a logothereotic perspective echoes Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al.’s (2019, p. 489) encouragement to investigate complex phenomena, such as meaningfulness, with integrative and holistic approaches to appreciate and theorise them. This dissertation also responds to calls expressed by Pauchant and Morin (2008, p. 3) as well as Bailey, Yeoman et al. (2019, p. 100) for research drawing on Frankl’s work. Since Frankl’s logotherapy is based on a normative approach to meaningfulness and embraces the notions of ‘meaning in life’ and ‘meaning of life’, the logothereotic study also resonates with Michaelson’s invitation to advance theorising on normative meaningfulness and “Normatively meaningful work” (2021, p. 424). Lastly, investigating meaningfulness from the viewpoint of logotherapy is important for the research area of logotherapy itself, as this dissertation highlights logotherapy as a distinct scientific-philosophical approach.

## Research Questions

Building on the blind spot of meaningfulness research (1.2.4), the existential view of Frankl's logotherapy (1.2.3), and the current endeavor of the research area of meaningful work to understand the existential facet of meaningfulness (1.2.2), the overarching research question guiding this dissertation can be formulated as follows:

### **How can integrating logotherapy advance theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience and research on meaningful work?**

The above formulation of the research question assumes we know what 'logotherapy' is and have justified why the term 'logotherapy' is insufficient. It also assumes we know how the research area of meaningful work currently understands the existential facet of meaningfulness. Therefore, answering the research question also requires answering the following sub-questions:

- (1) How does the research area of meaningful work address the existential facet of meaningfulness?
- (2) How is the meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy as an axiomatic system of thought described and schematically represented in the research area of logotherapy?
- (3) What is logotherapy?
- (4) What are the implicit assumptions about meaningfulness in organisational science?

The fourth sub-research question was only formulated towards the end of the research in late 2024, when the researcher's understanding of the research topic, that is, meaningfulness, had matured.

Overall, this dissertation advances theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience. It focuses on exploring the 'experience of meaningfulness' – the phenomenological state of experiencing. Consequently, what the individual perceives in her subjective 'experience of meaningfulness' depends on the consciously or unconsciously chosen basic concepts, that is, the philosophical assumptions underlying the 'experience of meaningfulness'. This dissertation arranges research on meaningfulness in a fundamental way, because it scrutinises the structures of subjective experience and inner perception: how reality is perceived, what kind of conceptual system is used to structure what is perceived, and how the concepts used affect what we perceive about meaningfulness as a phenomenon in the phenomenological world of our subjective experience.

## Structure of the Dissertation

The structure of this dissertation reflects the main research question. **Figure 3**<sup>8</sup> illustrates this structure, detailing which research or sub-research question each chapter addresses, as well as the main outcomes and methods each chapter uses.

**Introductory Chapter 1** first presents the rationale for studying the topic of meaningfulness and, through a ‘mapping review’, identifies key pieces of literature that address meaningfulness from an experiential perspective. It then summarises the current state of each identified piece of literature: the research areas of ‘meaningful work’, ‘meaningful life’, and ‘logotherapy’. Conducting a mapping review in the introductory chapter is not customary, yet this dissertation deems it justified. The review provides the reader with a preliminary introduction to research on meaningfulness as a separate field, further enabling the positioning of this dissertation, the definition of the research problem, and the formulation of the main research question and the first three sub-questions. Furthermore, the mapping review with the author’s pre-understanding of logotherapy<sup>9</sup> enables the methodological choice of positioning the research area of ‘meaningful work’ as the domain theory, which this dissertation studies through the method theory lens of ‘logotherapy’ (Lukka & Vinnari 2014) to expose assumptions and advance research on meaningfulness (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013). In the terminology of the adopted problematisation methodology, ‘meaningful work’ settles as the home theoretical stance or assumption ground, and ‘logotherapy’ as the alternative theoretical stance through which the topic of meaningfulness is explored (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, p. 49). In light of the author’s pre-understanding of meaningfulness research, this positioning is fruitful, as her expertise lies in the research area of ‘logotherapy’, while the research areas of ‘meaningful work’ and ‘meaningful life’ emerge as new ways of seeing.

**Chapter 2** introduces the reader to the study of human phenomena and experiences, as well as the meta-level theoretical research and theorising through conceptual thinking. Essentially, the chapter justifies the methodological choices of this dissertation, outlines the methodological steps (Figure 4), specifies the research data and the method of analysis, and depicts the research process.

<sup>8</sup> The author is indebted to Van Mumford’s dissertation for illustrating the structure (2018, p. 30).

<sup>9</sup> The author started studying logotherapy in 2008 and graduated as a logotherapist in 2013 from the Finnish Institute of Logotherapy ([www.logoterapia.fi](http://www.logoterapia.fi)), where training is based on a four-year curriculum (FLP-EU) developed by Elisabeth Lukas and approved by Frankl. The author has also taught logotherapy since 2015.

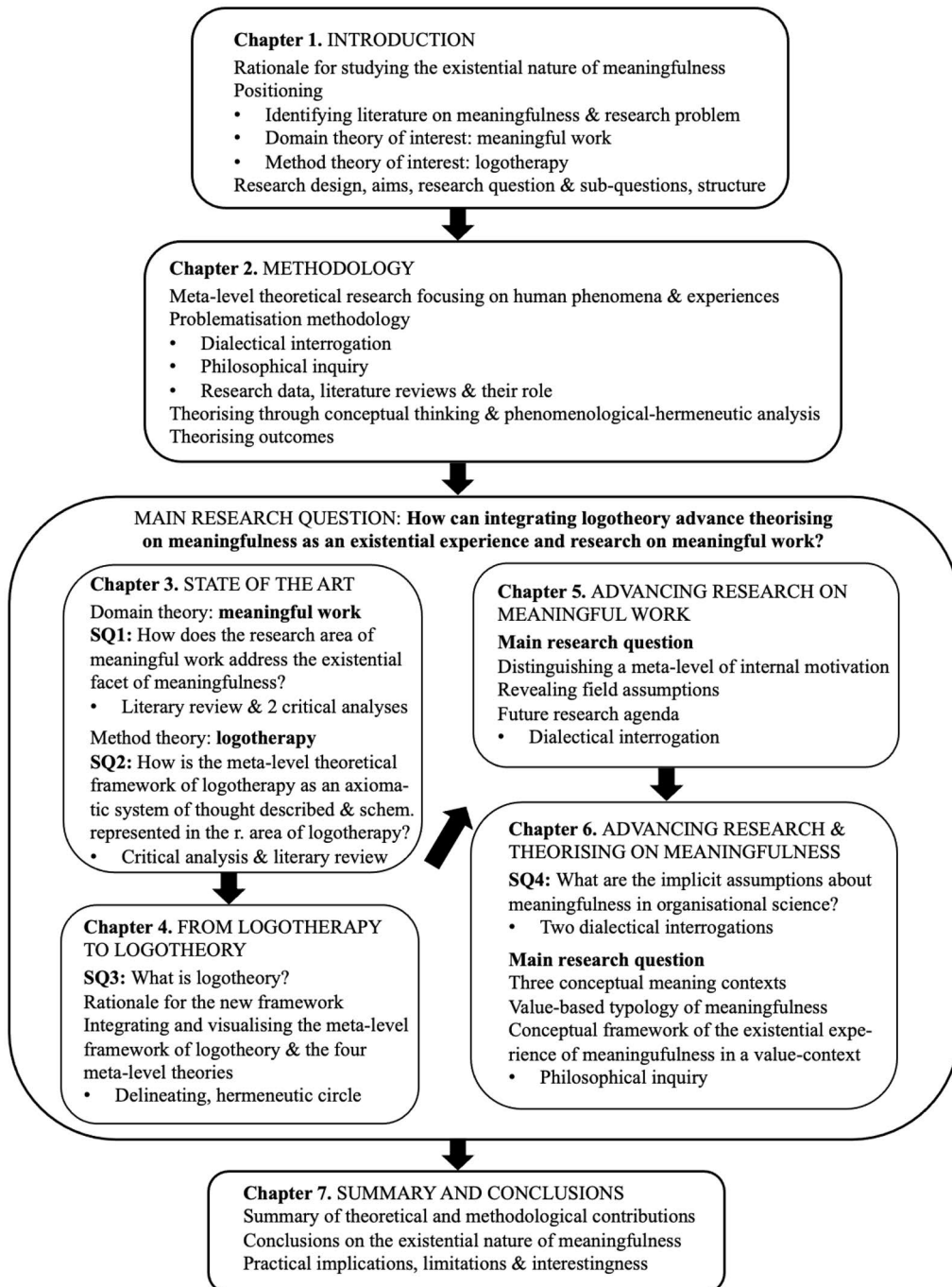


Figure 3. Structure of the dissertation.

**Chapter 3** delves into the state in the art of the domain and method theories, which is necessary to explore the topic of meaningfulness in light of the main research question. Section 3.1 is guided by the sub-research question 1: How does the research area of ‘meaningful work’ address the existential facet of meaningfulness? To provide an answer, a ‘systematic search and review’ and two critical analyses are performed. Lastly, Section 3.1 critically analyses the term ‘mattering’ used by the research areas of ‘meaningful work’ and ‘meaningful life’, through which – or, the synonyms, ‘existential mattering’, ‘significance’, ‘existential significance’ – these research areas describe the existential facet of the subjective experience of meaningfulness. Section 3.2 is guided by the sub-research question 2: How is the meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy as an axiomatic system of thought described and schematically represented in the research area of logotherapy? Through a critical analysis of Frankl’s books and a ‘critical review’ of the ‘logotherapy’ literature, the section reveals what is unclear about the meta-theoretical foundation of ‘logotherapy’. Section 3.2 contributes by suggesting future research avenues for the research area of ‘logotherapy’.

**Chapter 4** pieces together the method theory lens, that is, the alternative theoretical stance through which research on ‘meaningful work’ and theorising on meaningfulness are advanced in later chapters. This chapter is guided by the sub-research question 3: What is logotherapy? The chapter proposes that the meta-level framework of ‘logotherapy’ includes four meta-level theories, which relate to (1) the view of human nature (anthropological basis), (2) ontology of values and meaning (philosophical basis), (3) epistemology (eclectic basis built on meta-theoretical assumptions), and (4) human motivation (psychological basis). The meta-level framework of ‘logotherapy’ and each meta-level theory are illustrated with schematic representations to make it easier for the reader to understand them as axiomatic systems – separately (4.2–4.5) and together (4.6). This chapter contributes by compiling ‘logotherapy’ and its four meta-level theories and by illustrating them through schematic representations.

**Chapter 5** is guided by the main research question of how integrating logotherapy can advance theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience and research on meaningful work. It advances research on ‘meaningful work’ through a dialectical interrogation between ‘logotherapy’ and the five paradoxes of ‘meaningful work’ presented in the *Journal of Management Studies Special Issue on Meaningful Work* (2019). These paradoxes concern the motivational basis, tensional nature, criteria, managerial amenability, and temporal dimension of meaningfulness (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, pp. 489–495). Before this dialectical interrogation, Section 5.1 depicts three approaches to meta-level internal motivation based on Frankl’s thought: need satisfaction, self-actualisation, and meaning fulfilment. They are important for exposing assumptions in this chapter and Chapter 6. These approaches

were not depicted in Chapter 4, which discusses logotherapy, as only one, the ‘meaning fulfilment’, is based on logotherapy. This chapter contributes by revealing a meta-level of human motivational dynamics and field assumptions of ‘meaningful work’ (Table 3). Moreover, it proposes key characteristics of the three meta-level motivational approaches (Table 2) and a meta-level future research agenda for ‘meaningful work’.

**Chapter 6** focuses on advancing the theorising of meaningfulness as an existential experience in Sections 6.2–6.4. These sections are guided by the main research question and contribute by developing three conceptual contexts of meaning (Figure 18), a value-based typology of meaningfulness (Figure 19), and a conceptual framework of the existential experience of meaningfulness in a value-context (Figure 21). To theorise the above, the chapter starts by answering sub-research question 4 through two dialectical interrogations: What are the implicit assumptions about meaningfulness in organisational science? Thus, Section 6.1 lays the foundation for developing the conceptual meaning contexts (Figure 18; Section 6.2). It contributes through revealing field assumptions about meaningfulness in organisational studies and illustrating the prevailing approach of organisational science to studying meaningfulness (Figure 17).

**Chapter 7** shows that this dissertation’s contributions are multidisciplinary, as is meaningfulness research. Overall, this dissertation contributes to the (a) subject of interest, that is, meaningfulness, (b) domain theory, that is, meaningful work, (c) method theory, that is, logotherapy/logotherapy, (d) organisational studies, (e) psychology, (f) methodology, and (g) practice. Section 7.1 summarises the theoretical contributions (Table 4) presented in the previous chapters. Section 7.2 encapsulates the methodological contributions. To elaborate, this dissertation contributes methodologically by highlighting a meta-level of theorising that allows identifying “a second-set of assumptions” implicit in theoretical stances, from which more explicitly formulated assumptions emerge (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, p. 58). Furthermore, the schematic representations, more broadly, the visualisations of the meta-level axiomatic systems, are presented to increase clarity and improve scholars’ opportunities to assess the internal logical consistency (i.e. coherence) (Cornelissen et al. 2021, p. 11) of the integrated meta-level theoretical framework and individual meta-level theories. Section 7.3 highlights how this dissertation has advanced the understanding of the *existential nature of meaningfulness*, as formulated in the dissertation title. Section 7.4 starts with this book’s practical implications. They relate to five key calls for action for the work-life professionals, managers, and leaders. The last section concludes with a discussion of the limitations and interestingness of this dissertation.

## 2 Methodology

This chapter examines meaningfulness as a research problem and as a subject of theoretical investigation. The focus is on key methodological concepts, particularly meta-level study, philosophical inquiry, theorising, conceptual thinking, problematisation, and dialectical interrogation. To better understand Frankl's theorising, basic ideas of phenomenological study of phenomena and experiences are presented. The chapter also justifies the methodological choices, itemises the methodological steps, summarises the research data used, and, to conclude, describes the method of analysis and conduct of the study.

### 2.1 A meta-level theoretical research problem

Methodology is a branch of philosophy that means the study of method. A method is a scientific means for solving a specified problem and for obtaining knowledge. (Lipsanen 2021, p. 133;<sup>10</sup>). The main problem of this dissertation is how integrating logotherapy can advance theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience and research on meaningful work. This problem is theoretical, that is, abstract or non-empirical. To elaborate, the justification of integrating (compiling, piecing together) logotherapy, and the compilation process are theoretical, as are the examination of meaningfulness as an existential experience, and the dialectical interrogation between the research areas of meaningful work and logotherapy. As a theoretical study, this dissertation does not contain firsthand empirical information, and its argumentation is based on the method of thinking (Kallio 2006, p. 520).

Traditionally, the method of thinking has been used in the discipline of philosophy (Kallio 2006, p. 520). Broadly, it refers to constructing argumentation “on the researcher’s intuition, reflection, and insights generated as a result of analysis and/or synthesis” (ibid.). Organisational scholars have recently emphasised the importance of a thinking-based philosophical approach in advancing the study of

<sup>10</sup> <https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:metodologia>;  
<https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:metodi>

organisational phenomena (Tsoukas & Chia 2011; Tsoukas et al. 2024). Specifically, philosophical inquiry is highlighted as an approach to “scrutinize, critique, and clarify key concepts, modes of thinking, research practices, as well as assumptions about reality and ways of justifying knowledge claims” in organisational research (Tsoukas et al. 2024, p. 1229). As such, philosophical inquiry enters a deeper meta-theoretical level of research, where the objects of study are not empirical but abstract, and “concerned with the nature (or meaning) of the concepts” (ibid., pp. 1230, 1238). In the sphere of the meta-level philosophical inquiry or questioning, “the obvious and commonplace” ... “come to the fore and are open to ‘problematization’ (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, 2024)” (Tsoukas et al. 2024, p. 1235, 1238). Thus, the task of the philosophical approach is to broaden the scope of research of organisational phenomena – to not get absorbed in philosophy per se. Tsoukas et al. (2024, p. 1232) depict this aspiration as follows:

Philosophy typically delves into more fundamental questions than those addressed in our everyday lives and scientific pursuits. It contemplates inquiries such as: What defines reality and how can we know it? What is truth and what is right and wrong? What characterizes a good life (and, perhaps, a good death)? What is freedom? What defines inequality? What is the status of human beings, other animals, nature, artificially intelligent beings and laboratory-grown, living materials? How can we judge beauty? What is time, and what constitutes matter, causality, meaning and consciousness? In this sense, philosophy serves as a radical means of questioning and examining our core assumptions and beliefs, allowing us to perceive the world with fresh eyes. In other words, by means of systematic critique, reflection, contemplation and exploration, philosophy aims to attain deeper insights into both the world and our place within it.

In this dissertation, philosophical inquiry is used to investigate the phenomenon of meaningfulness, which is argued to fundamentally concern life’s meaningfulness, that is, what makes life worth living. To understand meaningfulness as an existential experience, it is imperative to qualify the underlying assumptions about human nature, the philosophy of life, and man’s relationship to the value-ethical realm of life. These are meta-theoretical considerations. Generally, the prefix ‘meta’ refers to “beyond, above, at a higher level” (Oxford English Dictionary<sup>11</sup>). Accordingly, a meta-theoretical approach is concerned with exploring theories, theoretical perspectives, foundational concepts, modes of theorising, conceptual frameworks, or

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/meta\\_prefix?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#124015095](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/meta_prefix?tab=meaning_and_use#124015095)

research methods within a particular discipline (Kukkola 2018, p. 45; Tsoukas et al. 2024, pp. 1232, 1235). Kallio (2004, p. 43) notes that, historically, the majority of scientifically interesting and significant discoveries often arise from meta-theoretical examination and are theoretical or conceptual by nature.

To reveal assumptions that are tacitly incorporated in theories and theorising, Tsoukas and Chia (2011, p. 7) discern ontological, epistemological, and praxeological domains of philosophical inquiry. Regarding the first, they argue that scientific advances “come from making fresh ontological distinctions that enable social scientists to approach a particular phenomenon in a new light and, accordingly, design new research programmes” (ibid., p. 9). In turn, “epistemological considerations lead to exploring how our claims to knowledge are couched and justified” (ibid., pp. 9–10). The concern of the third domain of philosophical inquiry, praxeology, is “how knowledge is related to action and, more specifically, how theory is related to practice” (ibid., p. 12). This dissertation capitalises on these domains of philosophical inquiry in exploring meaningfulness as an existential experience, building on the idea that the subjective meanings possess causal power in social and natural worlds. Specifically, this dissertation studies the ontology of the human mode of being and that of meaning and values, the epistemology of axiological knowledge, and the theory-praxis gap by connecting being and meaning, in particular, by proposing a process of ‘meaning fulfilment’.

Theoretical investigation is intrinsically valuable regarding the progress of science and is central from a practical perspective as well, because theory, theorising, and related concepts change practice (Ghoshal 2005; Kallio 2004, p. 517; Tsoukas & Chia 2011, p. 3). For example, management and leadership theories have a strong connection with how management and leadership are implemented in organisations; Freud’s thinking continues to influence ideas about the unconscious motives of human behaviour and the importance of satisfying needs; our conceptual understanding of meaningfulness is linked to what and how we strive for in life and work. The need for a philosophical inquiry into a phenomenon’s basic concepts arises especially when the phenomenon under study is related to the normative sphere (Pihlström 2020, p. 302), i.e. ethics, morality, values, and mattering. Empirical science cannot take a position on, for example, whether companies ought to strive to maximise profit and whether it is meaningful (Tsoukas et al 2024, p. 1235). This dimension is reached by philosophical inquiry. By questioning commonly accepted meanings and proposing “fresh conceptual distinctions”, philosophical inquiry “assists science in expanding its vision” and promotes the progress of organisation theory and research on meaningfulness (Tsoukas et al. 2024, pp. 1235–1236).

## 2.2 Focus on human phenomena

Turunen (1995, pp. 57, 113) suggests the various scientific viewpoints that study humans and human behaviour can be summarised into three broad, complementary approaches: positivism, hermeneutics, and phenomenology. In this classification, “phenomenology is the heart of all theoretical activity” and “creates the ‘hard’ theoretical core of many sciences” (1995, pp. 95, 243, 249). DuBois (1993, pp. 57, 60) agrees on the importance of phenomenology and, further highlights that “Frankl’s logotherapeutic metatheory [sic] has truly arisen phenomenologically, through reflection on his intimate contact with what is unambiguously given in human experience”. To help the reader follow the theorising of this dissertation, both regarding the meta-level framework of logotherapy (Chapter 4), dialectical interrogation (Chapter 5 and Section 6.1), and philosophical inquiry (6.2–6.4), this section briefly introduces the background of the study of phenomena and experiences, as well as key concepts.

### 2.2.1 Origins in phenomenological, hermeneutic, and existential philosophy

Phenomenology is the study of experience, that is, how phenomena appear to us (Holt & Sandberg 2011, p. 217). As a philosophical movement and research method, phenomenology encompasses several approaches. Holt and Sandberg underline that “[P]henomena are what we as researchers begin with” (2011, p. 215). By definition, a phenomenon “is a thing, object, or entity that appears or is revealed in” a conscious experience (<sup>12</sup>; Gill 2018, p. 118): “knowledge, beauty, right and wrong, and the immaterial and the material are all understood experientially” (Holt & Sandberg 2011, p. 217). As a concept, subjective experience only became common in the 19th century, with the emergence of phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophy (Tökkäri 2018, p. 64). Hermeneutics is a philosophical approach derived from phenomenology that refers to the theory of understanding and interpretation (<sup>13</sup>; Laine 2010, p. 31; Turunen 1995, pp. 87, 113). Instead of assuming humans are “primarily rational beings who can be explained universally through natural science”, the phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches introduced by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) emphasised the human world of experience, its holistic nature, and individual variability (Tökkäri 2018, p. 65). Inherent in the new approaches was separating natural and human phenomena. Whereas natural sciences examine natural phenomena and aim for explaining,

<sup>12</sup> <https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:ilmi%C3%B6>

<sup>13</sup> <https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:hermeneutiikka>

human sciences – which, for Dilthey, includes social sciences – study human phenomena and aim for ‘*verstehen*’, that is, understanding (Laine 2010, p. 31). For Dilthey (Makkreel 2021, p. 12),

[T]he realization that the human sciences not only ascertain what is—as do the natural sciences—but also make value judgments, establish goals and prescribe rules, discloses that they are much more directly related to the full reality of lived experience.

In Husserlian phenomenology, the basic quality of a human phenomenon, that is, experience or consciousness, is its object-orientation (Tökkäri 2018, p. 65). This experiential orientation is the basis of man’s relationship to the world, and thus, human experiences are inevitably connected to the surrounding social and natural world (Laine 2010, p. 29). Specifically, object-orientation is captured by the philosophical concept of intentionality: “an experience, or relationship of meaning, arises when the individual’s consciousness is directed toward an object and the object appears to consciousness” (Kukkola 2018, p. 48; Tökkäri 2018, p. 65). Unlike natural phenomena (e.g. sunshine, thunderstorms, magnetism, or putrefaction), the basic property of human phenomena is to be directed towards objects outside themselves and to constitute a relationship of meaning. Husserl adopted the concept of ‘intentionality’ from his teacher, philosopher Franz Brentano (1838–1907), who introduced it to modern philosophy (and admired Aristotle). For Brentano, intentionality marked the difference between physical and psychological phenomena (Niiniluoto & Saarinen 2002, p. 218).

In the 19th century, in addition to phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophy, a third philosophical approach emerged that focused on the world of human experience and the human mode of being: Existential philosophy, the progenitor of which is considered the philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). Kierkegaard highlighted that individuals live in a concrete world and suggested three levels of human existence: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious (Lehtinen 2002, p. 108). Later, the positive form of existential philosophy found a more solid foundation in the work of Jaspers, and the negative form in that of Heidegger. While Jaspers accentuated the importance of the philosophical dimension, for example, worldview and value orientation for mental health and a fulfilling life, Heidegger elaborated on ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘meaning of being’ (*Sinn von Sein*). For Heidegger, human existence in the world is being awakened by anxiety (*Angst*), determined by worry and responsibility (*Da-Sein*), “which can be realized or missed in time, indeed, in every single moment”. (Teischel 2014, pp. 22–23). Since WWII, the domain of existential philosophy has mostly been addressed

from the perspective of existentialism, especially that of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), the leading exponent of French existentialism.

Existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic philosophies are interconnected in many ways – intellectually and through a close connection of certain key figures. For example, Heidegger was Husserl’s student and assistant, and Jaspers and Heidegger are influenced by Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who is also included in the canon of existential philosophers (Lehtinen 2002). Intellectually, these three philosophical approaches are deeply intertwined in *Lebensphilosophie*, or philosophy of life, whose main representatives were Dilthey and the philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941)<sup>14</sup>. According to Gaiger (2005, p. 1048), “[I]n its most general sense *Lebensphilosophie* denotes a philosophy which asks after the meaning, value and purpose of life, turning away from purely theoretical knowledge towards the undistorted fullness of lived experience”. It highlights “‘life’ as an all-encompassing whole” and understanding from within, based on feeling and intuition (ibid.). All the aforementioned philosophical approaches have influenced Frankl’s focus on human phenomena, the multilayered human mode of being, epistemology, and the philosophy of life. Most of all, however, in theorising the philosophical and anthropological foundations of logotherapy, Frankl has absorbed ideas from philosopher Max Scheler (1874–1928), especially from Scheler’s distinctive form of philosophical anthropology and phenomenology.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Scheler was a prominent figure in the German intellectual scene, an influential melting pot of different schools of thought. To illustrate, Scheler was strongly influenced by Rudolf Eucken and Max Weber; interested and/or versed in the thinking of Marx, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Simmel, and Freud; knew and/or worked with phenomenologists like Husserl, Reinach, and Hartmann, and critical theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer; introduced Bergson’s thoughts to the German language area; met and/or corresponded with Buber, Einstein, Tillich, Wertheimer, and Rilke. With his book *The Forms of Knowledge and Society* (*Die Wissenformen und die Gesellschaft*, 1926), Scheler initiated a new field of study – the sociology of knowledge – and, similarly, offered a thorough analysis of pragmatism for a German-speaking audience. (Davis & Steinbock 2024; Kotkavirta 2005; Spiegelberg 1982, p. 306). According to Davis and Steinbock (2024, p. 5), Scheler wrote near the end of his life that the question of “meaning of the human being” is the focal theme of his work. “At the time of his death, ... Scheler was one of the most prominent German intellectuals and most sought after philosophers of his time” (ibid., p. 1). Today, few academics within meaningfulness

<sup>14</sup> <https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:el%C3%A4m%C3%A4nfilosofia>

research and organisational science are familiar with Scheler's work – although, for example, Berger and Luckmann's classic book on social construction of reality (1991/1966, pp. 15–26) highlights Scheler's legacy for the sociology of knowledge.

## 2.2.2 The nature of studying phenomena and experiences

As a research approach, phenomenology emphasises that there is something worth examining in the phenomena themselves. In other words, reasons or causes of phenomena are not sought 'outside' or 'behind' them. To illustrate, the basis of psychic phenomena (e.g. feelings, thinking), that is, our experiences, is not sought from, say, brain research, but from the subjective experience itself, remaining in it. (Turunen 1995, pp. 113–114). While in positivist research, assuming the true nature of phenomena and their explanations lie in material processes is common, in phenomenological research, the experienced level of phenomena cannot be explained technically or reduced to materiality. Instead, phenomena "are thought to have some emergent, irreversible, and self-contained existence of their own, which may never be reached except phenomenologically" or philosophically. (Turunen 1995, p. 114).

Philosophical phenomenology and phenomenological psychology assume that man can be aware of his or her inner life: what we experience – the world of experience – can be encountered, examined, and formulated into concepts (Spiegelberg 1982, p. 20; Turunen 1995, pp. 115, 117). In other words, besides only blindly experiencing, it is possible for man to encounter and become conscious of the experience as well (Turunen 1995, p. 117). While empiricism usually refers to the influence of the positivist research approach on sensory perception, especially to visual or technical observation, according to Turunen, the examination of inner experience (and inner perceptions) has also been called empiricism (experience-based). Then, inner phenomenological states, as conscious experiences and the related inner perceptions, are as much a part of the human world of experience, or empiricism, as are sensory perceptions. (Turunen 1995, pp. 61, 63, 67, 117). An important step in developing research into the inner world of experience was the idea of conscious and unconscious levels of consciousness, presented in the 19th century. For example, the psychodynamic approach, which was developed from Freud's thinking, is based on one kind of view of the conscious and unconscious structures of the human world of experience and the related conceptual system, in which concept formation is based on inner perception. (Turunen 1995, pp. 118–119).

From a meta-level perspective, theorists, such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) assign the subject a different role in forming an experience (Kukkola 2018, p. 48), which influences what the experience entails in the first place. Whereas Husserl emphasises the experiencer, structure of

consciousness, and intentionality as an act of consciousness, in the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach, building on Heidegger, the focus is on structures of being in the world, relationships, and interpretation (George 2021, p. 13; Holt & Sandberg 2011, p. 217; Kukkola 2018, p. 48; Tökkäri 2018, p. 65). Building on Scheler and the abovementioned approaches, in logotherapy, the content of the experience can be considered (passively) given and (actively) interpreted by the experiencing individual (Kukkola 2018, pp. 53–54). Davis and Steinbock (2024, p. 23) explain that

“Givenness” is a term used by Scheler and other phenomenologists to name that which is experienced in a particular act. It is, more precisely, the objective correlate of the intentional act. There is the intending on the part of the person and that which is given, the object or meaning.

Furthermore, Frankl draws on Kant’s transcendental idealism in that he repeatedly highlights man’s subjective perspective and limited knowledge amidst a world that exists in itself: in Kantian terms, the difference between ‘phenomena’ and ‘noumena’, that is, the world/things for us (Ding für uns) and the world/things as themselves (Ding an sich). More precisely,

... the objects of our experience as such are independent of the consciousness that perceives them, but the way in which they are perceived in the experience is a product of our consciousness. In other words, the information of experience is given by a reality independent of us, but the perception of this information in consciousness depends on the ways in which consciousness generally organizes its experiences. These ‘objects as such’ are usually called things in themselves (Ding an sich) in distinction from phenomena (Erscheinung), as they are always perceived in experience.<sup>15</sup>

The mode of knowing about human phenomena cannot be subjectless, but rather the subject, that is, the individual knows (Turunen 1995, p. 115). Whether displayed or not, the subject is assumed to have some kind of structure that influences what is known and how. This, in turn, is connected to the structure of our acts of consciousness, for example (inner) perception or valuing, which, in the phenomenological context, are always directed toward something that “is not consciousness itself but intentionally constituted in an act of consciousness” (Holt & Sandberg 2011, p. 218; Turunen 1995, p. 127). Therefore, in the inner perception,

<sup>15</sup> [https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:transsendentaalinen\\_idealismi](https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:transsendentaalinen_idealismi)

“things are never things in themselves but always things as something for someone” (Holt & Sandberg 2011, p. 218). According to Frankl, the phenomenological emphasis on the subjective perspective carries a possibility of misunderstanding the nature of reality, which DuBois aptly describes as follows (1993, p. 61):

Existential psychology has sometimes down-played, or flatly denied, the subject-object distinction. But far from being more sympathetic to the subjective dimensions of the person, this view robs personal life of its meaning and intelligibility. Not only is this tantamount to denying the possibility of discovering truth and value, but it contradicts what is evidently given in human experience. Frankl handles this point admirably by balancing the fact that we only know being through our own peculiar acts of cognition – which as acts of contingent beings are always from a definite perspective – with the fact that our cognition may remain cognition of something other than ourselves. He notes that the latin term *perspectum* (the root of our “perspective”) means “seen through”. It is true that all human knowledge is from a subjective perspective, but the only thing that is subjective is the perspective through which we approach reality, and “this subjectivity does not in the least detract from the objectiveness of reality itself” ([Frankl]1988, p. 59).

According to Kukkola (2018, p. 43), along the way, in phenomenology, the subject’s defining role as an autonomous “basic unit” of the experience has been sought to be faded away. For instance, Holt and Sandberg (2011) illustrate how Heidegger shifted the focus from the experiencing subject to the subject’s relationships with the (socio-cultural) world. In Heidegger’s wake, they state that “it is in explicating the relationship between things [phenomena] and ourselves that we “get at” what “is” and what it is “to be”” (Holt & Sandberg 2011, p. 217). In its focus on the relationship or correlation between the experiencing subject and the experienced thing or phenomenon (Salice 2020, p. 7), emphasis shifts to becoming, that is, nothing “simply ‘is’, but everything is constantly ‘becoming’” (Huhtinen & Tuominen 2020, p. 493). When aiming to understand human phenomena, such as meaningfulness, responsibility, guilt, human dignity, fairness, and unfairness, besides the above relationship, logotherapy emphasises that we also need to consider the structure and/or the philosophical assumptions of the experiencing person, the experienced reality, and experience itself. Kukkola highlights that (2018, pp. 46–47)

we are subjects of our own experiences, but when we tell about the experience, we are actually asserting something “outside” of that act of experience. Experience is not only about the experiencer or the act of experience, but it is also a kind of statement or intuition, depending on our meta-scientific approach

– the nature of the thing we experience. In terms of this intentionality, or our orientation to the object of experience, we can easily be mistaken.

For example, regarding the phenomenon of meaningfulness and the related intentional act, a difference exists in whether we assume the existence of a reality of ‘meaning and values’ independent of the individual and consider objects as bearers of values, or whether we assign value to objects and consider values as part of the subjective and/or social reality, in which case values lose their normativity in their strong sense. In other words, values can, at best, be considered prescriptive, yet their connection to what is valuable or ethical in itself, is random (see 2.3.1). Notably, building on Scheler, in the logothoeoretic context, becoming relates to self-transcendence – the fundamental feature of human existence. In Scheler’s words: “The human being is no thing, but rather a “becoming,” a “between,” a “self-transcending being.”” (Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 37). Instead of constant becoming, logothoeory underlines an existential dimension of becoming, which is grounded in being conscious of one’s responsibility. As such, the human being “does not simply exist but always decides what his [sic] existence will be, what he [sic] will become in the next moment” in relation to an ought (Frankl 2010/1961, p. 66). Importantly, becoming relates to the self and the world; they are intertwined.

## 2.3 Theorising through conceptual thinking

In science, theories describe and explain phenomena and serve as the basis for informed knowledge claims. Theories consist of concepts and connections between them, that is, ideas. Through concepts, ideas form interwoven networks and express what is claimed about reality. Thus, an ensemble of ideas and concepts, that is, a view, emerges. A theory is a view, and theorising is an effort to create a view by structuring reality through ideas and concepts. (Cornelissen et al. 2021, pp. 2–3, 16; Kallio 2006, pp. 519, 522–523; Turunen 1995, pp. 68, 71, 164, 240–241). In this dissertation, theory is understood as an “umbrella concept” that may concern different layers or levels of theory (Cornelissen et al. 2021, p. 2; Kallio 2006, p. 523; Turunen 1995, p. 71), such as a broad meta-level description of an axiomatic system of thought, or an operationalised system “in which structures are connected by statements and variables by hypotheses” (Bacharach 1989, p. 498; Cornelissen et al. 2021, p. 3). Hence, the term ‘meta-level theory’ in Chapter 4 refers to a description of an axiomatic system of thought included in the view of human nature, the view of reality, the theory of knowledge, or the view of motivation. Chapter 4 also proposes a meta-level theoretical framework compiled from these meta-level theories. In it, the axiomatic system of thought refers to a description of the nomological network of ontological, epistemological, human

nature, and motivation-related assumptions. Notably, such an axiomatic system of thought or meta-level theoretical framework always underlies research on human behaviour, although most often implicitly.

Building on the foregoing and Hoon and Baluch's (2020, p. 1247) description of theorising, in this dissertation, theorising involves a process of theory elaboration, in which dialectical interrogation and philosophical inquiry lead to novel theoretical insights and alternative ways of seeing the phenomenon and experience of meaningfulness. The dialectical interrogation between logothory and the research area of meaningful work focuses on theorising from anomalies rather than similarities. Through finding dissimilarities, alternative theoretical perspectives and underlying assumptions are revealed. (Hoon & Baluch 2020, pp. 1248, 1252–1253). In general, through theories, we aim to predict and control the functioning of reality or at least intelligibly structure it. Therefore, theories and theorising are closely linked to practice and application. (ibid., p. 247). In the spirit of Lewin and James, while “nothing is as practical as a good theory”, theory, concepts, and conceptual knowledge are always only a partial view of the “fullness of reality to be known” (Tsoukas & Chia 2011, p. 12; Turunen 1995, p. 247). Indeed, no theory – let alone meta-level theory – is an unquestionable truth claim; instead, theories develop based on new knowledge (Tsoukas & Chia 2011, p. 4; <sup>16</sup>).

According to Tsoukas et al. (2024, p. 1234), science is ultimately a social practice that operates on basic concepts. The basic concepts structure the research subject, are based on philosophical intuition, and provide a foundation for empirical research (ibid.). Philosophical intuition concerns “propositions that do not necessitate referential or experiential justification”, or, in Whitehead's wording, “insights into the constitution of reality and how it can be known” (ibid., p. 1233). Therefore, the basic concepts underlying science also include philosophical knowledge based on intuition, which cannot be precisely expressed linguistically (ibid. 1234; <sup>17</sup>). Indeed, for example, Bergson distinguished between philosophical knowledge based on intuition – specifically, intuition as a philosophical method – and scientific knowledge generated by scientific methods; he also considered them complementary (Lipsanen 2021, p. 133, 135). As a form of knowledge, intuition refers to an immediate understanding of the object of study. Generally, knowledge is considered intuitive when it is immediate and independent of reasoning and concepts. (Lipsanen 2021, p. 133; <sup>18</sup>). As an existential experience related to reflection, normative sphere, value-judgement, and issues “that fail to be resolved by recourse to theory or rule”, understanding meaningfulness requires combining

<sup>16</sup> <https://tulevaisuus.fi/filosofiset-perusteet/tieteellinen-tieto-ja-tiedonintressit/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:intuitio>

<sup>18</sup> <https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:intuitio>

empirical and philosophical knowledge, that is, factual and value-ethical, or axiological knowledge (Tsoukas et al. 2024, p. 1236).

In the actual theorising process, this dissertation builds on conceptual thinking defined as “the process of understanding a situation or problem abstractly by identifying patterns or connections and key underlying properties” (MacInnis 2011, p. 140). MacInnis (*ibid.*, p. 141) highlights that

[I]dentifying interesting problems, developing hypotheses, interpreting data, and deriving implications all involve thinking conceptually. Thus, conceptual thinking is at the heart of the scientific enterprise; it is critical to the development of both an individual scientist and the field of endeavor.

Regarding the intended conceptual contribution of research, MacInnis distinguishes between four general and eight specific kinds of conceptual goals and critical thinking skills they involve (2011, pp. 138–141). This dissertation capitalises on ‘delineating’ and ‘revising’. The first, ‘delineating’ entails a goal of depicting an entity, emerges through logical reasoning, and contributes by providing a theoretical framework and schematic representations for understanding the entity (*ibid.*, pp. 144, 148). A schematic representation is defined as a figure “showing the main form and features of something in a way that helps people to understand it”<sup>19</sup>. Specifically, ‘delineating’ is employed to piece together the meta-theoretical framework of Frankl’s logotherapy – that is, logotherapy and its four meta-level theories –, to develop the value-based typology of meaningfulness, and the conceptual framework of the existential experience of meaningfulness. The second conceptual thinking skill, ‘revising’, involves a conceptual goal of taking a new perspective on something that has already been identified, requires expertise, often leads to questioning assumptions, and contributes by presenting an alternative view and theoretical insights (MacInnis 2011, pp. 138, 143–144). While ‘revising’ is specifically exploited in the dialectical interrogation of the paradoxes of meaningful work (5.2) and sociological and organisational scientific roots of subjective experience and subjective meaning (6.1), ‘revising’ is also a thinking skill, on which this dissertation relies more broadly.

### 2.3.1 Descriptive, prescriptive, and normative quality

When meaningfulness is explored as an existential experience, it is necessarily related to the sphere of ethics and values, as well as to an individual’s value-

<sup>19</sup> Cambridge Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/schematic>

apprehension, that is, one's inner relationship to different kinds of values. Building on Bell, Raiffa, and Tversky's (1988) distinction between the normative, prescriptive, and descriptive qualities and heuristically shifting it to the context of values, distinguishing between different value-orientations and kinds of values is possible (more in Section 6.3).

Initially, Bell et al. (1988, pp. 9, 16) proposed a distinction between descriptive, prescriptive, and normative decision-making: "an abstract system that purports to describe or predict behaviour is called a descriptive model; an abstract system that attempts to capture how ideal people might behave is called a normative model"; and an abstract system relating to how real people, instead of "idealized, mythical, de-psychologized [normative] automata", can make better choices or decisions, is called a prescriptive model (ibid., p. 17). Then, the descriptive and normative modes of decision-making relate to the common usage of separating 'the is' and 'the ought', and the prescriptive one brings forth a new category. More specifically (ibid., pp. 17–18; italics in the original),

[T]he differences among the three functions – descriptive, normative, and prescriptive – of choice models can be illuminated by examining the criteria by which they are evaluated. Descriptive models are evaluated by their *empirical validity*, that is, the extent to which they correspond to observed choices. Normative models are evaluated by their *theoretical adequacy*, that is, the degree to which they provide acceptable idealizations or rational choice. Prescriptive models are evaluated by their *pragmatic value*, that is, their ability to help people make better decisions.

This dissertation builds on Bell et al.'s above distinction of descriptive, prescriptive, and normative quality when characterising the different value bases on which evaluation and criteria of meaningfulness are based. The terms also describe the quality of an individual's value-apprehension. Specifically,

- (a) the 'normative' is related to 'an ought' based on intrinsic value and the individual's conscious orientation towards it;
- (b) the 'prescriptive' is related to 'an ought' based on mutual agreement and understanding on what grounds something is considered valuable, as well as the individual's conscious orientation towards it;
- (c) the 'descriptive' is related to a value-apprehension, in which the individual justifies the value of something based on one's subjective valuations and/or cultural and social values without consciously taking a position on the quality of these valuations or values.

Thus, contrary to what Bell, Raiffa, and Tversky's prescriptive model above suggests, in the classification of this dissertation, the fact that a decision or choice has practical value is not a sufficient basis for it being better. In other words, a decision's superiority is not assessed from the perspective of its practical value but from the perspective of the individual's value-apprehension. Furthermore, the proposed link between normative quality and ideal people, and prescriptive quality and real people, as Bell et al. depict, does not fit into this dissertation's view of the normative and prescriptive quality of value bases and the related value-apprehension (see 6.3, 6.4). In this dissertation, ideal does not refer to "how idealized, rational, super-intelligent people should think" (Bell et al. 1988, p. 16); instead, humans are considered free, responsible, and meaning-oriented beings, who are "different, with differing psyches and emotions, capabilities, and needs", as Bell et al. depict the qualities of "real people" (*ibid.*, pp. 16–17).

## 2.4 Problematisation

In this dissertation, the theoretical nature of the research problem determines the chosen methodology (Laaksovirta 1985, pp. 36, 38, 41), that is, problematisation, introduced by Alvesson and Sandberg (2011, 2013). Problematisation is "a methodology for identifying and challenging assumptions" between chosen theoretical stances through dialectical interrogation, that is, hermeneutic in-depth reading and rereading of selected key texts (Alvesson & Sandberg 2011, pp. 247, 256; 2013, pp. 49–50). This dissertation uses problematisation to (1) explore, expose, and challenge implicit underlying assumptions of the phenomenon of meaningfulness through dialectical interrogation between the researcher's home and alternative theoretical stances (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, pp. 49, 53), and based on this, to (2) advance theorising on meaningfulness and research on meaningful work. Thus, the ultimate goal is not to generate new research questions, as Alvesson and Sandberg suggest (*ibid.*, pp. 51, 53, 70); rather, problematisation is used as a "resource" – an instrument for meta-level theorising (*ibid.*, p. 69). Importantly, this dissertation agrees with the idea that the key task of problematisation is to "identify, articulate, and challenge the central assumptions underlying the existing literature in a way that opens up new areas of inquiry" (*ibid.* p. 56).

To better capture the roles of the home theoretical stance and the alternative theoretical stance in the dialectical interrogation, this dissertation employs the terms 'domain theory' and 'method theory' suggested by Lukka and Vinnari (2014). Then, meaningful work is the domain theory, and logotherapy is the method theory referring to a theoretical lens through which the domain theory is examined and alternative ways of seeing are uncovered. Since the research area of meaningful work has not previously been examined from the viewpoint of logotherapy (nor logotherapy), these

two different perspectives suffice for the theoretical stances to be used in the dialectical interrogation to reveal and challenge the underlying assumptions of meaningfulness and provide a foundation for novel and mainstream-challenging ideas (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, pp. 70, 109, 115).

According to Alvesson and Sandberg (2013, p. 59), a key issue in dialectical interrogation

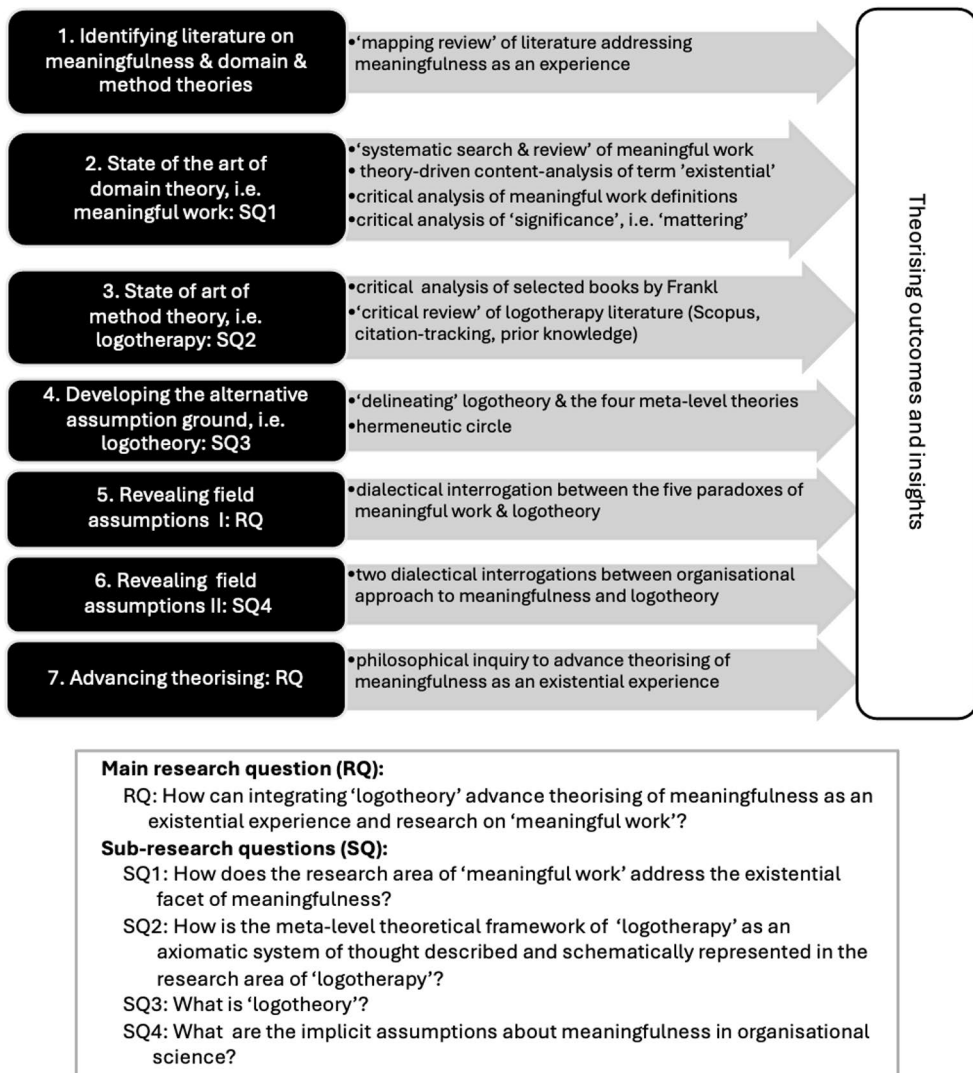
is to transform what are commonly seen as truths or facts into assumptions. In doing so the implicit or hidden is made explicit and laid open to scrutiny. This often calls for hermeneutic process of noting, interpreting, moving between and reinterpreting different cues, indicating assumptions not directly expressed, nor perhaps being consciously grasped or considered by authors. Hermeneutic ideas such as the circle (constant and recurrent moves) between preunderstanding and understanding are helpful here.

To identify the literature to be used in the dialectical interrogation, Alvesson and Sandberg (2011, p. 256) advise that problematisation “typically involves a more narrow literature coverage and in-depth readings of key texts”. Even a single review article can be a sufficient subject of dialectical interrogation. In the problematisation process, the problematiser first needs to identify the “actual domain” and second, “the specific texts chosen for deep readings and rereadings” (ibid.).

In this dissertation, assumptions about meaningfulness are identified and challenged in three sections: first, in Section 5.2, in relation to the domain of meaningful work. For this dialectical interrogation, a recent key text was identified: the introductory article of the *Journal of Management Studies Special Issue on Meaningful Work* by Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. (2019). Second, in Section 6.1.1, assumptions about meaningfulness as a social phenomenon are exposed through dialectical interrogation regarding how the terms ‘subjective experience’ and ‘subjective meaning’ are addressed in sociological and organisational research. For this purpose, two influential books within organisational science were selected: (a) Burrell and Morgan’s classic work *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis. Elements of the Sociology of Corporate Life* (2019/1979), and (b) Berger and Luckmann’s *Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1991/1966). Third, assumptions about meaningfulness as a motivational phenomenon in the research areas of ‘meaningful life’ and ‘meaningful work’ are further explored in Section 6.1.3. For this dialectical interrogation, three key texts were selected: from ‘meaningful life’ representing psychology, Reker and Wong’s two book chapters (1988, 2012) on ‘personal meaning in life’, and from ‘meaningful work’ representing organisational science, Rosso et al.’s (2010) highly referenced review article on meaningful work.

## 2.4.1 Methodological steps of the dissertation

The problematisation process and methodological steps of this dissertation build on the research questions and proceed as **Figure 4** shows (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, p. 70). To note, when problematising, the three conducted literature reviews are not objectives per se, but serve as a means to identify a field of research or current state of knowledge, as well as to justify the need for research (Elsbach & van Knippenberg 2020, pp. 1278, 1279, 1282; Jaakkola 2020, p. 21).



**Figure 4.** Methodological steps of the dissertation.

The seven methodological steps taken contain the following (Figure 4):

**1. Identifying literature addressing meaningfulness as an experience** through a ‘mapping review’ and justifying the theoretical stances to be used in the dialectical interrogation, that is, the domain theory and the method theory: A mapping review (Grant & Booth 2009, pp. 94, 97–98) is suitable to broadly describe and categorise existing literature of a topic or a field of research at a broad level. Generally, mapping reviews are used to identify gaps in the research literature and justify further research. Section 1.2.

**2. Identifying the state-of-the art of the domain theory**, that is, the research area of meaningful work in relation to sub-research question 1 (Figure 4): A ‘systematic search and review’ (Grant & Booth 2009, p. 95) was conducted. According to Grant and Booth (2009, p. 102), this review type “combines the strengths of a critical review with a comprehensive search process”. It allows for including multiple study designs, uses an evaluative approach to bring forth what is known, and provides a narrative synthesis at a minimum. The analysis has three stages, each of which builds on the previous one and gradually refines the answer to the research question. First, to form an overview, a theory-driven content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, pp. 151–156) of the term ‘existential’ was performed. Based on the findings, a critical analysis of the definitions of meaningful work containing the word ‘existential’ was considered necessary. A critical analysis means reflectively scrutinising a subject in light of the particular research question to advance knowledge (emancipatory research interest). Finally, a critical analysis of the term ‘significance’ (synonyms existential significance, mattering, existential mattering) in the research areas of ‘meaningful work’ and ‘meaningful life’ was performed to bring forth the current understanding of the term. Section 3.1.

**3. Identifying the state-of-the art of the method theory**, that is, the research area of logotherapy in relation to sub-research question 2 (Figure 4): First, Frankl’s theoretically most appreciated books (3.2.1) were critically analysed regarding the sub-research question. Second, a ‘critical review’ of logotherapy literature was conducted using publications in the Scopus database, prior knowledge, and citation tracking. A critical review (Grant & Booth 2009, pp. 93–94) “provides an opportunity to ‘take stock’ and evaluate what is of value from the previous body of work” and offers “a ‘launch pad’ for a new phase of conceptual development” (3.2.2). The outcome of this review is “the starting point for further evaluation, not an endpoint in itself” (ibid. p. 97). This section contributes by suggesting future research avenues for logotherapy. Section 3.2.

**4. Developing an alternative assumption ground** for delivering new insights and advancing theorising: This methodological step was guided by sub-research question 3 of what logotherapy is. The proposed meta-level theoretical framework including the four meta-level theories, as well as their constituents, is based on

‘delineating’ and the hermeneutic spiral of the researcher’s understanding – a result of years of immersion in Frankl’s works and other logotherapy literature, as well as extensive reading of the philosophy of science literature. In the context of exploring what logotherapy is, the word ‘integrate’ means to compile, piece together, assemble. This chapter’s theoretical contributions consist of integrating the meta-level theoretical framework of the alternative view and depicting the synthesised entities through schematic representations. Chapter 4.

**5. Revealing field assumptions I** (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, pp. 55, 70) about meaningfulness based on a dialectical interrogation between the five paradoxes of meaningful work (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019) and logotherapy: Field assumptions concern “a broader set of assumptions” or meta-level foundational beliefs “about a specific subject matter that are shared across different theoretical schools” in a particular paradigm or “across paradigms and disciplines” (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, pp. 55, 70). The main research question guided the dialectical interrogation in Section 5.2. The discussion Section 5.3 presents the theoretical contributions and the meta-level future research agenda for meaningful work. Chapter 5.

**6. Revealing field assumptions II** about meaningfulness through two dialectical interrogations between an organisational approach to studying meaningfulness and logotherapy: The first interrogation focused on meaningfulness as a social phenomenon, while the second focused on meaningfulness as a motivational phenomenon, with the latter incorporating a psychological aspect. This methodological step relates to the fourth sub-research question, which concerns the implicit assumptions of organisational science about meaningfulness and contributes through a conceptual framework and through exposing assumptions. Section 6.1.

**7. Advancing theorising on meaningfulness** as an existential experience through philosophical inquiry from the perspective of logotherapy. To be precise, this step builds on the key theory elaboration argument of this dissertation, according to which relationships of meaning are simultaneously relationships of value. This final methodological step is guided by the main research question (Figure 4) and builds on the foregoing steps. It contributes by developing three reasoned interpretations, that is, theorising outcomes to broaden the appreciation of the nature of meaningfulness: (a) three conceptual contexts of meanings; (b) a value-based typology of meaningfulness, and (c) a conceptual framework of the existential experience of meaningfulness. Sections 6.2–6.4.

The theoretical contributions of this dissertation take shape in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, and in Section 3.2.2, and are summarised in Chapter 7 (Table 4). Section 7.2 presents the methodological contributions. The theorising outcomes include meta-level theoretical frameworks and their schematic representations (Figures 12–16), a typology (Figure 19), three conceptual frameworks (Figures 17, 18, 21), revealing

meta-level (field) assumptions about meaningfulness and human motivation, theoretical insights, and future research proposals for the research areas of meaningful work and logotherapy, as well as, in Chapter 7, for organisational science and those interested in a meta-level research approach (MacInnis 2011, pp. 138, 143–144, 148). Following MacInnis’s classification, the entity level around which these theorising outcomes are generated is a ‘domain’, that is, a broad category “of study within which specific constructs, theories, and/or procedures can be articulated” (MacInnis 2011, pp. 140, 142). According to MacInnis, conceptual advances in the ‘domain’ are important in that they connect academics and practitioners, which “fosters knowledge diffusion and sharing” (ibid., p. 142).

## 2.4.2 Research data

The data of this dissertation is conceptual. The data collection for the three literature reviews is detailed in the relevant sections: the mapping review of the three research areas of meaningfulness in Section 1.2; the systematic search and review of ‘meaningful work’ in Section 3.1; and the critical review of ‘logotherapy’ in Section 3.2.2. Section 3.2.1 justifies Frankl’s books, which are used in the critical analysis of logotherapy. Section 4.1 details the data used to integrate logotherapy. The separation of the three meta-level motivational approaches in Section 5.1 builds on Frankl’s thinking; however, the data used for depicting these approaches is also gathered from contemporary sources, especially, the electronic APA Dictionary of Psychology<sup>20</sup>, Maslow’s book *The Unpublished Papers of Abraham Maslow* (1996) edited by Hoffman, and from the Scopus electronic database. The selection of data in the form of the key texts used in the dialectical interrogations in Sections 5.2 and 6.1 is based on the literary review of ‘meaningful work’ in Section 3.1, and the researcher’s formal studies and personal readings in organisational science during the Ph.D. programme. When selecting data from the research area of ‘meaningful life’, the author prioritised publications that a) were from researchers operating in both the research areas of ‘meaningful work’ and ‘meaningful life’; b) were highly cited; c) referenced Frankl; or 4) were found through citation tracking.

While the peer-reviewed articles and book chapters used to compile the meta-level framework of logotherapy can be found in electronic scientific databases, some sources emerge as grey literature. Scopus database contains two of Frankl’s books: *On the Theory and Therapy of Mental Disorders* (2004/2024, Routledge) and *The Feeling of Meaninglessness. A Challenge to Psychotherapy and Philosophy* (2010; article compilation, Marquette University Press). APA PsycArticle electronic

<sup>20</sup> <https://dictionary.apa.org/>

database naturally contains none of Frankl's books, while those listed in the abstract database of APA PsycINFO are marked in Section 3.2.1. In selecting sources and/or their critical reading (Kallio 2004, p. 47) – DuBois's article (1993), Biller and de Lourdes Stiegeler's logotherapy dictionary, and Lukas's publications, and other sources by Frankl – the author has drawn on her expertise in logotherapy and lists of Frankl's key books by two experienced logotherapy scholars (Section 3.2.1). The included source material<sup>21</sup> is argued to be high-quality and relevant for piecing together logotherapy and the four meta-level theories.

## 2.5 Analysis and research process

This dissertation's analysis is based on a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, which emphasises that meanings not only appear in experience or consciousness but are also to be interpreted (Tökkäri 2018, p. 65). While phenomenology as a philosophical approach contains several movements with differing emphases and modes of analysis, in this dissertation, phenomenological analysis “is a device for facilitating our direct encounter with the phenomena themselves” (Spiegelberg 1982, pp. xxvii–xxviii; Spiegelberg 1986, p. 332). This entails that the focus is on the phenomenological state, that is, the conscious experience of the phenomenon of meaningfulness itself from the first-person viewpoint. Consequently, the experience has a subject, and the state of meaningfulness has its own feeling or sense, that is, “some phenomenology” the subject can reach (Tye 2021, p. 1). According to Tye (2021, p. 1), “[P]hilosophers often use the term ‘qualia’ (singular ‘quale’) to refer to the introspectively accessible, phenomenal aspects of our mental lives”. Hence, the phenomenological analysis does not start with meanings, but with the nature of the studied phenomenon (meaningfulness) and the conditions of the experience itself (Kukkola 2018, p. 43; Spiegelberg 1986, p. 51; Turunen 1995, pp. 113–115). In this dissertation, phenomenological analysis draws on Turunen's (1995, p. 232) idea that

[P]henomenology is about discovering and establishing basic concepts, in a sense opening a research topic to conceptual scrutiny. This often concerns the foundations of science and the structure of phenomena, for example the structure of human experiences and society.

Defined in this way, phenomenological analysis and the previously presented philosophical inquiry appear as similar processes and can be used to draw attention

<sup>21</sup> Source material on logotherapy (books, book chapters, articles) has been found, and, if necessary, were purchased during doctoral studies (2019–2025), logotherapy studies (2008–2013), and while preparing logotherapy trainings (2010–).

to the meta-level of the phenomenon under study. In turn, hermeneutic analysis is an umbrella term for various types of interpretation-based analyses that aim to understand the research subject, and in which understanding progresses through a hermeneutic circle, or a systematic interpretive process<sup>22</sup>. According to George (2021, p. 7),

[U]nderstanding, then, is not pursued ‘vertically’ by layering beliefs on top of foundations, but rather ‘circularly,’ in an interpretive movement back and forth through possible meanings of our presuppositions that by turns allow a matter to come into view. In this, the pursuit of understanding does not build ‘higher and higher;’ it goes ‘deeper and deeper,’ gets ‘fuller and fuller,’ or, perhaps, ‘richer and richer.’ [sic]

Hence, the hermeneutic circle refers to the expansion and deepening of understanding that results from the back-and-forth dialogue between the research subject as a whole and its individual parts (Turunen 1995, p. 96–98). The circle begins with pre-understanding, which concerns the researcher’s knowledge and experience of the research topic at the start of the research process. This highlights that the foundation for understanding is always that which has been understood before, and further, understanding always means interpretation. Gradually, during the research process, the hermeneutic circle or spiral narrows towards a reasoned interpretation. In essence, the hermeneutic circle clarifies and corrects pre-understanding. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, pp. 112–113; Turunen 1995, p. 97). According to Puusa and Juuti (2020, p. 112),

Hans-Georg Gadamer proposed a hermeneutic rule, according to which the whole must be understood from the detail and the detail from the whole, in which case the setting is circular. According to this rule, the criterion for “right” understanding is the compatibility of the individual elements, taking into account the whole. As the research process progresses, the researcher corrects his or her own preconceptions and strives for clarity, i.e. that the interpretation increases the intelligibility of the whole and the content of the interpretation and the data to be interpreted do not contradict each other.

The hermeneutic circle can be used to describe the logic of progression not only in qualitative but in theoretical research, in which the researcher’s pre-understanding or original interpretative idea gradually deepens and becomes more precise (Kallio

<sup>22</sup> <https://sites.app.jyu.fi/mehu/fi/menetelmapolku/aineiston-analyysimenetelmat/hermeneuttinen-analyysi>

2004, p. 48; Puusa & Juuti 2020, p. 111). In this dissertation, the hermeneutic circle concerns two interrelated processes, from which the theoretical and methodological contributions arise: (1) the hermeneutic process of integrating logotherapy, and (2) the hermeneutic process of understanding the phenomenon of meaningfulness as an existential experience. Both processes have taken years (2019–2025). The insights gained during this dissertation’s hermeneutic cycles have led to a deeper understanding of logotherapy and the phenomenon of meaningfulness, and, through this, an increasingly reasoned interpretation of both.

Yet, the new knowledge this book generated is not objective, as knowledge based on interpretation never is. Kallio (2004, p. 47) highlights that “an interpretation is always a conditional, incomplete, and one-sided understanding of a phenomenon”. Based on Palonen, he stresses that “every interpretation is debatable”, can have “objections and alternatives”, and “[N]o interpretation of the phenomenon gives an exhaustive idea of it” (ibid.). Bearing this in mind, this dissertation proposes one reasoned interpretation of Frankl’s thinking and meaningfulness as an existential experience, developed over a long period of time (Puusa & Juuti 2020, p. 114). To make the reasoning transparent and provide a solid basis for other scholars’ counterarguments and further elaboration, this book contains numerous direct quotations from Frankl’s works and meticulous citation information. This particularly concerns Chapter 4, which discusses logotherapy. To justify, especially in terms of conceptual knowledge, interpretation is a delicate process (Kallio 2004, p. 46). To maintain conceptual accuracy, this dissertation uses direct quotations rather than presenting the author’s condensed interpretations of the quoted passages.

The hermeneutic research process, striving for understanding, is characterised by uniqueness, overlapping phases, and the researcher moving back and forth between them. Often, in light of new understanding, the researcher returns to correct the choices and assumptions made in the earlier research phase. The research thus becomes a circular whole (Puusa & Juuti 2020, pp. 113, 115). Puusa and Juuti (2020, p. 115) note that, due to the circular nature of hermeneutic research, describing the research process consistently and thoroughly is difficult. Indeed, the research process of this dissertation can be characterized by the above. For example, during the Ph.D. studies, the author organized the constituents and sub-constituents of the meta-level framework of logotherapy presented in this book in slightly different ways. Regarding previous versions, the author has had an intuitive feeling that the compatibility of the individual parts and whole was not yet matching. These versions are documented in conference papers and research seminar presentations.

Another example of the process can be found in the gradual adoption of this dissertation’s meta-level research approach. First, based on DuBois’s phrasing about logotherapy as a ‘metapsychology’ (4.1), the researcher realised that compiling the theoretical framework of logotherapy is a meta-level approach. Second, with the

meta-level apprehension, the exposed assumptions in the dialectical interrogation between logotherapy and the five paradoxes of meaningful work (5.2) were newly understood from this perspective. At this point, the researcher realised that, from a theorising perspective, ‘logotherapy’ and the ‘meaningful work’ approach the experience of meaningfulness at different theory levels: logotherapy at a meta-level that targets assumptions, and meaningful work at an applied level that aims for empirical research. Third, having discovered the two methodological articles on a philosophical approach to organisational science in 2024 (Tsoukas & Chia 2011; Tsoukas et al. 2024), the researcher understood she was conducting meta-level theoretical research. Consequently, she was able to use these articles to justify the already adopted meta-level research approach and connect it to the problematisation methodology of this dissertation.

To conclude, the phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis of this dissertation involves a critical approach to understanding reality and an emancipatory research interest. This is necessary to question the dominant ways of seeing the phenomenon and experience of meaningfulness, as well as to reveal new perspectives. (Huhtinen & Tuominen 2020, p. 491; Kallio 2004, p. 53; Turunen 1995, p. 232). Increasing self-understanding through interpretation, as part of a hermeneutic research interest, is part of the analysis, but not the ultimate goal in this dissertation (Niiniluoto 1999, pp. 71–72). In essence, the critical approach combines self-reflection, in which the researcher continually questions his or her interpretation, with the goal of emancipation and the expansion of knowledge (Habermas 2004, p. 316; Kallio 2004, p. 54; Turunen 1995, p. 232).

# 3 The state of the art

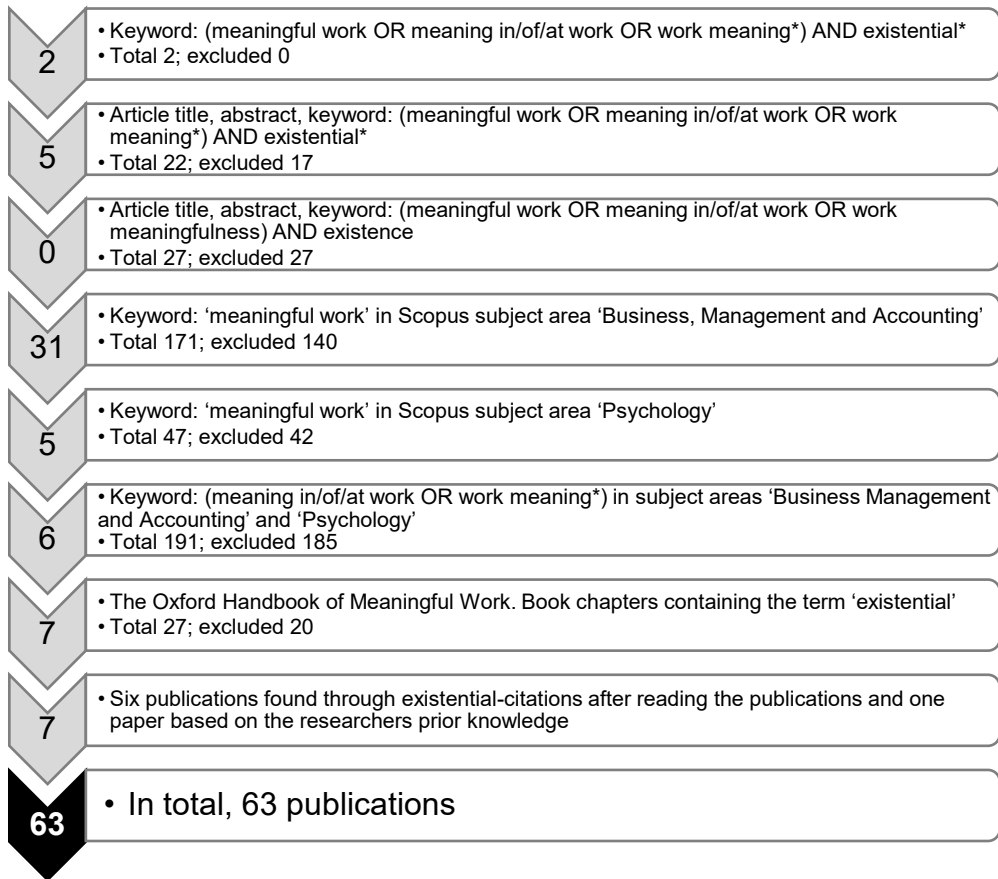
This chapter consists of two sections. The first delves into the domain theory, i.e. meaningful work, and the second into the method theory, i.e. logotherapy. To map the current state of the art of research in light of sub-research questions 1 and 2, two literature reviews, three critical analyses, and one content analysis were conducted.

The data collection and analysis in Section 3.1 are guided by sub-research question 1, which examines how the research area of meaningful work addresses the existential facet of meaningfulness. It begins with a flowchart of the ‘systematic search and review’ and a description of the identified publications. In this description, special attention is paid to Frankl’s position and logotherapy within the identified literature on meaningful work. The analysis proceeds in stages, each of which builds on the next: 1) a theory-driven content analysis on the term ‘existential’; 2) critical analysis of the definitions of meaningful work containing the term ‘existential’; and 3) critical analysis of the term ‘significance’, i.e. existential significance, mattering, existential mattering.

In Section 3.2, attention shifts to logotherapy, which involves an existential perspective on meaningfulness. This section begins with a critical analysis of selected books by Frankl. The analysis and the subsequent ‘critical review’ of logotherapy literature are guided by sub-research question 2: How is the meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy as an axiomatic system of thought described and schematically represented in the research area of logotherapy? The section concludes with future research avenues for the research area of logotherapy.

## 3.1 Domain theory: the existential facet of meaningful work

To map the knowledge about the existential facet of the research area of meaningful work, a ‘systematic search and review’ of this literature was conducted. **Figure 5** illustrates the process of identifying the literature in the flowchart.



**Figure 5.** Flowchart detailing the analysed literature on meaningful work.

Altogether 63 publications were identified through the Scopus electronic database searches and citation tracking in November and December 2021<sup>23</sup>. To control the

<sup>23</sup> Searches include articles, review articles, and book chapters in the Scopus Subject Areas of 'Business, Management, and Accounting' and 'Psychology'. The duplicates were removed in each step and are not included in the total numbers. No limits on the year of publication or language were imposed when conducting the searches. Search strings are described in the flowchart (Figure 5). Final inclusion criteria consisted of a publication or publisher no less than level 1 (AJG or JUFO) and the occurrence of the term existential in the text, not only as a word in references. Six of the included publications were found through citation tracking. Three did not meet all criteria; however, their inclusion is justified based on the content or the paper's central position within the meaningful work literature: Pratt and Ashforth's (2003) book chapter published by academically non-listed Berrett-Koehler Publishers; May, Gilson, and Harter's (2004) article, which does not contain the term 'existential'; and Lips-Wiersma and Mills' (2014) article, which used the terms 'meaning' and 'work' separately as

findings, the same searches were also conducted in Web of Science in November 2021. The search proceeded in stages and yielded 494 publications, the titles and abstracts of which were read. The full text of the article was checked for the term ‘existential’ in 468 publications (unable to retrieve 26). The screening process resulted in the exclusion of 431 articles. The final data set consists of 63 publications, which were read in full. Note that in 2021, when this search was performed, *The Oxford Handbook of Meaningful Work* (2019) was not yet available in electronic databases. Therefore, this book has its own section in the flowchart.

The 63 identified publications consist of 49 journal articles, ten book chapters, and four review articles, of which 22 are conceptual papers, three essays, four review articles, 14 qualitative and 19 quantitative articles, and one mixed-methods article. Half (52%) of the publications appeared by level Q3 or Q4 publishers or journals. While their publication year ranged from 1986 to 2021, 89% were published in 2010 or later, indicating the topicality of the existential perspective to meaningful work.

Frankl was referenced in 27 (43%) publications – four times as often as the meaningful work literature in general (9%) (see Figure 1). However, no publications list Frankl or logotherapy as keywords. The term ‘logotherapy’ appeared in only one review article (Lee 2015) and one book chapter (Morin 1995), where it guided theory building. Additionally, Pavlish, Hunt, Sato, and Brown-Saltzman (2019, p. 243, 250) applied Frankl’s three ways to find meaning – not logotherapy – in their qualitative study. Other references relate to individual logotherapeutic concepts – without using the term ‘logotherapy’ – or a specific idea of Frankl that substantiates the author’s view or position.

The most commonly used Franklian concept within the meaningful work literature is the ‘will to meaning’ (e.g. Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 482; Lips-Wiersma & Morris 2009, p. 492; Yeoman 2014, p. 240), referring to the motivational basis innate to a human being. However, no paper treats the concept based on its original paradigmatic framework: logotherapy. This is also true for the central logotherapeutic concept of self-transcendence, to which meaningful work researchers have recently paid attention (Madden & Bailey 2019; Schnell 2011; Steger & Dik 2009). To summarise, although Frankl is increasingly cited in the research area of meaningful work, the logotherapy’s influence on theory building, and development remains weak. This holds, even though this review mapped the

keywords. The search was updated in February 2022, January 2023, and December 2024. Altogether, seven new papers met the criteria. They did not contain new information about the term ‘significance’ or about the definitions of meaningful work, which this review ultimately focused on as the analysis progressed. These papers are not included in the flowchart.

existentially oriented stream of meaningful work, in which Frankl is referenced more widely than in the research area of meaningful work as a whole.

The aim of this ‘systematic search and review’ was to form an understanding of how the term ‘existential’ is used and how it adds to knowledge about the experience of meaningfulness in the research area of meaningful work. Based on a theory-driven content analysis, three different ways of using the term – from a broader to a more specific one – were distinguished:

1. ‘existential’ loosely indicating a particular perspective on a subject (17%), e.g. existential approach, existential lens, existential philosophy;
2. ‘existential’ as a distinctive dimension of something or someone (60%), e.g. existential significance, deeper existential layer of meaningfulness, existentially fulfilling, existential self; and
3. ‘existential’ incorporated in a novel concept or a measure (23%), e.g. existential labor by Bailey, Madden, Alfes, Schantz, and Soane (2017); existential indifference by Schnell (2010); Existential Meaning of Work Scale by Fairley and Flett cited in Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012, p. 669).

To understand what the term ‘existential’ is intended to capture in the experience of meaningfulness or in the context of meaningful work, a more detailed analysis was needed. A closer look at the 63 papers uncovers the ambiguity of the term’s use. The following examples illustrate the manifold ways in which the term ‘existential’ is employed in the analysed meaningful work literature: To begin, in Bailey and Madden (2017, p. 422), existential refers to “one’s personal and deeply-held sense of what is meaningful” manifested in “deep existential acting”. Lips-Wiersma, Wright, and Dik (2016, p. 535; the same also in Dik et al. 2015, p. 559; Ashforth, Harrison & Corley 2008, p. 332, cited in Steger 2019, p. 213) voice that “the accumulating research demonstrates that many people want their work to matter in a deeper, more existential sense”. Building on Frankl, they (ibid., p. 537) note the “construction of meaning is regarded as a strong existential capacity of human beings regardless of their circumstances”. Lepisto and Pratt (2017, p. 108) suggest that the core problem in their justification conceptualisation of meaningful work is “more existential in nature”, referring to a “fundamental uncertainty or ambiguity regarding the basic worth or value of the work individuals are engaged in”. Madden and Bailey (2019, p. 152) claim that “[I]t is through the mechanism of self-transcendence that people experience meaningfulness, by connecting inner, existential concerns, such as life coherence, self-fulfillment, health, and well-being (Wong & Fry 1998), with outer concerns that go beyond self-boundaries to gain a deep sense of “what matters” (Pratt & Asforth, 2003)”. In Brun and Dugas (2008, p. 718), an existential meaning “forces people to identify anchor points and personal meanings to guide their lives”.

Steger (2019, pp. 209–210) equates significance (third dimension of the construct of ‘meaning in life’ besides comprehension and purpose), that is, “people’s convictions that their lives are worthwhile and intrinsically valuable” with George and Park’s (2014) ‘existential mattering’. Lips-Wiersma and Morris particularise (2009, p. 492) that “the existential domain differs from the emotional domain”. Martela and Pessi (2018, p. 12) conclude “that gaining a deeper understanding of what meaningful work is fundamentally about can assist us in building future workplaces that better address the existential needs of human beings”.

Altogether, in the 63 publications, the term ‘existential’ conveys or captures something obviously substantial and valuable for man and meaningful work; however, the knowledge remains scattered, cursory, and obscure, again inviting further exploration.

To dive further into the existential facet of the research area of meaningful work, especially in relation to the experience of meaningfulness, attention next turns to the definitions of meaningful work that include the term ‘existential’. Conceptual definitions are foundational for scientific research and progress and aim to clearly depict the phenomenon of interest (Podsakof et al. 2016, pp. 159, 165). Thus, it is expected that the term ‘existential’ is explained, defined, or its origin is distinctly referenced in the meaningful work definitions. In the 63 publications, the term ‘existential’ was included in the definition of meaningful work in 17 papers (27%), which contained six different definitions (**Table 1**). The most influential of these, measured by the number of Scopus citations (13.12.2024), are in Lips-Wiersma and Wright’s (2012) empirical paper about a comprehensive measure of meaningful work (CMWS) and in Allan et al.’s (2019) meta-analysis on outcomes of meaningful work that maps research based on Hackman and Oldham’s job characteristic model.

**Table 1.** Definitions of meaningful work containing the term ‘existential’.

Reference	Definition of Meaningful Work
<p><b>1. Lips-Wiersma &amp; Wright</b> 2012, p. 657 Group and Organization Management (SAGE) Authors: New Zealand</p>	<p><i>When someone experiences his or her work as meaningful, this is an individual subjective experience of the existential significance or purpose of work.</i></p> <p>The term existential is interpreted to build on Pratt &amp; Ashforth 2003; May et al. 2004, p. 11; Steger et al. 2006, p. 81; Aktouf 1992, p. 415. Authors consider ‘meaningful work’ an individual, subjective, and existential concept (p. 657). ‘Existential significance’ relates most of all to one’s answer to the “existential question of “why am I here?”” (pp. 657, 658, 672).</p>

<p><b>2. Lee 2015, p. 2263</b> The Journal of Advanced Nursing (John Wiley &amp; Sons Ltd) Author: USA</p>	<p><b><i>The discovery of existential meaning from work experience, work itself and work purpose/goals.</i></b> An integrative definition of ‘meaning in work’* based on 26 articles and two books. ‘Existential meaning’ relates to an existential view building on logotherapy (p. 2260) and is argued to seize “the core essential of the [‘meaning in work’] concept that reflects existential significance” (p. 2265).</p>
<p><b>3. Both-Nwabuwe, Dijkstra, &amp; Beersma 2017, p. 7</b> Frontiers in Psychology (Frontiers) Authors: Netherlands</p>	<p><b><i>Meaningful work is the subjective experience of existential significance resulting from the fit between the individual and work.</i></b> An integrative definition of meaningful work based on 14 definitions of meaningful work identified in the literature (see Table 1, pp. 4–6). Authors specify that (p. 7) “[T]he subjective experience of existential significance’ refers to the process of personally perceiving work as contributing to, or making sense of, one’s reason for existence in the world”.</p>
<p><b>4. Allan, Batz-Barbarich, Sterling, Tay 2019, p. 502</b> Journal of Management Studies (John Wiley &amp; Sons Ltd and Society for the Advancement of Management Studies) Authors: USA</p>	<p><b><i>The global judgement that one’s work accomplishes significant, valuable, or worthwhile goals that are congruent work with one’s existential values.</i></b> Definition of meaningful work builds on Pratt &amp; Ashforth 2003; May et al. 2004; Martela &amp; Pessi 2018. ‘Existential values’ is interpreted to build on Allan et al. 2014 and May et al. 2004 (p. 501).</p>
<p><b>5. Bhatnagar &amp; Aggarwal 2020, p. 1494</b> Employee Relations: The Inter-national Journal (Emerald Publishing Limited) Authors: India</p>	<p><b><i>When individuals perceive their work as meaningful, this is a personal perception of this work’s existential purpose or significance.</i></b> Definition of meaningful work, including the term ‘existential’, builds on May et al. 2004, p. 11.</p>
<p><b>6. Martela, Gómez, Unanue Araya, Bravo, Espejo 2021, p. 1</b> Journal of Vocational Behavior (Elsevier) Authors: Finland and Chile</p>	<p><b><i>The subjective experience of how existentially significant and valuable people find their work to be.</i></b> Definition of meaningful work including the term ‘existential’ draws on Both-Nwabuwe et al. 2017 and Martela &amp; Pessi 2018.</p>

\* In the article title and as a keyword, Lee uses the concept ‘meaning in work’, yet in the text also uses the term ‘meaningful work’ (e.g. p. 2260).

As Table 1 shows, Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) were the first to include the term ‘existential’ in defining meaningful work. Their definition builds on previous work (Lips-Wiersma 2002; Lips-Wiersma & Morris 2009; Algera & Lips-Wiersma 2012) and draws inspiration from a wide range of existential and humanistic literature. For Lips-Wiersma and Wright, meaningful work and the developed theoretical framework (CMWS) are an “individual, subjective, and existential concept” (ibid., p. 657). In the paper, the authors (2012, p. 657) specify four sources for the term ‘existential’: Pratt and Ashforth (2003); May, Gilson, and Harter (2004); Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler (2006); and Aktouf (1992). While the referenced passages provide building blocks, based on them, it is problematic to grasp what the term ‘existential’, or, more precisely, ‘existential significance’ indicates in their definition. To illustrate, Pratt and Ashforth’s question “why am I here?” (ibid., p. 311) draws on Frankl (Lepisto & Pratt 2017, p. 108) and, according to them, refers to the “purpose of one’s existence” and conveys that something is meaningful (Pratt & Ashforth 2003, p. 311). Conversely, Aktouf (1992, p. 415) builds on Sartre in describing the concept of man (the theory of the subject) needed by the renewed form of management he proposes. However, Sartre and Frankl’s existential approaches are based on different ideas of human nature and the reality of meanings, although both end up emphasising responsibility, yet, on different grounds. This inaccuracy finds a potential explanation in Lips-Wiersma and Mills’s (2014, p. 155) later article, according to which organisational scholars using existentialism favour a Sartrean approach or an eclectic one, where “a mixture of chosen perspectives” is justified “solely on its explanatory potential to the particular phenomena that they focus on”.

In the second meaningful work definition, Lee’s view of existential is guided by logotherapy, and the fundamental goal of meaningful work is to allow employees “to realize their meaningful existence” (2015, p. 2263). However, as Lee states, her paper is *guided* by logotherapy; it does not exploit it as a coherent theoretical framework. In the third, Both-Nwabuwe et al.’s (2017) definition of meaningful work, the term ‘existential’ originates from the above-discussed papers by Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009), Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012), and Lee (2015). The fourth definition of meaningful work suggested by Allan et al. (2019) highlights ‘existential values’. Yet incorporating the term ‘existential values’ into the definition seems to build on the authors’ description “that experiences are meaningful when people conduct actions that fulfill values that are relevant to their existence and explain why their work is worth doing” (Allan et al. 2019, p. 501). However, in the referenced articles by Allan, Autin, and Duffy (2014) and May et al. (2004), the word ‘existential’ does not appear. In the fifth definition, Bhatnagar and Aggarwal (2020) use the term ‘existential’ only in their meaningful work definition and, like most of the others above, build on May et al. (2004). The sixth meaningful work definition containing the term ‘existential’ is proposed by Martela et al. (2021). It is based on

Both-Nwabuwe et al.'s (2017) and Martela and Pessi's (2018) work. In the referenced paper, Martela and Pessi (2018) do not include the term 'existential' in their definition (components in the original) of meaningful work; instead, they incorporate the existential needs of human beings into their notion of 'significance', which they consider the top component of meaningful work (2018, p. 2, 6, 12).

In sum, based on the above definitions of meaningful work and their citation tracking, the term 'existential' concerns "the nature of one's being and existence" (Steger et al. 2006, p. 81); human spirit and soul (May et al. 2004, p. 11); purpose of one's existence (Pratt & Ashforth 2003, p. 311); "a being whose destiny is meaning, intentions and projects", and thus, being and becoming (Aktouf 1992, p. 415); core values (Allan et al. 2014, p. 544); meaningful existence (Lee 2015, p. 2263); and "existence that goes beyond mere survival" (Martela & Pessi 2018, p. 6). Increasingly, the term 'existential' seems incorporated into definitions to highlight a deeper dimension of the human experience of meaningfulness, that is, to more precisely capture the experience of what ultimately matters, the "amount of significance" (Rosso et al. 2010, p. 94). Yet again, in their definitions of meaningful work, the authors justify the use of the term 'existential' vaguely, or not at all. For example, they do not explain the difference between 'existential significance' and 'significance', or what kind of values are relevant to one's existence. The most advanced effort is in Lips-Wiersma and Wright's article, where the authors state that the content and process dimensions of meaningful work are eclectically based on "existential literature" or "existential writings" (2012, pp. 661, 678). They also claim that the article "is based on clearly articulated ontological assumptions" and justify this by the aforementioned citation from Aktouf (Lips-Wiersma & Wright 2012, p. 657). Although the article is, in myriad ways, meritorious and makes a significant contribution to the study of meaningfulness, its ontological position regarding the existential dimension of being human or that of meaningfulness is, however, indistinct.

Interestingly, all definitions of meaningful work, implicitly or explicitly, involve inner processing of the experience of mattering/significance or meaningfulness. For Lips-Wiersma and Wright, Both-Nwabuwe et al., and Martela et al., this processing is incorporated by the term 'subjective experience'. Lee, in turn, employs discovery; Allan et al., judgement; and Bhatnagar and Aggarwal, perception. Both-Nwabuwe et al. (2017, p. 7) state that "[T]he subjective experience of existential significance refers to the process of personally perceiving work as contributing to, or making sense of, one's reason for existence in the world." The key weakness of this statement is that one's reason for existence can be virtually anything. It can be based on, for example, achieving financial success, pursuing self-interest or pleasure, or promoting a particular ideology, such as deep ecology or jihadism. Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012, p. 663) delineate that "meaningfulness is a constant process of

searching for, articulating, balancing, struggling with, and taking responsibility for the human need for meaning”. While building on the Franklian notion of ‘will to meaning’ and recognising the tensional nature of human life between reality and ideal [inspiration], their framework (CMWS) however builds on the idea of need-satisfaction. Chapter 5 will elaborate on this dilemma. Overall, philosophical assumptions about the self, the reality of meanings, and the modes of knowing set boundaries for how the inner process of experiencing of meaningfulness occurs. No article reaches this meta-theoretical level when discussing the deeper, existential dimension of the ‘experience of meaningfulness’.

### 3.1.1 On significance, that is, mattering

From the existential ‘what matters in life’ perspective advocated by this dissertation, both meaningful work and meaningful life scholars emphasise one aspect of the subjective experience of meaningfulness: ‘significance’, also termed ‘mattering’, ‘existential mattering’, or ‘existential significance’. In the research area of meaningful life, George and Park delineate that “mattering directs attention to the overall evaluation of the worth and value of one’s life in the world”, by definition, ‘mattering’ is the “extent of experiencing one’s existence as significant, important, and of value in the world” (2016, p. 208, 212). For Martela and Steger, ‘significance’ is a normative and evaluative component of ‘meaning in life’ denoting “the quality of being of value”, that is, focusing on “value, worth, and importance” (2016, pp. 534–535, 542). They define significance “as a value-laden evaluation of one’s life as a whole regarding how important, worthwhile, and inherently valuable it feels” (ibid., p. 535). King and Hicks (2021, p. 567) offer an evasive delineation, according to which “[T]he notion of existential mattering or significance refers to the extent to which a person believes their life counts—i.e. that their existence has and will have a lasting impact on the world<sup>24</sup>”.

In the research area of meaningful work, the first to highlight an existential perspective was Estelle Morin, who built on Frankl’s and Irvin Yalom’s (1931–) existential psychotherapies to “help managers and workers restore meaning to their daily lives” (1995, p. 42). For Morin, significance “implies a specific manner of approaching and understanding the phenomenological experience, as well as the value or importance that is conferred upon this experience” (ibid., p. 43). Drawing on an existential-phenomenological approach, Morin conceptualises the relationships of the three components (significance, orientation, coherence) as follows (ibid.):

<sup>24</sup> This description seems to build on George and Park’s 2016 review paper, which explains it more thoroughly.

[T]o discover the meaning of an object, we must therefore first discover the manner in which the subject conceives the object. This will also highlight the subject's underlying values. In addition, we must discover the subject's orientation toward the object and the object's degree of coherence with his phenomenological experience.

Unfortunately, Morin's paper has been ignored in the meaningfulness research, except for being mentioned in Lips-Wiersma's 2002 article on the influence of spiritual meaning-making on career behaviour, which lays the foundation for her later work in the research area of meaningful work. Instead, a strong research line of meaningful work builds on Hackman and Oldham's job characteristic theory (JCT) (1975, 1976). In it, 'experienced meaningfulness of the work' concerns "[T]he degree to which the individual experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile" (1976, p. 256) – basically the same content as what meaningful life scholars use to describe 'significance' today.

JCT's roots lie in sociological positivism reflecting an "attempt to apply models and methods derived from the natural sciences to the study of human affairs" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 7). In 2003, drawing on this paradigmatic continuum more familiar to organisational scholars than Morin's existential-phenomenological approach, Pratt and Ashforth wrote an influential conceptual book chapter about "meaningfulness in working and at work". There they delineate that 'meaningful' means "that the work and/or its context are perceived by its practitioners to be, at minimum, purposeful and significant" (2003, p. 309–311). Building on Frankl (Lepisto & Pratt 2017, p. 108), Pratt and Ashforth argue that "[W]hen something is meaningful, it helps answer the question, "Why am I here?" ... [that is] a broader existential question about the purpose of one's existence". This answering occurs through "meaning(fullness)-making", understood as a subset of sensemaking and defined "as the attribution of significance to some target or stimulus". (Pratt & Ashforth 2003, p. 311).

Partly building on Pratt and Ashforth's work, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009, p. 492) argue that "[W]hen someone experiences his or her life as meaningful, this is a subjective experience of the existential significance or purpose of life". In the paper published in 2012 (p. 657), Lips-Wiersma and Wright suggest the same definition for meaningful work, except that, in it, the word 'life' is replaced with 'work'. As the previous section stated, Both-Nwabuwe et al. (2017, p. 6) refine that "[T]he subjective experience of existential significance" refers to the process of personally perceiving work as contributing to, or making sense of, one's reason of existence in the world". The culmination of the 'significance'-perspective of the research area of meaningful work can be considered Martela and Pessi's (2018, p. 1; italics in the original) suggestion that "meaningfulness in the broadest sense is about

*work significance* as an overall evaluation of work as regards whether it is intrinsically valuable and worth doing”.

Taken together, what the term ‘significance’, i.e. mattering – whether with the prefix existential or not – is fundamentally intended to express within the research areas of meaningful life and meaningful work, is value or worth; that something is valuable, most of all from the individual’s perspective. In other words, meaningfulness is inherently connected to values and valuable. Further, in the research area on meaningful life, a consensus is growing that the construct of ‘meaning in life’ comprises three components: comprehension/coherence, purpose, and significance/mattering/existential mattering (George & Park 2016; Martela & Steger 2016; King & Hicks 2021). Based on the scholars’ definitions of these three components, besides the one related to ‘mattering’, also ‘purpose’ is also connected to values, valuing, and therefore, to the individual’s value-apprehension. However, the psychologically oriented ‘meaning in life’ and meaningful work researchers leave open, how the individual knows what is of value. They take for granted the mainstream option that individuals assign values to objects.

Simultaneously, meaningful life and meaningful work researchers hold that feelings – for example, feeling or sense of significance or purpose – play a role in how individuals experience the above three components. Yet, from the logotherapy perspective, scholars once again bypass focal constituents, especially, man’s conscious relationship with values, value categories, and feelings as a mode of knowing about values (DuBois 1993, p. 65). So far, besides Morin (1995), only Michaelson (2021) has touched on, albeit implicitly, the relationship between values and meaningfulness within the research area of meaningful work, proposing the subjective, social and normative accounts of meaningful work. However, in describing these accounts’ different criteria for meaningfulness and related sources of authority, Michaelson (ibid., pp. 421–422, 424), like others, treats values as abstract entities to be evaluated and reasoned about, rather than as felt and lived, as in logotherapy. Chapter 4, which compiles the meta-level framework of logotherapy, further discusses this, as do Sections 6.2–6.4, which advance theorising on meaningfulness and the experience of meaningfulness in a value-context

### 3.2 Method theory: the meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy

This section explores the state of knowledge regarding the meta-level theoretical framework of ‘logotherapy’, particularly how it has been depicted as an axiomatic system of thought and by schematic representations (sub-research question 2). These are investigated, first in light of Frankl’s books, and second, based on a ‘critical review’ of logotherapy literature compiled mainly from the Scopus database.

### 3.2.1 The meta-level theoretical framework based on Frankl's books

At age 19 in 1924, Frankl's first scientific article was published in the *Internationalen Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse (International Journal of Psychoanalysis)* on Freud's recommendation (Batthyány 2010, p. 11; Frankl 2000, p. 65). The second article, *Psychotherapy and Worldview*, followed the next year in the main journal of a competing approach, Adler's individual psychology (Frankl 2000, p. 60). This paper is foundational in that it is where Frankl (2000, p. 59) first outlined the common thread of his work, which "concerns the border area that lies between psychotherapy and philosophy, with special attention to the problems of meanings and values in psychology". Frankl states that by 1933, "I had systemized my ideas to some extent", for example, the "concept of three groups of values, or three possible ways to find meaning in life – even up to the last moment, the last breath" (2000, p. 64). The central ideas of the tensional relationship between the subjective pole of being and the objective pole of meaning and values, as well as the 'will to meaning' connecting these two poles, existed before World War II. After the war, Frankl advanced the theoretical basis of logotherapy by introducing, e.g. the concepts of 'self-transcendence' in 1949 and 'dimensional ontology' in 1953 (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 46; Frankl 1982b, p. 33; see Chapter 4).

According to Thir and Batthyány (2016, p. 54), Frankl's key works that capture the "structural makeup" of logotherapy, the "main principles of Frankl's theories", and the application of the logotherapeutic methods were published between 1946 and 1956. These seven focal books and information on whether they are included in the Scopus electronic database and the APA PsycINFO abstract database are (ibid.):

- *Ärztliche Seelsorge* (1946) (APA PsycINFO)
- *Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager* (1946) (in English<sup>25</sup> in APA PsycINFO).
- *Die Psychotherapie in der Praxis. Eine kasuistische Einführung für Ärzte* (1947)
- *Der unbewusste Gott* (1948) (a revised and updated version titled *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* (2011) in APA PsycINFO)
- *Der unbedingte Mensch. Metaklinische Vorlesungen* (1949)
- *Homo Patiens. Versuch einer Pathodizee* (1950)

<sup>25</sup> *Man's Search for Meaning* (1992/1959), Frankl's most cited book in scientific publications. The book contains 9,840 references in the Scopus database and 30,482 in Google Scholar as of 11.5.2025.

- *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen* (1956) (in English *On the Theory and Therapy of Mental Disorders. An Introduction to Logotherapy and Existential Analysis* (2024/2004) in Scopus and APA PsycINFO).

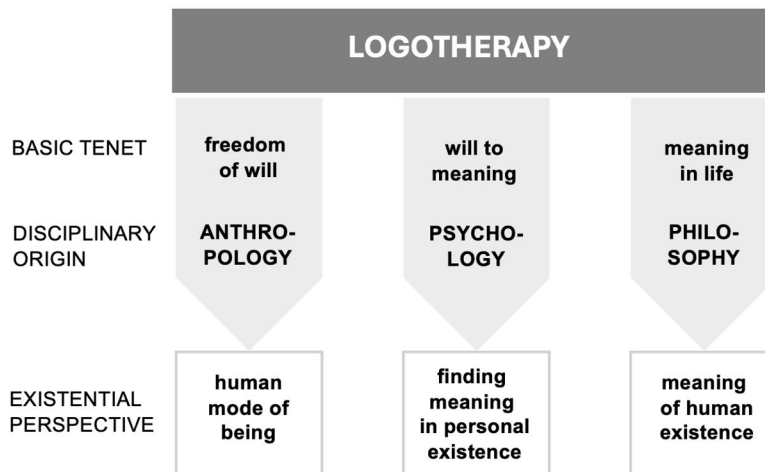
For English-speaking audiences, Professor James M. DuBois, who has translated the last piece in the above list into English, proposes six works central from the perspective of understanding Frankl's meta-theoretical framework, which DuBois calls "metapsychology" (2024, p. xi)

- *The Unheard Cry for Meaning* (1978) (APA PsycINFO)
- *Psychotherapy and Existentialism* (1985)
- *The Doctor and the Soul* (1986) (APA PsycINFO)
- *The Will to Meaning* (1988) and "the identically titled book in German albeit with different content, *Der Wille zum Sinn* (1991)"
- *Der leidende Mensch* (1990) including republications of *Homo Patiens* (1950) and *Der unbedingte Mensch* (1949), which are also in the list above.

Based on these works<sup>26</sup>, it is evident that the logotherapeutic practice, existential analysis as part of this practice, and Frankl's theory and therapy of mental disorders (Frankl 2004/2024), rest on a distinct meta-theoretical foundation. The focal building blocks of this foundation are the three "basic tenets" or "principles of logotherapy" (Frankl 1967, pp. vii–viii): 'freedom of will', 'will to meaning', and 'meaning in life' (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 107). The first tenet relates to the view of human nature, the second to meaning-orientation as man's primary motivation, and the third to a "belief in the unconditional meaningfulness of human life under any and all circumstances" (DuBois 2004, p. xi; Lukas 2020a, p. 20). The tenets of 'free will' and 'meaning in life' are axioms eluding scientific proof, whereas the tenet of 'will to meaning' has been empirically corroborated by experimental psychological studies and psychometric tests (Batthyány 2011, p. 174–175; Frankl 2004, pp. 6, 9; Frankl 2010/1972, p. 43). Building on Lukas's figure (2020a, p. 19), **Figure 6** on the next page connects the three basic tenets, their disciplinary origins in philosophical anthropology, psychology, and philosophy, and Frankl's earlier delineation of the term 'existential' (see 1.2.3). To note, Frankl employs the term 'anthropology', "as is common in Continental philosophy", where it signifies a "philosophy of the human

<sup>26</sup> In this dissertation, the author has used all but one – *Die Psychotherapie in der Praxis. Eine kasuistische Einführung für Ärzte* (1947) – of the listed books as sources, although in some cases, an earlier or later edition was used.

person” (DuBois 2004, p. xi; Frankl 2004, p. 225). Overall, Figure 6 brings forth the current meta-theoretical framework of logotherapy.



**Figure 6.** The basic tenets of logotherapy, their connection to disciplines, and to Frankl’s delineation of the term ‘existential’ (developed from Lukas 2020a, p. 19).

In his daily work, Frankl encountered human distress and problems. His primary goal, one might claim, was to help real people in real-life situations, not the average person – “a ghost who is everywhere yet nowhere”, to quote Ryle about the average taxpayer (Ryle 2009/1949, p. 8) – in a typical situation. Emphasising the practice-orientation inherent in Frankl’s work, Batthyány (2011, p. 184) sums up that “Frankl did not propose a series of mutually independent psychological hypotheses and therapeutic methods, but rather formulated a highly generative overall psychological model, which forms the basis for the development of logotherapeutic methods”. As research methods in social sciences only started to take shape after the mid-1900s, in the early 20th century, when Frankl developed logotherapy, theory building in many disciplines, including psychology, relied mostly on intellectual theorising, reflection, and criticism of prevailing thinking combined with inductive reasoning from cases (Frankl 2014b, pp. 58–59; Harisalo 2008, pp. 42–43). Logotherapy can be argued to have evolved in this way.

This dissertation argues that grasping the comprehensive theoretical framework of logotherapy is challenging for two reasons in particular: First, Frankl assumes the reader is familiar with the thinking of various philosophers, such as Scheler, Jaspers, Heidegger, Kant, Hegel, and Husserl. If so, the reader will be better able to follow and understand Frankl’s argumentation, especially if she or he is informed about the tradition of continental philosophy. However, today’s research on ‘meaningful

work’ and ‘meaningful life’ is mostly promoted by disciplines that emphasise a psychological and/or sociological (including organisational) approach as well as empirical research, so the key philosophical elements of logotherapy may remain elusive to most researchers. Second, information about logotherapy as a comprehensive axiomatic system of thought, or meta-level theoretical framework, is scattered throughout Frankl’s writings. Consequently, the nomological network underlying logotherapy is hard to conceive holistically. For example, it is not easy for the reader to realise key theoretical building blocks inherent in the three basic tenets, such as the human experiential relationship to values and meanings, let alone the underlying theory of knowledge. That said, this challenge concerns not only the axiomatic system of thought behind logotherapy, but also, for example, the meta-level theoretical framework underlying Freud’s psychoanalysis, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, and cognitive and positive psychology (see Chapter 5). Yet, in calling for humanising psychological science, Frankl directs our attention to the importance of this level of theorising and to the consequences that our views of human nature and motivation have for encountering and treating people (Frankl 2014a, p. 3; 2024, p. 13).

Regarding the existing schematic representations of logotherapy (sub-research question 2), in the above books, the key figures depicting the theoretical basis of Frankl’s thinking relate to illustrating the three-dimensional view of man and/or reality by using geometry. These figures take three basic shapes and appear in several publications, for example, in *Ärztliche Seelsorge* (2013, pp. 52–53), *Der unbewußte Gott* (2018a, pp. 19, 90), *Der Wille zum Sinn* (1982a, pp. 143–144, 154–155, 169, 247–249), *The Will to Meaning* (2014a, pp. 10, 112–113), *Psychotherapy and Existentialism* (1967, pp. 139–140), and *The Doctor and the Soul* (2019, pp. 288–289). According to Frankl (2014a, p. 9),

[C]onceiving of man in terms of bodily, mental, and spiritual strata or layers means dealing with him as if his somatic, psychic, and noetic modes of being could be separated from each other. I myself have tried to simultaneously to do justice to the ontological differences and the anthropological unity by what I have called dimensional anthropology and ontology. This approach makes use of the geometrical concept of dimensions as an analogy for qualitative differences which do not destroy the unity of a structure.

To exemplify, **Figure 7** illustrates how Frankl capitalises on geometry to explain the logotherapeutic three-dimensional view of man involving bodily, mental, and spiritual dimensions, as phrased in the quotation above, that is, physical, psychological, and noological (human) dimensions, as Frankl and this dissertation also use.

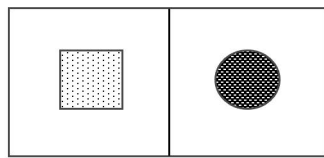


Figure A.

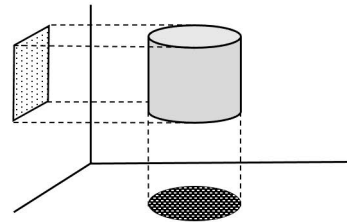


Figure C.

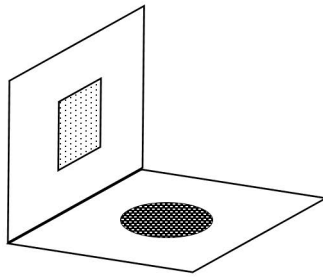


Figure B.

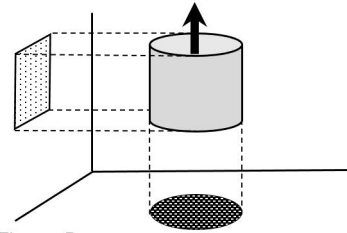


Figure D.

**Figure 7.** Frankl's geometric description of the three-dimensional view of man (Frankl 1982a, pp. 247–249).

According to Frankl (1982a, pp. 247–249), in Figure A, the circle and square can be thought of as being on the pages of an open book, describing Freud's and Adler's psychotherapies and their contrasting views of human nature. These, like the square and the circle, are mutually contradictory; squaring the circle is impossible. In other words, since the Freudian and Adlerian psychotherapies contain different anthropological assumptions about man, they lead to different psychotherapeutic practices. If, however, the other page of the book is turned into a perpendicular position as in Figure B, one "can imagine that the square and the circle are but the (two-dimensional) projections of a (three-dimensional) cylinder inasmuch as they represent its profile view and its ground-plan" (p. 247), as in Figure C. When positing a new perspective, the third dimension of the cylinder depicting Frankl's logotherapy, the square and the circle appear "as mere projections" and do not "contradict the oneness" they describe (Figure C). Further, the closedness of the square and the circle does not "contradict the openness of the cylinder" (p. 248) (Figure D). As such, the cylinder depicts "the dimension of the specifically human phenomena" of logotherapy, where it is "possible to catch the oneness as well as the humanness of man" (p. 249).

To summarise, various aspects of the meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy are scattered throughout Frankl's writings, and following his argument requires the reader to have philosophical knowledge. Although Frankl's books contain information about logotherapy as a comprehensive axiomatic system of

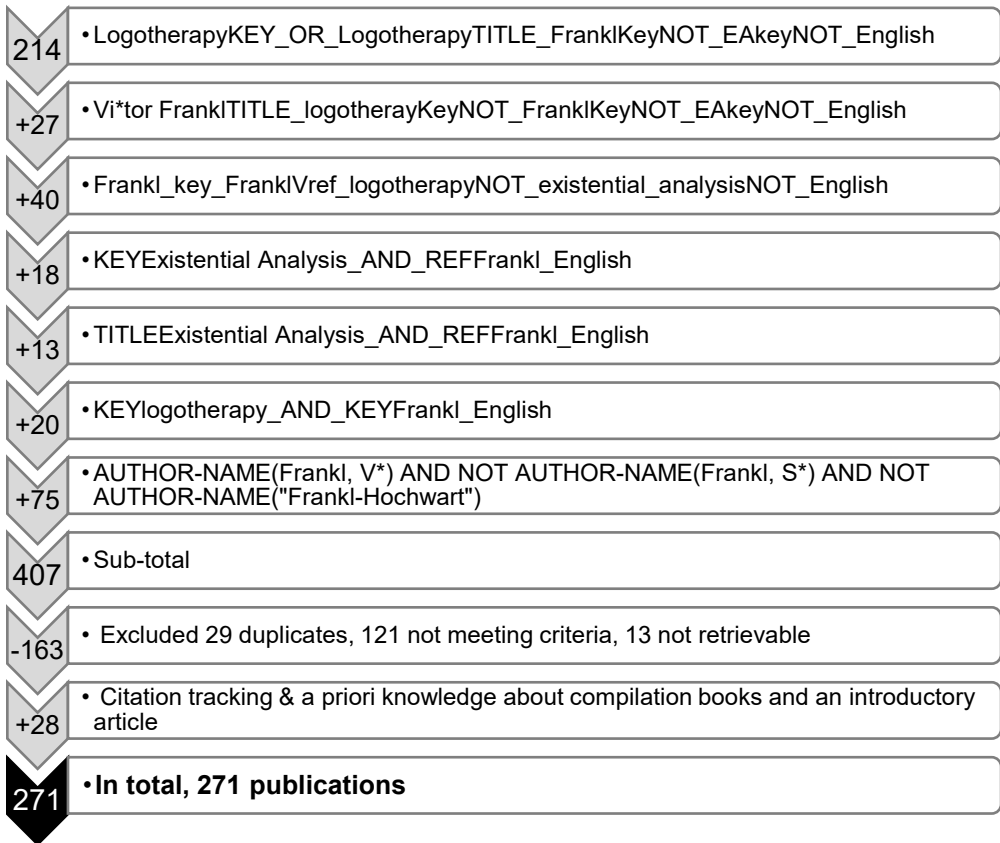
thought, at present, this meta-theoretical foundation must be compiled by the readers themselves, building on the three basic tenets of freedom of will, meaning in life, and will to meaning. In this case, the epistemological foundation of logotherapy remains particularly difficult to grasp. Further, the meta-level theorising is illustrated with schematic representations from some aspects, such as the three-dimensional view of human nature (Figure 7), but not holistically. Arguably, these have contributed to the fact that too few researchers recognise logotherapy as a distinct scientific-philosophical approach, and that applying logotherapy in contemporary meaningfulness research is cursory.

### 3.2.2 A critical review of logotherapy literature

Beyond becoming acquainted with Frankl's key books, the logotherapy literature was also surveyed via Scopus database searches for this dissertation. Compared with other large electronic databases – Web of Science, PubMed, and APA PsycINFO –, Scopus contains the most records on logotherapy (title OR abstract) and papers by Frankl. Using a single extensive electronic database was deemed sufficient, as the review did not adopt a systematic literature review approach. As the flowchart on the next page illustrates (**Figure 8**), a basic search with logotherapy as a keyword or title (n=214) was conducted and complemented with different combinations of keyword/title/references/author searches using Boolean operators and the search terms 'logotherapy', 'existential analysis', 'Vi\*tor Frankl', and 'Frankl'<sup>27</sup>. This step-by-step search yielded 407 articles, review articles, or book chapters in English. Based on reading the titles, 29 duplicates were removed. The abstracts of the remaining 378 publications were read and, when necessary, the full texts were scanned to ensure they met the inclusion criteria. In tandem, the publications were classified into theoretical, empirical, and review articles. Altogether, 121 publications were excluded because they did not meet the type (e.g. opinion, essay, comment), quality (e.g. no information about journal ranking<sup>28</sup>), language, or content criteria, such as when the word 'logotherapy' was only mentioned but did not affect the publication's content. Thirteen publications could not be retrieved.

<sup>27</sup> Scopus electronic database searches in November 2023, updated 3.1.2024. No limit for subject area or the year of publication were imposed. Regarding Frankl's papers, language was not restricted to English, as some of the publications lacked language information. In this step, English language articles were selected one by one.

<sup>28</sup> This particularly concerns the main logotherapy journal, *The International Forum for Logotherapy*, which is included only in the APA PsycINFO bibliographic index. PsycINFO lists 335 items published in this journal (2.1.2025), yet the full texts are unavailable in this abstract database. Papers published in *The International Forum for Logotherapy* were not screened for this literature review. For quality reasons, see 1.2.3.



**Figure 8.** Logotherapy literature flowchart based on Scopus electronic database searches, citation tracking, and prior knowledge.

Frankl's English-language papers were also screened in PsycINFO, Web of Science, and PubMed, resulting in five additional publications. Based on the author's prior knowledge, nine articles authored by Frankl from the compilation book *The Feeling of Meaninglessness. A challenge to Psychotherapy and Philosophy* (2010); five articles by Frankl from the compilation book *Psychotherapy and Existentialism. Selected Papers on Logotherapy by Viktor E. Frankl* (1967); six book chapters related to logotherapy from the *The Wiley World Handbook of Existential Therapy* (van Deurzen et al. 2019); DuBois's introductory book chapter from Frankl's book *On the Theory and Therapy of Mental Disorders* (2004/2024); and one article (DuBois 1993) found through citation tracking were added to the search results.

The screening process yielded 271 publications, published in nearly 180 different journals and books between 1953 and 2024. Arguably, the multidisciplinary nature of logotherapy's theoretical basis is at least one reason its research is scattered across numerous journals and different disciplines. While most publication forums

represent Scopus-rankings Q4 and Q3, some also fall into categories Q1 and Q2. Of the publications, 107 were classified as theoretical, 24 as review, 6 as methodological, and 134 as empirical. Based on the number of publications, key scholars in logotherapy literature are Viktor Frankl (n=35), Jim Lantz (n=14), and Stefan Schulenberg (n=13). Review articles incorporated four meta-analyses: on existential therapies' psychological outcomes (Vos, Cooper & Craig 2015), the effects of psychological meaning-centered [sic] therapies on quality of life and psychological stress (Vos & Vitali 2018), the efficacy of psychological interventions for preventing and treating mental health disorders in university students (Barnett et al. 2021), and the effects of different interventions on internet addiction (Zhang et al. 2022). In the last two, logotherapy plays only a cursory role.

To unravel, whether the identified literature adds to knowledge about the meta-theoretical framework of logotherapy and schematic representations, all abstracts were reread. Theoretical, review, and methodological articles (n=137), with 21 empirical articles, were scrolled and read in full when deemed necessary. The reviewed papers discuss logotherapy:

(a) to advance it as a therapy, e.g. family logotherapy (Lantz 1986, 1992, 1994, 1998), meaning-centred psychotherapy for clinical practice (Martínez & Flórez 2015) or for aging (Guttman 2001);

(b) to further an existing framework or topic through logotherapy, e.g. cognitive behaviour therapy (Ameli & Dattilio 2013), rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) (Hutchinson & Chapman 2005), sociotherapy (Nilsson 2022), meaning-oriented music therapy (Pfeifer 2021), professional burnout (Riethof & Bob 2019), euthanasia (Beuselinck 2021) meaning-centred couples therapy (Schulenberg, Schnetzer, Winters & Hutzell 2010), or gerontological theory and practice (Xu 2010);

(c) to develop a novel theoretical and/or therapeutic approach building on logotherapy, e.g. personal existential analysis (PEA) (Längle 2012), meaning-centred counseling and therapy (MCCT) (Wong 2012c), a four-dimensional model of mindfulness (Nilsson 2014), or a combination of meaning-centred psychotherapy and neuroscience for the treatment of mood and anxiety disorders (Balogh, Tanaka et al. 2021);

(d) to use logotherapy as a theoretical lens, e.g. the concept of dimensional ontology for a psycho-biographical analysis of a person's life (Harry & van Niekerk 2023), the concept of noodynamics (noö-dynamics) for studying the search for meaning of Frankl himself between 1942 and 1945 (Bushkin, van Niekerk, Stroud 2021), or the concepts of creative, experiential, and attitudinal values for understanding the COVID-19-experience in Hong Kong (Li 2020);

(e) to focus and advance the understanding of a selected logotherapeutic concept, e.g. spiritual unconscious (de Carvalho & Moreira-Almeida 2023), spirituality and unconscious religiosity (García-Alandete 2023), theory of meaning (Bailey 2022), or freedom (Rempel 2021);

(f) to compare Frankl/logotherapy and other theorists/theoretical frameworks for the purpose of highlighting similarities and/or differences, e.g. logotherapy and psychoanalysis (Weisskopf-Joelson 1958); Frankl and Rollo May (Bulka 1978), Frankl and Alfred Längle (Reitinger & Bauer 2019; Lhotová 2015; Längle 2019), logotherapy and Eastern religions (Fabry 1975), or logotherapy and Talmudic Judaism (Bulka 1975);

(g) to use logotherapy as one perspective through which a subject matter is examined, e.g. meaning as a source of societal resilience and growth (Vos, Russo-Netzer & Schulenberg 2023), spirituality in psychological science (Helminiak 2008), epistemological impasse between psychology and religion (Gladson & Lucas 1989), or philosophy as a therapeutic instrument for social medicine (Melley 1998).

(h) to present conceptual criticism, e.g. Landau on freedom (2019), Pytell on the transcendent nature of human experience (2006), or Woelfel on freedom and responsibility (1982).

Numerous articles provide a brief overview of logotherapy with varying emphases and terminology. The most consistent and accurate descriptions of logotherapy as a holistic theoretical and therapeutic framework are given by Kimble and Ellor (2000), in their book chapter in the compilation book *Viktor Frankl's Contribution to Spirituality and Aging* (2000), and Crumbaugh (1971), in his article *Frankl's logotherapy: a new orientation in counseling*. While several other authors also put forward the theoretical basis or key concepts of logotherapy, particularly, Bulka (1975), Hillmann (2018), Ritchie, Walter, and Starck (2018), Schulenberg, Hutzell, Nassif, and Rogina (2008), Weisskopf-Joelson (1958), and Wong (2012c, 2014), these studies aim to assess logotherapy as a theory and therapy for clinical practice, develop testable hypotheses, or simply, to provide an overview. In other words, they do not pursue the compilation or illustration of the holistic meta-theoretical framework underlying Frankl's thinking.

In addition to Frankl, it seems only DuBois (1993; 2004) has aimed to refine and clarify the meta-theoretical foundation of logotherapy. In the introductory chapter to his English translation of Frankl's seminal book on mental health (2004; 2024), DuBois contemplates logotherapy as a meta-psychology (2004, pp. x–xi), and distinguishes between Frankl's dimensional ontology, theory of knowledge, and theory of meaning and values (2004, pp. x–xvi). DuBois's 1993 article explains how Frankl's meta-psychology guides Frankl's eclectic practice, meaning how theory-

based eclecticism guides the practice of logotherapy. In light of the scientific databases, no logotherapy scholar has yet seemed to have capitalised on DuBois's thought. Besides those of Dubois, two articles target the meta-theoretical foundation of logotherapy; however, they do not aim to compile or illustrate it: Costello (2016) examines the concepts of a three-dimensional view of man, logos, spirit, and spirituality through philosophical analysis, aiming to bring forth compatibility between Frankl, Plato, and classical Greek philosophers. Reitingner and Bauer, representing the Länglian approach to logotherapy, instead criticise the meta-theoretical basis of Frankl's logotherapy, claiming, for example, that in Frankl's theorising, "values and meaning can be recognized directly by the conscience without a "detour" via emotions", and that "foundation of meaning [is] in God" (2019, p. 325). As Chapter 4 on logotherapy shows, the claims are unfounded.

Regarding illustrating the meta-theoretical basis of logotherapy (sub-research question 2), only three articles summarise their logotherapeutic understanding or theorising into a schematic representation: Hillmann's (2008, p. 360<sup>29</sup>) view of human beings, Lieban-Kalmar's (1984, p. 263) three-dimensional view of man and meaning finding, and the "theory of meaning" framework consisting of the three-dimensional view of man, life purpose, human suffering, and freedom to choose by Ritchie et al. (2018, p. 85, 90). These schematic representations offer a foundation for how to *apply* logotherapy in practice; however, they do not advance an understanding of the meta-theoretical basis of logotherapy.

Last, reading the identified logotherapy literature brings forth that contemporary research describes 'logotherapy' in a number of different ways, such as Frankl's existential psychiatry and Frankl's existential theory of meaning (Bailey 2022), classical logotherapy (Längle 2012), "logotherapy—a school of therapy centred around meaning creation, considered the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy" (Bushkin, van Niekerk & Stroud 2021), a theory of psychotherapy based on Viktor Frankl's theory of meaning and psychopathology (Martinez & Florez 2015), a form of existential psychotherapy (Lantz 1993), Franklian existentialism (McDonald & Perry 2023), Frankl's model of meaning fulfilment (Pfeifer 2021), meaning-focused existential philosophy (Schulenberg et al. 2008), and Viktor Frankl's meaning-seeking model (Wong 2014). Some authors separate logotherapy's theoretical and therapeutic elements to highlight the authors' focus on the theory. For example, Lützen and Ewalds-Kvist (2013) build on Viktor Frankl Institute's definition that distills 'logotherapy' as an applied therapy, 'logotherapy/existential analysis' (LTEA) as an empirically based meaning-centred approach to psychotherapy, and 'existential analysis' (EA) "as the philosophical and scientific basis of logotherapy

<sup>29</sup> Three other familiar figures from Lukas's and Frankl's works are on pages 363, 365, 366.

as well as an essential part of a therapy proper”, that is, “analysis with respect to existence”<sup>30</sup>. However, the use of these definitions has not become widespread in science. The only article to employ the term ‘logotherapy’ was Joshi, Marszalek, Berkel, and Hinshaw’s empirical paper, in which it refers to “a loose model” explaining the relationships among seven variables (2014, pp. 227–228). While the authors cite Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1984), it does not appear in the book.

Indeed, Frankl defined the terms ‘logotherapy’ and ‘existential analysis’ ambiguously. Primarily, logotherapy is “a therapy that engages the spiritual dimension of the person” and rests on a theoretical foundation: existential analysis (Biller & de Lourdes-Stiegeler 2020, pp. 64–65; DuBois 2004, p. xvii). As such, logotherapy “signifies a psychotherapy that is oriented toward meaning and that reorients the patient toward meaning” (Frankl 2010/1958, p. 81). Yet, Frankl specified that “[L]ogotherapy ... does not in itself represent a (psycho-)therapy in the true sense of the word” (ibid.) because it is based on and oriented towards using the specifically human dimension (alongside the psychosocial and biological dimensions) (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, pp. 64–65). Furthermore, ‘logotherapy’ and ‘existential analysis’ are English synonyms for ‘Existenzanalyse’ (Frankl 1967, pp. viii–ix), and “Existential Analysis and Logotherapy are really the same; at least they are insofar as they both represent respectively a side of one and the same theory” (Frankl 2010/1958, p. 81). Docent Risto Nurmela (2013, pp. 31–32) summarises that Frankl did not clearly define the relationship between the terms ‘existential analysis’ and ‘logotherapy’ in any of his publications. Instead, he uses them interchangeably in reference to theory and therapy<sup>31</sup>. The ambiguity surrounding the definition of the term ‘logotherapy’ thus dates back to Frankl and may have contributed to its replacement by other terms or descriptions in secondary logotherapy literature, as depicted above. It is further argued that today, the term ‘logotherapy’ has become problematic in contexts outside psychology, psychiatry, and nursing. Based on the author’s experiences, this is highlighted when ‘logotherapy’ is used in the sense of a theoretical framework in the context of organisational science and/or working life (e.g. in trainings).

According to Leontiev (2016, p. 277), a twofold image of ‘logotherapy’, that is, comprehending it as a philosophy and a psychological theory, or as a psychotherapeutic practice, has become rather stable. However, this seemingly concerns, above all, the English-language logotherapy literature since, in German, both terms – ‘existential analysis’ and ‘logotherapy’ – remain in use. Moreover, conceptual confusion may arise among scholars who are unfamiliar with the

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.viktorfrankl.org/logotherapy.html> 18.1.2024

<sup>31</sup> For example, in Finland, the term logotherapy has traditionally had this dual meaning.

logotherapy literature, because empirical research based on logotherapy may be based on two meta-theoretically differing approaches using the same terms: the ‘logotherapy/existential analysis’ by the Viktor Frankl Institute (VFI) and ‘logotherapy and existential analysis’ endorsed by Alfried Längle and his followers, for example, in the *Wiley World Handbook of Existential Therapies* (van Deurzen et al. 2019, pp. 305–403). Generally, Länglians use the term ‘existential analysis’ (EA) only, and regard logotherapy as a “subsidiary branch” of existential analysis<sup>32</sup>.

To conclude, Batthyány from the VFI (2011, p. 184) states there is “strong evidence in support of logotherapy and existential analysis as a whole, i.e. as a philosophically grounded, yet at the same time practice- and outcome-focussed [sic], and hence empirically testable, model of human nature”. Schulenberg (2003, p. 307) adds that “[T]he theoretical underpinnings of logotherapy are strong”. He draws on Guttmann (1996), who points to the role of case studies in substantiating different aspects of logotherapy, and, at the same time, to the lack of rigorous quantitative research (ibid.). Overall, the interest of those studying logotherapy has almost invariably been directed towards its practical application or the operationalisation of logotherapeutic concepts. The underlying rationale is that what is most urgently needed, is further evidence of logotherapy’s effectiveness through rigorous research methods (Thir & Batthyany 2016, p. 66, 68). For example, according to Thir and Batthyány (2016, pp. 66–67), there is an

enormous amount of findings providing evidence for the theoretical assumptions of logotherapy, the outcome effectiveness of its applications in various states of suffering, the preventive function of the search for meaning and the presence of meaning in life as an important resilience factor, and the body of assessment instruments operationalizing different aspects of meaning in life according to Frankl’s theory, especially their psychometric properties legitimizing their use both for clinical practice and empirical research.

However, based on how Frankl’s ideas, logotherapeutic concepts, and the meta-theoretical framework of logotherapy in the form of the three basic tenets are currently applied or overlooked in the research areas of meaningful life, meaningful work, and logotherapy, the question also arises as to how coherently the meta-level theoretical foundation of logotherapy is described, illustrated, and available for the contemporary meaningfulness researchers.

In summary, a meta-level description with a schematic representation of the axiomatic system of thought underlying logotherapy is lacking. As a reminder, the

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.existenzanalyse.org/en/introduction/existential-analysis/>

axiomatic system of thought refers to the description of the nomological network of ontological, epistemological, human nature, and motivation-related assumptions, captured in a meta-level theoretical framework (see 2.3). Based on Frankl's books and the screened logotherapy literature, neither Frankl nor any researcher since has proposed a coherent description or illustration of this meta-level foundation. Thus, in the contemporary meaningfulness research, Frankl's logotherapy is ignored, or theory development drawing on it appears equivocal, as it suffers from varying interpretations, distortions, and misunderstandings (Anderson & Lemken 2023, p. 86) of the overall framework, individual concepts, their contents and interrelations (e.g. in Bailey 2022; Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019; George & Park 2016; King & Hicks 2021; Lepisto & Pratt 2017; Rosso et al. 2010; Steger 2019).

To promote theory development and rigorous research, logotherapy and, more broadly, psychological science would benefit from research that scrutinises whether logotherapy is a form of psychotherapy and, if so, what it means for psychotherapy and psychology. Additionally, to enable more scientific research and to soundly grasp Frankl's thinking and theorising, a list of his books and articles – at least the English and German editions – should be compiled and made available to researchers in academic electronic databases. For example, Levinson (Billler, Levinson & Pytell 2002, p. 109) and Schulenberg et al. (2008, p. 447) bring forth that Frankl published over 700 scholarly articles. This figure starkly contrasts what scientific electronic databases currently contain. The Scopus database yields the most results: 76 records (10.1.2025, no limitation for language or publication type). In addition, confusion is caused by reprints (often amended), articles with the same title but different content, and the same content published in different forums, for example, in various languages (the same publication may appear as different records in an electronic database) and, as a conference paper and a journal article.

Furthermore, a literature review of the theoretical basis of logotherapy, including English and German sources from the scientific electronic databases, is needed. To justify, Frankl's terminology is most precise in German, and the German-speaking research community and logotherapy researchers arguably have knowledge and insights that have not yet reached the English-language mainstream of scientific research. Finally, a systematic literature review of existing criticisms of logotherapy's theoretical basis is needed. This is necessary to demonstrate that the critique is often based on a misunderstanding or insufficient knowledge of Frankl's thinking (Anderson & Lemken 2023, p. 86) and to also consider the perspective of developing logotherapy.

## 4 From logotherapy to logotherapy

This chapter focuses on integrating the meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy. Based on the previous chapter's critical review of logotherapy literature and critical analysis of Frankl's key books, Section 4.1 first proposes that the new framework be termed 'logotherapy' and that it consists of four meta-level theories. As a reminder, the term 'theory' is used in a broad sense to signify an axiomatic system of thought or, phenomenologically speaking, a description (see 2.3). The first section also details the logotherapy literature, on which the compilation process that proceeds in the hermeneutic circle is based. Each meta-level theory, its constituents, and an integrative meta-theoretical framework emerging from the individual theories, are then described and visualised through schematic representations in Sections 4.2–4.6. Of the meta-level theories, the two related to ontology are first pieced together, then that related to epistemology, and finally, the theory of motivation. The chapter is guided by sub-research question 3 of what logotherapy is.

### 4.1 Two elementary propositions

This dissertation proposes a novel theorising on the meta-theoretical foundation of Frankl's logotherapy to (a) more comprehensively grasp the meta-level axiomatic system of thought (Cornelissen et al. 2021, p. 3), the "a priori horizon" of Frankl's thought (Frankl 2024, p. 230); (b) bring forth links between constituents within this axiomatic system or meta-level theoretical framework; (c) develop foundation for advancing theorising and research on the existential experience of meaningfulness; (d) advance theory and research on and based on logotherapy; (e) promote a consistent use of the terms 'logotherapy' and 'existential analysis' along the lines of the research tradition building on Frankl (and Elisabeth Lukas) in various linguistic and research areas, including disciplines puzzled by the word 'therapy', e.g. organisational science; and (f) better distinguish empirical logotherapy research based on Frankl from Längle's later and meta-theoretically different approach. This dissertation thus first proposes that

- I. the philosophical foundation of logotherapy, its meta-level theoretical framework, is called ‘logotherapy’ (Figure 9).

Hence ‘logotherapy’ as applied therapy and ‘existential analysis’ as part of the therapeutic process fall under a new umbrella term: ‘logotherapy’. Moreover, the double meanings of both terms in Section 3.2.2 disappear, and the terminological difference to Längle’s (logotherapy and) existential analysis (van Deurzen et al. 2019, pp. 305–403) is established.

Second, this dissertation proposes that, building on Frankl’s three basic tenets of logotherapy, his delineation of the term ‘existential’, and DuBois’s (1993; 2004/2024) meta-level analysis of logotherapy,

- II. ‘logotherapy’ consists of four interrelated meta-level theories: the theory of human nature, the theory of meaning and values, the theory of knowledge, and the theory of motivation (Figure 9).

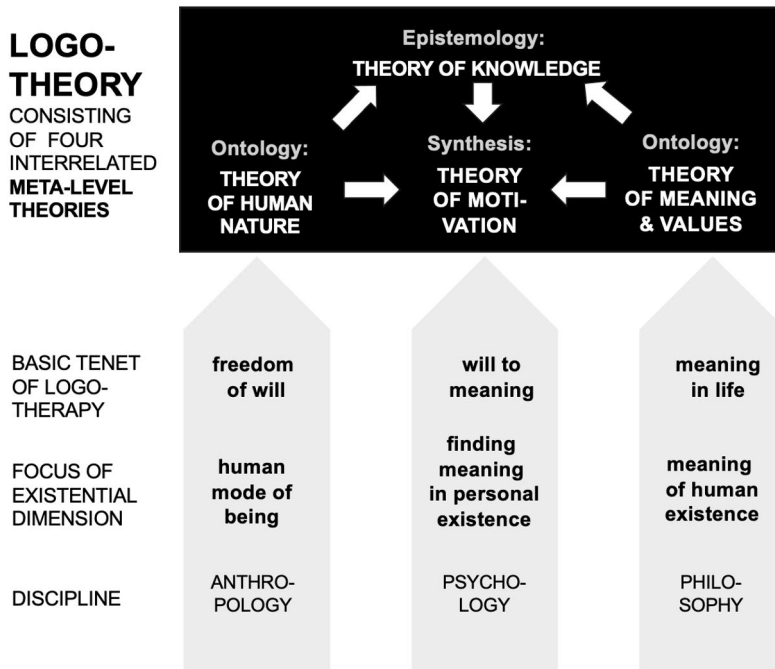


Figure 9. From logotherapy to logotherapy.

Figure 9 illustrates how the meta-level theory of human nature (in the black box on the left) originates from the tenet of ‘free will’ and ‘the human mode of being’ (grey column on the left); the meta-level theory of motivation (in the black box in the middle) from the tenet of ‘will to meaning’ and the ‘finding meaning in personal

existence’; and the meta-level theory of meaning and values (in the black box on the right) from the tenet of ‘meaning in life’ and the ‘meaning of human existence’. Renaming the basic tenets is necessary for several reasons. First, in the new meta-level theoretical framework, each theory’s constituents are more coherently integrated; second, Frankl’s definition of the term ‘existential’ guides the integration process; third, the novel designations more precisely indicate what the individual meta-level theories are about; and finally, instead of *three* tenets, logotherapy involves *four* meta-level theories. The first to highlight the fourth – the theory of knowledge – inherent in Frankl’s theorising was DuBois (2004). He claims this epistemological foundation as the most basic element of Frankl’s meta-psychology, along with his multidimensional view of human beings and the values they pursue (DuBois 2004, pp. xi–xiii). Thus far, the epistemological assumptions underlying Frankl’s thought have received the least attention in research on meaningfulness, including the research area of logotherapy.

In Figure 9, the arrows in the black box show how the four meta-level theories interrelate. The ontology of logotherapy consists of the meta-level theories of human nature (on the left) and meaning and values (on the right). In the thinking of early phenomenologists, ontology helps explain epistemology, that is, different kinds of things are known in different ways (see 4.3). In the Figure, the two arrows pointing from ontology to epistemology depict this. The meta-level theory of motivation, in turn, is based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions, as indicated by the arrows, forming a synthesis of the other meta-level theories.

In addition to Frankl’s books and articles, piecing together logotherapy, the four meta-level theories, and their related illustrations, draw particularly on the work of DuBois (1993, 2004/2024), Lukas (2020a, 2020b, 1989), and Biller and de Lourdes Stiegeler’s (2020) German dictionary of logotherapy and existential analysis. D.Sc., Ph.D. James M. DuBois acts as professor of psychology and medicine and is versed in philosophy and logotherapy<sup>33</sup>. In the above publications, he analyses Frankl’s theorising insightfully and meta-theoretically in a novel way. DuBois has translated Frankl’s seminal book *On the Theory and Therapy of Mental Disorders: An Introduction to Logotherapy and Existential analysis* (2004 and 2024, Routledge Mental Health Classic Editions), originally published in 1956, and the most recent edition in 2024 (Routledge). Ph.D., clinical psychologist, logotherapist Elisabeth Lukas (1942–) is Frankl’s most prominent disciple and key intellectual successor (McLafferty in the foreword of Lukas 2020b, p. viii). Her contribution to applying logotherapy in clinical practice, clarifying its theoretical basis, and

<sup>33</sup> <https://generalmedicalsciences.wustl.edu/people/james-m-dubois-dsc-phd/>;  
<https://bioethicsresearch.org/people/james-dubois-dsc-phd/>

overall, making Frankl's philosophical thinking more accessible, is significant<sup>34</sup>. Lukas has written numerous logotherapy books<sup>35</sup>, including textbooks, established the first logotherapy institute in 1986 (the South-German Institute for Logotherapy and Existential Analysis), and developed the first long-term and standardised Franklian logotherapy training<sup>36</sup>. The content and quality of this training is maintained by the umbrella organisation FLP-EU<sup>37</sup>. One indication of the practice-focus nature of Lukas's work is that, in the scientific electronic databases, her works are scarce. For example, Scopus (13.1.2025) identifies two publications and PsycINFO, 18, of which 14 were published in the main logotherapy journal, *The International Forum for Logotherapy*, between 1981 and 1999. In integrating logotherapy and the four meta-level theories, especially the following sources from Lukas are used:

- *Logotherapy. Principles and methods* (2020a)
- *Understanding man's search for meaning. Reflections on Viktor Frankl's logotherapy* (2020b)
- Typewritten compiled lecture notes from *Lukas's Logotherapy Seminar* in Finland 15–18.6.1989, by Hirvonen, L., Nieminen, E., Pystynen, H. & Pystynen, L., 124 pages.

Finally, university professor Karlheinz Biller's (1941–) and licenciate of philosophy Maria de Lourdes Stiegeler's (1944–) German dictionary of logotherapy and existential analysis, *Wörterbuch der Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse von Viktor E. Frankl. Sachbegriffe, Metaphern, Fremdwörter* (2020, 3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition) is unique in its scope and thoroughness for understanding Frankl's thought, and what logotherapy is about. The book is published by the South-German Institute for Logotherapy and Existential Analysis<sup>38</sup>, which Lukas founded. Contrary to what this chapter proposes regarding the theorising of 'logotherapy', the dictionary adheres to the terms 'existential analysis' and 'logotherapy' at the meta-theoretical level. All translations from this German source (as well as other translations) in this dissertation are conducted by the author.

In the following, the four meta-level theories are pieced together (4.2–4.5) and summarised into an integrative meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy (4.6), capturing the logotherapeutic "way of seeing" (Hines 1988).

<sup>34</sup> <https://elisabeth-lukas-archiv.de/en/literary-work/>

<sup>35</sup> According to Elisabeth Lucas archives 13.1.2025, "70 titles in German and 127 titles in other languages" (<https://elisabeth-lukas-archiv.de/en/literary-work/>).

<sup>36</sup> The author has completed this four-year education in Finland, <https://logoterapia.fi/>.

<sup>37</sup> <https://logotherapie-profession.eu/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://logotherapie.de/was-ist-logotherapie/#buecher>

## 4.2 The meta-level theory of human nature

The first meta-level theory encapsulates the human mode of being, i.e. the anthropological foundation of logotherapy. This dissertation proposes that the meta-level theory of human nature incorporates three interconnected constituents:<sup>39</sup>

- A multidimensional view of man and reality described through Frankl's 'dimensional anthropology and ontology'.
- 'Human existence' as free and oriented toward meaning and values.
- 'Being human' as something humans decide about.

These constituents are addressed next and ultimately summed up in a schematic representation (Figure 12).

### 4.2.1 Multidimensional view of man and reality

For Frankl, the human being is a multidimensional entity. To illustrate this and the reality humans experience, Frankl introduced the concept of 'dimensional ontology' in 1953 (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 46), more precisely, 'dimensional anthropology and ontology' (Frankl 2014a, p. 9). Biller and de Lourdes Stiegeler (2020, p. 46) specify that dimensional ontology views man and reality through (1) three dimensions, (2) three levels of consciousness, and (3) two geometric laws. In the following, these constituents are described, along with their suggested sub-constituents.

#### Three modes of being

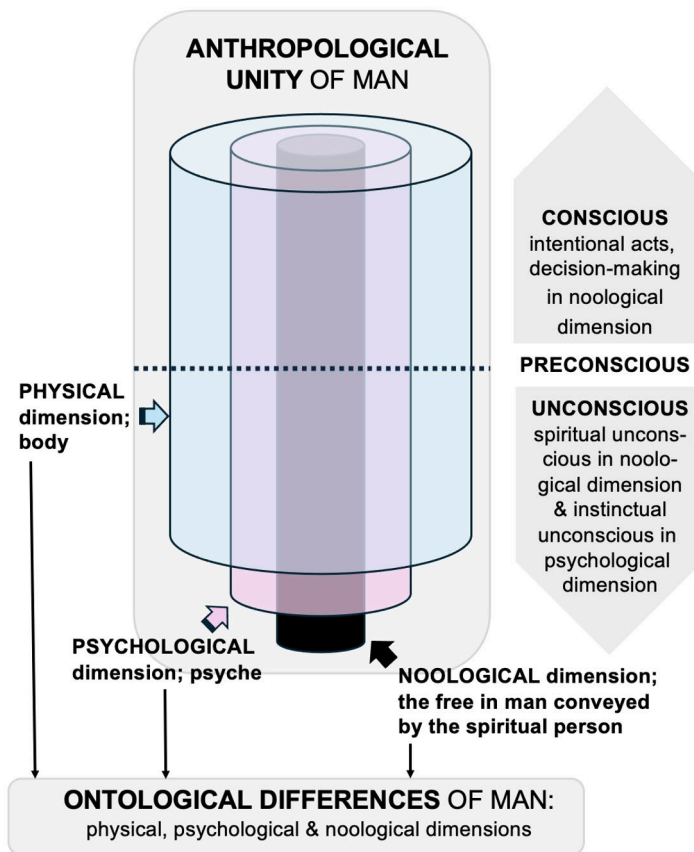
Building on Max Scheler's philosophical anthropology, Nicolai Hartmann's ontology, and the Schelerian form of phenomenology (Davis & Steinbock 2024, pp. 7–8; DuBois 2004, p. xii; Frankl 2010/1966, p. 143; Frankl 2014a, p. xvi), Frankl considers humans as "natural, integrated beings with three basic dimensions": the physical, the psychological, and the human (DuBois 2004, pp. xiii, xxiii; Frankl 2010/1962, p. 50; Lukas 2020a, pp. 22–23). In this multidimensional view of man, the physical, biological, or somatic dimension

<sup>39</sup> An alternative way of theorising this meta-level theory is to limit it to the description of the dimensional anthropology and ontology specifying the different modes of being, levels of consciousness, and geometric laws. However, to bring out the intertwined nature of being and logos that Frankl emphasised and to establish a firmer foundation for how the theory of human nature relates to the other meta-level theories, this dissertation proposes a more inclusive theorising of this first meta-level theory.

corresponds to body and somatic phenomena, such as neurological functions or metabolic (im)balance. The psychological or mental dimension is the home of psychological processes related to cognition, emotion, and social phenomena, such as power, efficiency, learned patterns of behaviour, or social formation. This is the dimension where mental health disorders occur, and psychology traditionally focuses. From the third, the uniquely human dimension encompassing human phenomena Frankl initially used the term ‘spiritual’<sup>40</sup>. (Frankl 2024, pp. 3–4; Frankl 2010/1964, pp. 74-76; Lukas 2020a, p. 22). However, to avoid misunderstandings arising from the religious connotation of the term ‘spiritual’ in English, he moved on to call this dimension first ‘noological’ and later ‘human’ (Nurmela 2013, pp. 47–48). In parallel, the term ‘spirit’ is conceived “in the sense of noetic phenomena or the noological dimension” (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 74). The prefix ‘noo’ or ‘noe’/’noë’ in Franklian terminology derives from the Greek word *noûs*, which signifies understanding, reason, and intelligence (Nurmela 2013, p. 47). The noetic or human phenomena that this human dimension or mode of being incorporates, include e.g. free will, intentionality, responsibility, ethical sensibility, humour, and existential processes, such as coming to terms with sorrow or the unfolding of the human person (Frankl 2010/1964; Lukas 2020a, p. 22; Lukas & Schönfeld 2019, p. 9).

The physical and psychological modes of being are closely linked, forming a psychophysical parallelism; however, the physical is not reducible to the psychological (DuBois 2004, pp. xiv, xxiii; Lukas 2020a, p. 26). According to Frankl, the separation between the two immaterial dimensions – psychological and noological – can only be inferred heuristically (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, pp. 101, 204; Frankl 2010/1960, p. 101). However, assuming that they are qualitatively different and in an optional interactive relationship is the cornerstone of Frankl’s theorising and therapy. The powerful implications this heuristic assumption has for psychological and medical science and practice is best exemplified by Frankl’s book *On the Theory and Therapy of Mental Disorders* (2004, 2024). Therein, Frankl explains how choosing an appropriate treatment or therapy for disorders builds on a three-dimensional view of man and a threefold causality (DuBois 2004, pp. x, xv). Likewise, Lukas’s books sharply illuminate the differences that arise when applying a three-dimensional and two-dimensional (physical and psychosocial) view of man in therapeutic settings (e.g. Lukas 2020a, pp. 50–58). **Figure 10** illustrates Frankl’s idea of the human mode of being, incorporating three dimensions.

<sup>40</sup> The German language has two words for the English word spiritual: *geistig* and *geistlich*. The ‘geistig’ Frankl used does not have religious overtones, whereas the latter does (DuBois 2004, p. xiv; Frankl 2010/1961, p. 62; Nurmela 2013, p. 48).



**Figure 10.** Coexistence of man's anthropological unity and ontological diversity together with the three levels of consciousness inherent in the human mode of being (builds on Frankl's illustration, 2018a, p. 19).

In Figure 10, the dimensions – the physical (blue cylinder), the psychological (pink cylinder), and the noological (black cylinder) – form an anthropological unity despite ontological diversity. Building on Scheler (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 214), Frankl calls the noological core a ‘person’ or ‘spiritual person’. According to Frankl (2019, p. 139),

[T]he spiritual self [person; term ‘self’ by the translator] takes form in giving shape to its psychic and physical modes of appearance and expression. That is, in the totality which is centered around the personal core the outer layers serve as means by which the inner layers are expressed.

Although the noological dimension is more inclusive, all dimensions are equally important for human existence (Frankl 2010/1961, p. 193; 2014a, p. 12).

### Three levels of consciousness

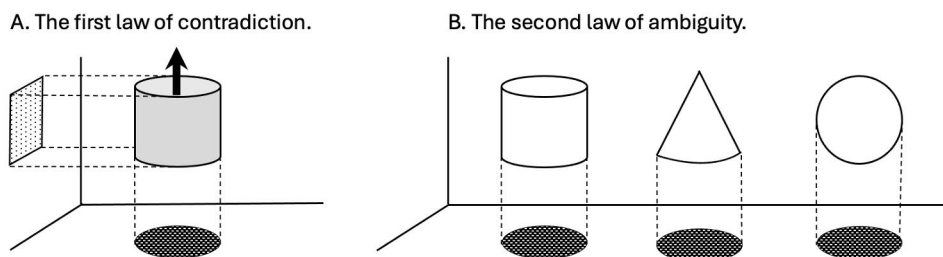
By specifying the three levels of consciousness – conscious, preconscious, unconscious – portrayed on the right side of **Figure 10** (Frankl 2018a, p. 19), Frankl brings forward how his theorising complements Freud’s psychoanalysis (ibid., 15–17). The key is in introducing the ‘spiritual unconscious’ (*geistig Unbewusstes*, not *geistlich*) alongside the ‘id’, that is, Freud’s ‘instinctual unconscious’ (Frankl 2021, 6. thesis; Frankl 1982a, p. 114). Whereas Freud’s unconscious is connected to the psyche and contains instinctual impulses, drives, and desires, Frankl’s ‘spiritual unconscious’ is connected to the ‘spiritual person’ and contains the three existentials (*Existentialien*) of spirituality (*Geistigkeit*), freedom, and responsibility (*Verantwortlichkeit*) (Frankl 2024, p. 61; 2010/1961, p. 134). According to Frankl, they capture what is human about existence (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, pp. 28, 76). Regarding the ‘existential’ (noun) of spirituality, Frankl (2010/1965, p. 217) argues that

[T]he spirituality of man is no epiphenomenon. It cannot be derived from and causally explained by something not spiritual; it is irreducible and indeducible. Spiritual life may very well be conditioned by something, without therefore being caused by it. Normal somatic functions are conditional to the unfolding of spiritual life, but they do not cause or produce it.

The concept of ‘existential’ (noun) in Frankl’s theorising originates in Heidegger’s ‘fundamental ontology’, where it refers to the basic features of human existence, ultimately manifested in anxiety and temporality. Although Frankl formally relies on Heidegger’s view of the ‘existential’, based on the dimensional anthropology and ontology with his phenomenological analysis, Frankl regards these basic features or “existential traits” of human existence differently (spirituality, freedom, responsibility). (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 76; Frankl 2024, p. 61). Moreover, in his emphasis on the ‘spiritual unconscious’, Frankl points to an “illogic[al] and self-contradicting” argument of Freud’s psychoanalysis about the roles of the ego and superego (Frankl 1953, p. 10; 2010/1965 p. 219). In particular, Frankl opposes the fact that human life is “an expression of instinctual strivings”, in which the ego is “genetically derived from the id” (the instinctual unconscious) and “the Superego from the Id and the Ego” (ibid.). At the same time, however, the ego is paradoxically able to act against the id, such as in the case of sublimation or “repression of drives by themselves” (ibid.). To bridge this theoretical gap, to understand human conduct more comprehensively, and to be able to treat (suffering) humans holistically, Frankl proposed the concepts of the ‘spiritual unconscious’, the ‘spiritual person’, and the heuristic distinction between the noological and psychological modes of being.

## Two geometric laws

To demonstrate what the three-dimensional view of man means for research and treatment of the multidimensional phenomenon of the human being, Frankl formulated the geometric laws of contradiction and ambiguity (**Figure 11**).



**Figure 11.** Frankl's laws of dimensional ontology (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 75; 2014a, p. 10).

In Figure 11, according to the first geometric law (A), “[O]ne and the same phenomenon projected out of its own dimension into different dimensions lower than its own”, “yield contradictory pictures” (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 75; 2014a, pp. 9–10). That is, when a three-dimensional cylinder (e.g. human being) is projected from its *space* down into two-dimensional *planes* (psychological and physical), the pictures (the casted shadows; A. The first law) contradict: the horizontal projection is a rectangle (e.g. physical) and the vertical a circle (e.g. psychological). Furthermore, the openness of the cylinder (e.g. a cup, a human being) disappears (Frankl 1982a, pp. 247–249; 2010/1964, p. 76). In the projected dimensions (the casted shadows), the human being thus “seems to be a closed system, be it of physiological reflexes or psychological reactions and responses to stimuli” (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 76). The second geometric law (Figure 11, B) states that “[D]ifferent phenomena” “projected into one and the same dimension lower than their own, yield ambiguous pictures” (Frankl 2010/1964, pp. 75–76; 2014a, p. 10). When a cylinder, a cone, and a sphere (different people) are projected from their own spaces into one-dimensional planes (psychological or physical), they produce three identical pictures. These pictures are interchangeable, and inferring from them is impossible, what is above (a cylinder, a cone or a sphere) (ibid.). This is related to, for example, choosing the right treatment for depression.

The two geometric laws encapsulate that man's apparent closedness in the physical and psychological dimensions is compatible with his or her openness in the noological dimension, where the wholeness of man is found (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 76; 2010/1966, p. 144). In Figure 11, the cylinder, cone, and sphere illustrate man's anthropological unity, that is, the three-dimensional view of man (Frankl

2010/1966, p. 144). All pictures (casted shadows), whether contradictory (rectangle and circle, A) or ambiguous (three circles, B), depict a selected psychological or physical projection, a part of the three-dimensional human being, such as findings produced by individual disciplines or different scientific methods (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 74). According to Frankl (2010/1958, p. 82), the pictures (casted shadows) cannot constitute the genuinely human. He (ibid.) asserts that “to a certain extent it belongs to the nature of science that it undertakes a reduction, that is, a projection of one dimension into another, and that it in principle methodically disregards the full dimensionality of reality” and of human beings. Thus, for Frankl (2010/1971, p. 157), the contradicting findings based on the cross sections of the human being do not contradict the unity of man, which is only available in the noological dimension. Notably, Frankl is not opposed to scientific research, on the contrary. While he regards the method-specific findings relating to a one-dimensional reality (e.g. to the psychic), warranted, he argues that the danger lies not in the tendency of scientific research to increasingly specialise, but in that specialists generalise (Frankl 2024, p. 231): “As a neurologist, I think it perfectly legitimate to consider a computer as a model for the central nervous system, for example. It is only then that one is misled when it is claimed that man is only a computer” (Frankl 2014b, p. 32).

#### 4.2.2 Human existence

The second constituent of the meta-level theory of human nature is based on the three existentials of spirituality, freedom, and responsibility, which capture ‘human existence’ as free and oriented toward meaning and values. In the following, the focus is on depicting the noological mode of being, especially the ‘spiritual person’ representing the noological core and the related sub-constituents.

The ‘spiritual person’ incorporates that which is free in man (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, 28, 101) and acts as the “center of activity” (Scheler’s concept: Frankl 1987, p. 18–19; Schutz 1957, p. 311). In 1950, in the ‘Ten theses about the person’<sup>41</sup>, Frankl formulates that the ‘spiritual person’ is dynamic in the sense of being capable of distancing itself from the psychophysical organism, and as such, cannot be qualified as substance in the conventional sense (Frankl 2021, 8. thesis). Broadly, the spiritual person is conscious and unconscious (Biller & de

<sup>41</sup> Frankl (1982a, 108–118) prepared the ‘Ten theses about the person’ as a keynote lecture for the Salzburg University Weeks in 1950. They were first published in 1951 in *Logos und Existenz* (Wien; Amandus Verlag, pp. 47–64). A recent English translation by Franz Vesely and David Nolland is on the Viktor Frankl Institut webpage, <https://www.viktorfrankl.org/texts.html>.

Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 298); in and beyond space and time (ibid. p. 297); experiences itself, meaning, and values from the perspective of transcendence, or intentional relationships to values in the world (anthropological concept) (ibid. p. 294); and, as the free in man, enables becoming otherwise, that is, different from what one is now (ibid., p. 294). Whereas the physical and psychosocial modes of being belong to the facticity, the ‘spiritual person’ is “existential” (Frankl 2021, 5. thesis). By this, Frankl (ibid.) means “[T]he human being, as a person, is not a factual but an optional being”. In this quote, the ‘human being’ refers to the three-dimensional view of man and the ‘person’ represents the noological core.

This dissertation distinguishes ‘freedom of will’ and ‘intentionality’ as the key sub-constituents of the ‘spiritual person’, on which the “fundamental-anthropological characteristics” of ‘self-detachment’ and ‘self-transcendence’ are based (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 293; Frankl 2024, p. 4). Free will means freedom within boundaries (DuBois 1993, p. 63). That is, human free will is limited, as human beings are not free from internal psychological conditions – like feelings, moods, cognitive capabilities – or external conditions, whether natural, social, or historical. In Frankl’s words, “freedom means freedom in [the] face of three things: (i) the instincts; (ii) the inheritance; and (iii) the environment” (Frankl 2010/1965, p. 217). Frankl argues that the freedom of will lies in the fact that humans are capable of, at the very least, choosing their stand towards the above constraints, indicating they are “self determining” (Frankl 2010/1961, p. 66; Frankl 2014a, p. 4; Lukas 2020a, p. 29). In its mature form, the individual understands freedom as one’s freedom to responsibility (Frankl 1992, p. 134).

In philosophical phenomenology, the defining feature of consciousness is ‘intentionality’, that is, the natural orientation of human consciousness toward an object outside of one’s consciousness. For Husserl, this meant that acts of human consciousness, which orient toward objects, are relationships of meaning. In other words, the focus is not on consciousness per se, but on the meanings of the acts of consciousness from which “an entire world arises”. (Holt & Sandberg 2011, p. 218; Niiniluoto & Saarinen 2002, pp. 223–224; Varto 1996, pp. 38, 40). According to Frankl (2014b, p. 55), “[P]henomenology has shown that the transcendent nature of an object is always contained in an intentional act”. Frankl informs addressing intentionality in the spirit of Husserl, Brentano, and Scheler (Frankl 1982a, p. 255). In particular, his thinking builds on Scheler, for whom phenomenology is “not a method, but an attitude” (Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 7). For Scheler (ibid., pp. 7–8),

[G]rasping the meaning or essence of an object has meant, since Plato, a type of disengagement from or suspension of an object’s immediate and present existence. The intent of this disengagement is not to abstract from an object of

cognition as it exists, but rather to look at the object as it is itself. The natural worldview or attitude presupposes the practical and habitual context in which the object is given and thus uncritically assumes the meaning of the object in this context.

In logotherapy, the relationships of meaning are intentional in two senses: they are value-conscious and volitional (Frankl 2014b, p. 55). Frankl states that value-orientation is a “basic character of the human mind” (1953, p. 10). Human or “spiritual acts are volitional” in that they are conscious and based on deciding. Put differently, intention is an act of will (Frankl 1953, p. 8; Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 145). If the act is deprived of intentionality, that is, its (objective) meaning, it is emptied of its (intentional) referent, “the for-the-sake-of” something or someone, and what remains is a human being driven value-blindly by desires and instincts (Frankl 1953, pp. 9–10).

To realize the implications of all this, we have but to think of the freudian [sic] psychoanalysis. In its system there is no recognized ethical obligation that would guide the will, but an unconscious “must” that compels the conscious volition. Here man is not confronted by values; behind him are drives, is the id. (ibid.).

To summarise, in logotherapy, the subject is the bearer of will, and the object is that of value (Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 9), and intentionality is not only a relationship of meaning but of value. Frankl highlights that the “total human endeavor is oriented according to a higher meaning<sup>42</sup>”, that is, it depends on how the subject understands the value of the object towards which he or she decides to orient him- or herself – even if this orientation is influenced by one’s psychological and social conditions, external environment, historicity, for example (Frankl 1953, p. 14; George 2021, p. 9). Thus, for Frankl, the Heideggerian concept of ‘being in the world’ includes the world of ‘meaning and values’: A person is only truly “in the world” when she lives the relationships in which she stands “in a meaningful and value-based way” (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 215).

In his volumes, Frankl (2014a, pp. 4–6, 17) highlights the two uniquely human capacities of the spiritual person – those of ‘self-detachment’ and ‘self-transcendence’. Self-detachment builds on the free will of the spiritual person and refers to man’s capacity to rise above oneself and one’s situation, to make one’s actions, moods, and conditions an object of reflection and evaluation (Frankl

<sup>42</sup> Higher here in the sense that the noological, human dimension is more inclusive than the psychological.

2014a, pp. 4–5; Frankl 2010/1962, p. 51; Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 368). This capacity draws on the heuristic separation of the noological and the psychological dimensions, and is shown, above all, in the concepts of ‘noo-psychological antagonism’, ‘defiant power of the spirit’, and ‘conscience’ (Frankl 2021, 7. & 8. thesis; DuBois 2004, p. xiv; Lukas 2020a, pp. 25–27, 36). In short, ‘noo-psychological antagonism’ means the human capacity to look at one’s psychosomatic events as if through the eyes of others or from a different perspective. The ‘defiant power of the spirit’ signifies one’s capacity to resist internal and external constraints – the same human quality that modern research studies under the title ‘resilience’ (Lahti 2014, p. 330), but with a meta-theoretically unspecified foundation. The role of the ‘conscience’ is that of an ethical directive originating from the spiritual unconscious and involving “an understanding of values that precedes all morals, which each of us intuitively carries within ourselves” (Lukas 2020a, p. 36). When Frankl asserts that the spiritual person achieves self-understanding through transcendence, this troublesome term refers to the human conscience (Frankl 2021, 10. thesis). In total, by suggesting the separation of the psychological and the noological quality of the human psyche, that is, consciousness, and that the noological core can observe oneself (as a three-dimensional being) in a functional relationship to the world and, simultaneously, to oneself (inner dialogical relationship), Frankl again builds on Scheler’s thinking (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 214; Gritschneider 2005, pp. 112–115; Kotkavirta 2005, p. 78).

The human capacity for self-transcendence, which Frankl introduced into logotherapy in 1949, indicates the intentionality of the spiritual person – its orientation toward someone or something valuable that is not itself (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 379; Frankl 1982b, p. 33; Frankl 2011, p. 84). According to Lukas, (2020a, pp. 47–48),

[I]t [self-transcendence] is the uniquely human ability to think and act in a way that gets one beyond oneself, in an “existence for something or for someone” (Frankl), by giving oneself to a task or by orienting oneself towards other people. Self-transcendence is concerned with a thing in itself or with people for their own sake and never as an object that can satisfy one’s own needs.

In essence, self-transcendence incorporates intentional and transcendent qualities of human existence (Frankl 2014a, p. 33). In logotherapy, transcendence presupposes the subject-object distinction (DuBois 1993, p. 61) and refers to man’s relationship with the spatio-temporal world and with something that transcends it, that is, the world of objective values. Transcendence is thus considered an anthropological rather than an ontological concept. In philosophical practice, this

difference is indicated by the terms ‘transcendence’ (*Transzendenz*) and ‘transcendentality’ (*Transzendentalität*). Whereas transcendence as an ontological concept conveys transcending in relation to the supernatural, transcendentality as an anthropological concept denotes the structural conditions of knowing, of the subject, or of consciousness. (Tugendhadt 2012; Turunen 1995, p. 128). To transcend thus signifies “the capacity of the human subject to go beyond himself [sic], or to be consciously related to something other than himself [sic]” (DuBois 1993, p. 61). According to Frankl (2014a, p. 6), the “most striking manifestations” of self-transcendence are “love<sup>43</sup> and conscience”:

Man transcends himself [sic] either toward another human being or toward meaning. Love, I would say, is that capacity which enables him [sic] to grasp the other human being in his [sic] very uniqueness. Conscience is that capacity which empowers him [sic] to seize the meaning of a situation in its very uniqueness... Because of the uniqueness of the intentional referents of love and conscience, both are intuitive capacities (ibid.)

The intentional and transcendent quality of human existence is characterised by its openness to the world and the principle of ‘noodynamics’ (Frankl 1966a, p. 97; 2010/1960, pp. 101–102; 2010/1971, p. 164). Whereas the human being as an anthropological unity is viewed as individualised and isolated (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 214), “the significance [Bedeutung] of such individuality, the meaning [Sinn] of human personality, is ... always related to community” and “vice versa, the community needs the individual existence in order for it itself to have meaning<sup>44</sup>” (Frankl 2019, p. 70; 2013, p. 125). The openness of human existence manifests in that the meaning of each person’s existence is in relation to and oriented toward community and values (Biller & de Lourdes-Stiegeler 2020, p. 215; Frankl 1966a, pp. 97–98; Frankl 2014b, p. 86). In relation to community (i.e., other people), human existence is inter-existential (*Bei-Sein*; Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler, 2020 p. 38; Frankl 1982b, pp. 91–92), while through values, human existence finds an ideal ‘ought’, which cannot be logically derived, but instead, is experienced, felt (Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 10; Frankl 2010/1966, p. 179; Frankl 2014b, pp. 19, 55). Frankl notes that the openness of human existence is also included in the term ‘existence’, which comes from the Latin word *ex-sistere* and

<sup>43</sup> Frankl builds on Scheler, for whom “[L]ove is that which opens the human being up to the world, to that which is the other” (Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 7).

<sup>44</sup> Frankl distinguishes between community and mass. He states that, unlike community, “which provides a frame of reference for the individual existence, the mass does not tolerate individuality” (Frankl 2019, p. 70; more pp. 70–73)

means stepping out of oneself (Frankl 2021, 8. thesis; 1982a, p. 116). With the concept of ‘noodynamics’, Frankl draws attention to the tensional structure that is natural to human existence (2010/1964, p. 77). He claims that (2010/1960, pp. 101–102),

[E]ach cognitive act of man is based indispensably upon the polar field of tension between the subject and the object. The essential dynamic which constitutes human cognition has its source in this tensional situation between man and that ‘world’ which he ‘is in’ (to use a popular existential expression [refers to Heidegger]).

In logotherapy, noodynamics indicates a tensional relationship between the subject and the object (Frankl 2010/1960, pp. 101–102), for example, “between the ‘I am’ and the ‘I ought’, between reality and ideal, between being and meaning” (Frankl 2014a, p. 34). Frankl argues that instead of an inner equilibrium, man needs “a sound amount of tension ... aroused by the demanding quality inherent in the meaning for human existence” (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 77).

Conceptually, self-transcendence is attainable only through self-detachment (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 378) and forms the foundation for the motivational concept of ‘will to meaning’ (Frankl 2010/1972, p. 43). Frankl (2010/1960, p. 99) states that “[O]nly as man withdraws from himself [self-detachment] in the sense of releasing self-centered interest and attention will he gain an authentic mode of existence [self-transcendence]”. Acting in a self-transcendent manner means focusing one’s attention on the situation or other being(s), and, consequently, forgetting oneself in a positive way (Frankl 1992/1959, p. 115; Frankl 2024, p. 4; Lukas 2020a, p. 70). Lukas (2020a, p. 68) accentuates that this demands inner growth, inner control, and self-knowledge. In terms of ‘dimensional ontology’, using self-detachment and self-transcendence means “leaving the ‘plane’ of the physical and psychological and passing into the ‘space’ of the noological” (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 108). Essentially, both capacities – self-detachment and self-transcendence – are mobilised in the logotherapeutic techniques of dereflection, paradoxical intention, and attitude modification (see e.g. DuBois 2004, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv; Frankl 2004, p. 1; Lukas 2020a, pp. 116–117).

### 4.2.3 Being human

The third constituent of the meta-level theory of human nature brings out the existential nature of ‘being human’, that is, being as something that man decides about in relation to ‘an ought’. In what follows, this dissertation proposes that, as ‘deciding being’, ‘being human’ involves four interconnected sub-constituents:

responsibility as an ethical imperative, becoming toward an ought, one's freedom to be responsible, and the response-character of life. Building on the multidimensional view of man and reality, 'being human' then manifests in physical, psychosocial, and noological dimensions.

### Responsibility as an ethical imperative

Drawing on Jaspers's term '*entscheidendes Sein*' (deciding or decisive being), Frankl underlines that 'being human' is not driven by 'id', that is, pleasure-oriented or determined by a 'will to power,' as Adler's individual psychology suggests (Nietzsche originally) (Frankl 2019, p. 21). Instead, 'being human' is "permeated by a will to meaning", marked by the striving for value. Further, as a person, the human being "exists as its own possibility, for or against which it can decide" (Frankl 2021, 5. thesis). This brings forth that as existential being, 'being human' is "more than being just free", since it is inherently connected to responsibility: "[I]n responsibility, the *what for* of human freedom is also given – what the human being is free to do – what he or she decides for or against" (Frankl 2021, 5. thesis; italics in the original).

In Frankl's theorising, 'responsibility' (*Verantwortlichkeit*) is an anthropological and ethical concept. As an anthropological one, responsibility refers to a basic feature of human existence (existential, noun) and to man as capable of 'being responsible'. Humans are considered moral subjects, making value judgements and taking a stand, as well as being responsible for their actions and the consequences of those actions (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, pp. 486–487; Frankl 2014b, p. 54). From an ethical perspective, Frankl delineates that "[R]esponsibility is a formal ethical concept, in itself comprising no particular directives on conduct" (Frankl, 2019, p. 275). For him, responsibility is not imposed from the outside; it comes from within<sup>45</sup> (Fabry 2013, p. 109). He draws on Scheler, who "holds that ethics rests upon an a priori, an obligation non-relative to future consequences [utilitarianism] or happiness [eudaimonism]" (Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 9). A priori then means a "unique call to responsibility given in the ethical imperative", which involves what one, "experienced as what 'I', and not merely anyone [in contrast to Kant], ought to" necessarily do (Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 9).

<sup>45</sup> Fabry (2013, pp. 108–109) specifies that logotherapy distinguishes between *responsibility*, which is imposed from the outside, and *responsibleness*, which is freely chosen. The author of this dissertation agrees with Fabry about this conceptualisation. However, since practically only logotherapists know of these terms, and since Frankl's books' English translations usually ignore this difference, in this dissertation, the word 'responsibility' is used for a freely chosen inner discipline, and responsibility imposed from the outside is considered an 'obligation'.

Additionally, as an ethical concept connected to one's conscience, responsibility implies that humans are not always aware of their scope of responsibility (*Verantwortung*) but may rather avoid it (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 486).

### Becoming toward an ought

According to Frankl (2019, pp. 5–6; 2014b, p. 18), consciousness and responsibility are “twin notions”, that is, together, they form an entity – “the wholeness of the human being”. This entity is characterised by ‘being’ (to be) and ‘being otherwise’ (to be different; *Anders-sein*) (ibid.). The ‘being otherwise’ can occur as the simultaneity and succession (ibid.). Specifically, space is an attribute of consciousness, and time that of responsibility (Frankl 2019, pp. 5–6): consciousness postulates the simultaneity of the subject and object (intentionality), and responsibility assumes the succession of different states of being due to the separation of the future and the present (ibid.). The will of the spiritual person, “as the bearer of responsibility, strives to convert the one state [of being] into another” (Frankl 2014b, p. 19). Thus, being conscious of one's responsibility facilitates a sphere of becoming, in which an individual can choose what she will be and what she will do with her capabilities in a particular situation in relation to an ought (Frankl 2010/1960, p. 103; 2014b, pp. 43, 89–90). The ought (*Sollen*), in this context, signifies an objective “world of meaning and values, namely, logos and ethos” (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 185). Thus, ‘being human’ does not mean only being otherwise (*Anders-sein*), but being capable of being otherwise (*Anders-können*) (Frankl 2013, p. 132). As Frankl (2013, p. 58) puts it, being human is “not something that simply ‘is’ but something that first decides ‘what it is’”.

### Freedom to be responsible

According to Biller and de Lourdes Stiegeler, “taking responsibility requires freedom and leads to ‘being responsible’” (*Verantwortlichsein*) (2020, p. 486). Frankl repeatedly emphasises that human limited freedom is not only freedom *from* something, but *to* something. Unless freedom is lived in terms of responsibility for and to something or to/before someone, it risks degenerating into mere arbitrariness (Frankl 1992/1959, p. 134; 2010/1964, p. 116). Thus, it is up to each individual to decide, for what and to what or to whom one is responsible, “be it society, or humanity, or mankind, or his [sic] own conscience” (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 116). Freedom and responsibility constitute a pair: “Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon [being human] whose positive aspect is responsibility”

[sic]” (Frankl 1992/1959 p. 134). To illustrate, Frankl oftentimes used the allegory that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast of the United States ought to be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast (Frankl 2014b, p. 80; Fabry 2013, p. 114).

‘Being responsible’ or ‘being conscious and being responsible’ – a phrase that Frankl frequently used – includes knowledge of what one, as a (spiritual) person, is free to do and what for (Frankl 2018a, p. 21; 2021, 5. thesis). It is “the assumption of responsibility for one’s own thoughts, wills, and actions for something and before something ... or ... someone” ... being responsible is the essence of human existence or the essence of noological existence” (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 488). Lukas (2020a, p. 253) adds that one is not responsible for the possibilities that exist but for the choices one makes. Whatever the circumstances in the external environment or within oneself, one is always free to choose, at the minimum, one’s attitude (ibid., p. 18): “A human being takes a position at every moment of existence, both to the natural and social environment, to the external milieu, as well as to the vital psychophysical inner world, to the inner milieu” (ibid., p. 29, citing Frankl).

### The response-character of life – the Copernican turn

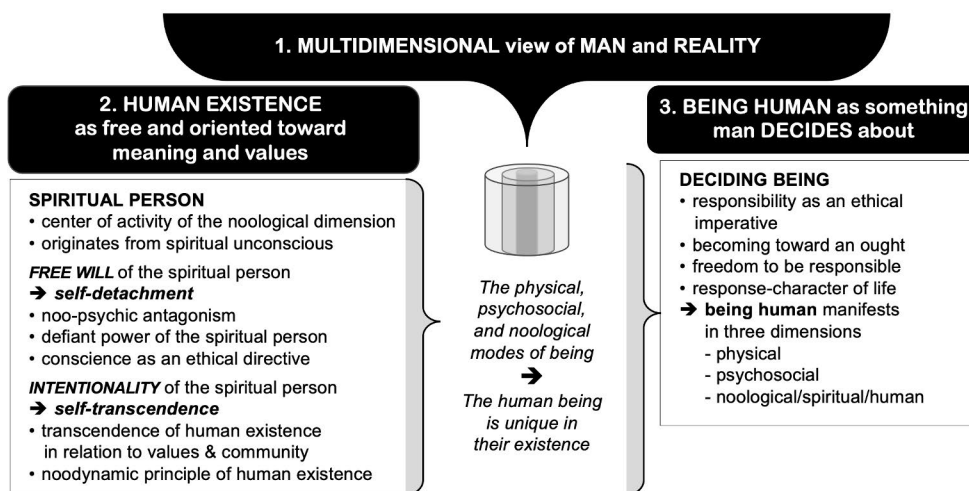
Fundamentally, responsibility is based on the transitory nature of human existence and the irreplaceability of the individual (Frankl 2010/1958, p. 89). This twofold uniqueness includes an appeal to the individual to actualise the unique potentials inherent in one’s existence (simultaneity), and the singular and transitory possibilities in one’s life (succession) (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 119). In an individual’s intentional orientation to concrete and personal tasks, these potentials and possibilities find their fulfilment (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 293). Indeed, Frankl highlights that becoming conscious of one’s responsibility grows from the awareness that everyone has a concrete, personal task in life (Frankl 2014b, p. 117). Being responsible is thus responsibility toward meaning, since only the unique individual can realise the meaning potentials intended for them (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, 490). Ultimately, being responsible presupposes a Copernican turn, in which the individual realises that life poses the questions, and she is the one who responds, not the other way around (Frankl 2010/1965, p. 210). According to Frankl (2010/1958, pp. 89–90):

[i]t is not up to man to ask about the meaning of [sic] his life. Instead, man must be understood as someone who is asked; that is, life itself asks him, and he has to answer — his existence has to respond [sic].

Accepting or rejecting this response-character of living, or, more specifically, the demanding character of a concrete situation (*Anspruchscharakter*; in Lewin’s and Wertheimer’s terminology *Aufforderungscharakter*; Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 432) is a free decision. In our answers to life lies the possibility of becoming aware and understanding human responsibility in its entirety – how it extends to everything that has and has not happened, as a call to action, as terrible and wonderful (Frankl 2014b, p. 51; Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 490).

#### 4.2.4 Synthesis of the first meta-level theory

**Figure 12** summarises how Frankl’s multidimensional view of man and reality lays the foundation for ‘human existence’ as free and oriented toward meaning and values, as well as ‘being human’ as something that man decides about.



**Figure 12.** The constituents and sub-constituents of the meta-level theory of human nature.

In logotherapy, the optional, existential quality of ‘being human’ is contrasted with the physical and psychosocial modes of being, which belong to the facticity. Existential being is more than being free; it is something man consciously decides about in relation to an ought and is ultimately connected to responsibility. Then, meaningful living signifies ‘being responsible’, which is founded in being conscious of one’s ‘responsibility’ as an inner discipline as well as one’s will as the bearer of this responsibility (Frankl 2010/1966, p. 176).

In practice, being responsible involves “deciding which answers to give to the individual questions” of life (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 119). To choose what to be and what to do, one needs the capacities of self-detachment and self-transcendence of

the spiritual person, the noological core. Exploiting them implies decision-making. Consequently, man is not guided by drives and instincts stemming from the instinctual unconscious and aiming for satisfaction, but by responsibility stemming from the spiritual unconscious and following the principle of noodynamics (Frankl 2018a, p. 17).

### 4.3 The meta-level theory of meaning and values

The second meta-level theory outlines Frankl's ontology of meaning and values representing the 'logos' (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, pp. 181–182). The theory of meaning and values is proposed to involve three constituents: (1) categories of meaning, (2) an axiology differentiating between four kinds of values, and (3) value-realisation, i.e. three value avenues. The last constituent is introduced in this section (more in Section 4.5) because most academic articles present Frankl's three value avenues mistakenly, either as his axiology or without grounding in objective values (e.g. Weiskopf-Joelson 1958; Pavlish et al. 2019; Ritchie et al. 2018; Steger 2019). In the following, the proposed three constituents of the meta-level theory of meaning and values will be examined separately and finally synthesised into a schematic representation. First, however, a few words will be said about the Franklian concept of 'logos'.

According to Frankl, 'logos' signifies "'the spiritual' and, beyond that, 'the meaning'" (2019, p. xix; 2010/1961, p. 62; 2010/1964, p. 74; 2010/1958, p. 81). Again, "meaning and values are the logos towards which the psyche [as the spiritual person] transcends itself" (Frankl 2018b, p. 160). Specifically, the existential (noun) of spirituality has an objective aspect, the logos, i.e. meaning, and a subjective aspect, existence, i.e. the specifically human, noological mode of being (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 437). Lukas elaborates that "*nous* presupposes *logos*, and engages with logos" (2020a, p. 247; italics in the original). Here, the *nous* equates the 'spiritual person' and represents "the decision-making, the stance-taking, the value-assigning and the personal agency in human beings" (ibid., p. 247). The *logos* signifies "what is meant, the best possibility, the ought to be" (ibid., p. 249), in other words, the reality of objective values and meaning. Meaning thus transcends subjectivity; it exists in the 'world', not in one's psyche, (i.e. consciousness). Therefore, "humans cannot decide arbitrarily what is meaningful" since meaning is something that is discovered in the world of meaning and values. (ibid.). Notably, in the expression 'meaning and values', the term 'meaning' is in the singular. As such, it refers to 'logos' as a "comprehensive meaning" (*umfassender Sinn*) or a 'world reason' (*Weltvernunft*), as in philosophical contexts – not as the God, or the reason of the God as a force of creation of the world, as in theological explanations. (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, pp. 181–182). Fundamentally, Frankl bases the above

idea of the coexistence of subjective and objective realities on his phenomenological analysis and the thinking of early phenomenologists, especially Max Scheler (DuBois 2004, p. xii). He argues that “[T]o speak of the world as a mere ‘design’ of the cognitive subject is to do injustice to the full phenomenon of the cognitive act which is the *self-transcendence of existence toward the world as an objective reality*” (Frankl 2010/1969, p. 102; italics in the original).

### 4.3.1 Meaning categories

Logotherapy discerns four meaning categories (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, pp. 403–413). The first, (1) ‘meaning of the moment’ relates to the uniqueness of the person and the singularity of the situation: a concrete meaning in a concrete situation that can be inferred by a concrete person (ibid., p. 426). Thus, meaning differs from man to man and from moment to moment (Frankl 2010/1966, p. 178). This meaning category builds on Scheler’s concept of ‘situational value’ (Frankl 1987, p. 27; 2013, p. 105) and is the one Frankl alludes to with his puzzling, however, in the logothereotic context, precise definition: “Meaning is what is meant” (Frankl 2010/1966, p. 182). The second meaning category captures the (2) ‘(overall) meaning of a particular person’s life’. It consists of the unique ‘meanings of the moment’; consequently, in the end, “life becomes what each person has become through their actions, experiences, and sufferings” (Frankl 2014b, p. 83). The third category, (3) ‘meaning in life’ corresponds to the third basic assumption of logotherapy. It refers to the meaning of being human, finding answers to the question ‘what do I live for’ and, as such, calls for philosophical contemplation (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 406). The fourth category, (4) ‘ultimate meaning’ surpasses human comprehension; however, as a limiting concept (Grenzbegriff)<sup>46</sup>, it forms the final standard for the other meaning categories (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, pp. 216, 412; Frankl 2014b, p. 47). In Kantian spirit, Frankl claims that the ultimate meaning is not “accessible to reason or intellect”, but calls for faith, signifying “confidence or trust in something” (Frankl 2010/1961, p. 135; Frankl 2014b, p. 49; Neubert 2019, p. 254); in the philosophical sense, faith in the absolute, such as truth or beauty or, in a theological context, faith in God (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 412). Logotherapy is based on a philosophical approach and regards spirituality in the religious sense (*Geistlichkeit*) as a phenomenon of the noetic reality. Frankl clarifies (2019, p. 31):

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Noumenon>: Kant’s notion that sets limits to human consciousness and claims that behind the phenomena, something unknowable exists.

Actually, our interrogation must be confined to the meaning of a part. We cannot begin to question the “purpose” of the universe. Purpose is transcendent to the extent that it is always external to whatever “possesses” it. We can therefore at best grasp the meaning of the universe in the form of a super-meaning [ultimate meaning], using the word to convey the idea that the meaning of the whole is no longer comprehensible. This concept of meaning would serve as a parallel to Kantian postulate of reason; our minds require its existence at the same time it is to our minds unfathomable.

Most of Frankl’s writings on the search for and finding meaning are primarily “concerned with the potential meaning inherent and dormant in all” situations of life (Frankl 1992/1959, p. 145), that is, the ‘meaning of the moment’. When this concept is understood as Frankl intended, it includes the three other meaning categories; together, they form a nomological network. To indicate this, Frankl (2010/1967; p. 125; 2010/1966, p. 177) occasionally employs ‘meaning and purpose’ collectively, where meaning refers to categories (1) and (2), and purpose to (3) and (4). In the meaningful life literature, these can be interpreted as corresponding to the terms ‘meaning in life’ and ‘meaning of life’, respectively<sup>47</sup>. After all, logotherapy is based on the assumption that life makes sense, that is, on the meaningfulness of human life (3<sup>rd</sup> category), and faith in ultimate meaning (4<sup>th</sup> category) (Frankl 1992/1959, p. 145). Frankl remarks that the logothereotic worldview of the meaningfulness of human life is as relevant an alternative to man as the opposite – that human life or life in general is meaningless (Nurmela 2013, p. 107).

#### 4.3.2 Logothereotic axiology

Values and an individual’s relationship to values are foundational in logotherapy. DuBois notes that two of the three basic tenets of ‘logotherapy’ depend on the notion of ‘value in itself’ [*Wert an sich*] – those of ‘meaning in life’ and ‘will to meaning’ (DuBois 1993, p. 63). Additionally, the third tenet of free will can be properly understood only in “its dialectical relationship to values” (ibid., p. 64). However, discerning Frankl’s axiology and how individuals grasp values requires precision, especially in English texts, because the word ‘value’ may refer to objective values, intersubjective values, or the three specific value avenues. From the logothereotic viewpoint, the focal idea is to understand the ought-to-nature of objective values in decision-making and for human conduct.

<sup>47</sup> Frankl also inconsistently uses the terms ‘meaning of life’ and ‘meaning in life’. However, the context reveals which one he is referring to.

In logotherapy, the key feature of the ‘world’ the individual experiences is that it includes not only the natural, social, and inner realities, but also an objective reality of meaning and values. Building on Scheler’s value-objectivism, Frankl postulates that the values exist independently (Frankl 2004, p. 10). Objective values, which open to the human consciousness through the spiritual unconscious (and further, through the conscience), pull or attract man [as a spiritual person], exposing their guiding, ought-to-nature – unlike the pushing nature of drives and instincts emanating from the instinctual unconscious (Frankl 1966a, p. 100). Specifically, values are considered as states of ethical awareness that “guide human activities, choices, and actions on a conscious and unconscious level”<sup>48</sup>. Frankl draws again on Scheler, who claims the basis of ethics lies in values and their perception (Kotkavirta 2005, p. 77).

In addition to objective values, Frankl highlights the role of the intersubjective values in guiding human behaviour and decision-making, although he does not use this term (2010/1966, p. 150). Then, the intersubjective values are “moral and ethical principles, as they have crystallised in the framework of human society throughout its history”; thus, unlike the objective values, they may change (Frankl 2013, p. 90; 2010/1966, p. 150). Neither objective nor intersubjective values hinge on the subjective valuations of individuals or, for example, the values of individual societies or cultures. Based on ontological and epistemological (in the sense of subjective or shared/intersubjective knowledge) assumptions underlying values, this dissertation distinguishes between objective values as normative, intersubjective values as prescriptive, and the social and cultural values, as well as subjective valuations, as descriptive (see 2.3.1 and 6.3).

### 4.3.3 Value-realisation

In logotherapy, objective values lend themselves to human perception as ‘meaning potentials’ (*Sinnmöglichkeit*) (Frankl 2013, p. 90), that is, temporally limited possibilities of which an individual becomes aware in a concrete situation and which contain the potential to change reality or oneself (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 388, 431). Consequently, “meaning [of the moment] is the most valuable possibility that man can fulfill in a concrete situation” (ibid., p. 387). Frankl specifies that possibilities are “chances to realize values, the opportunities to create, to experience, and to suffer meaningfully” (2010/1966, p. 172). Here, he refers to the three principal ways or avenues of value-realisation (Frankl 1992/1959, p. 146; 2010/1966, p. 179): the creative, experiential, and attitudinal

<sup>48</sup> <https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:arvo> 5.12.2023.

values. These avenues illustrate man's *relationship* to values that different objects (e.g., other persons, nature, work) bear, not different kinds of values that exist (DuBois 1993, p. 64; Lehtonen 2009, p. 4). Then, as DuBois (1993, p. 64) clarifies,

the concrete creative acts, the experiences, and the attitudinal stances of a person derive their value largely from what is created, what is experienced, and what the object and nature of the attitude is; and certainly the values of these differ both in kind and degree.

The act of value-realisation is thus deeply intertwined with man's value-ethical apprehension. In research literature, these three value avenues are often mistakenly treated as the value basis of logotherapy, at least partly because Frankl often referred to them as the "three chief groups of values" (2010/1966, p. 179).

#### 4.3.4 Synthesis of the second meta-level theory

To illustrate the multidimensional reality experienced by the likewise multidimensional human person, this dissertation distinguishes between man's (i) *inner reality* capturing the noological and psychophysical dimensions of the subjective experience, (ii) the *reality of objective values and meaning* residing in the noetic world, and the *reality external* to man in the sense of (iii) natural and (iv) social worlds (Figure 13, on the right). **Figure 13** synthesises the meta-level theory of meaning and values, as well as the noodynamic relationship between being and meaning, in other words, the subject and the object.

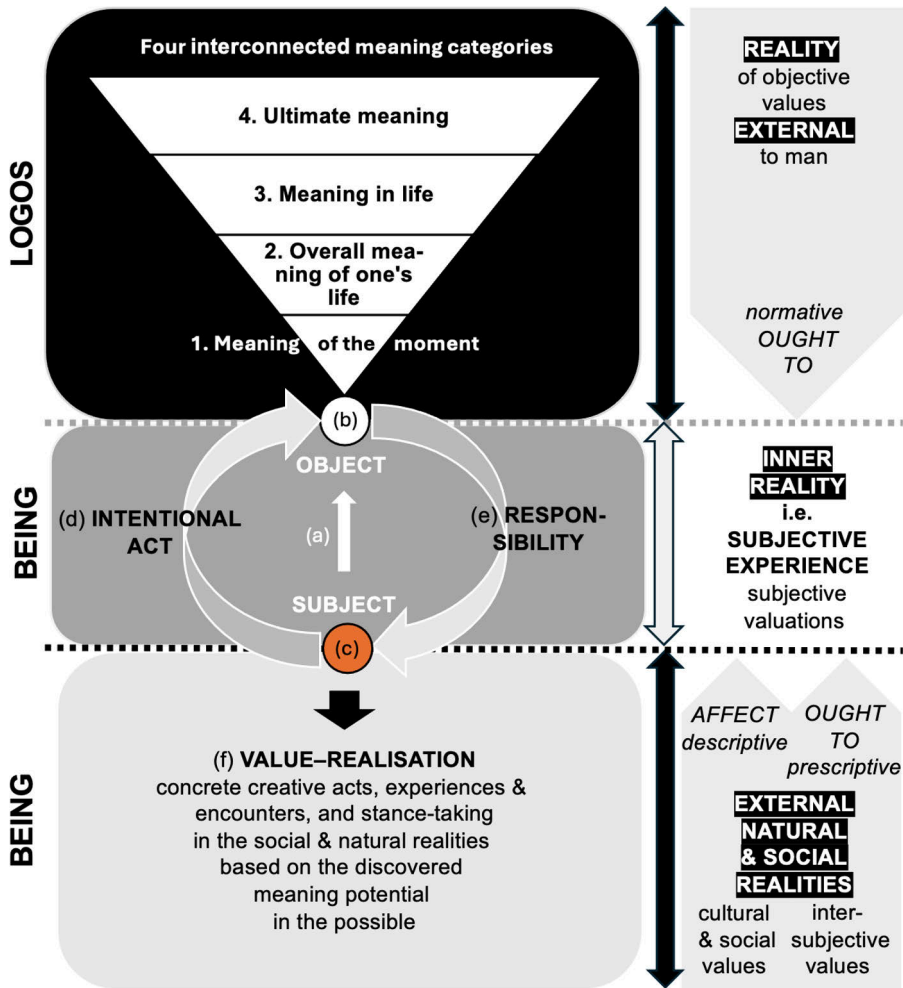


Figure 13. The meta-level theory of meaning and values.

On the left, there are the entities of being (ontos) and meaning (logos); on the right, are the qualitatively different four realities that contain the different categories of objective values, prescriptive intersubjective values, descriptive cultural and social values, and descriptive subjective valuations. At the top in the middle, the ought-to nature of the reality of ‘meaning and values’ (logos) is illustrated by a white triangle, which shows the four interrelated categories of meaning (1–4). In the middle, there is the polar field of tension, that is, noodynamics (a) between the object pole of meaning and the subject pole of being; more specifically, between the meaning potential (b), and the individual as a spiritual person (c) identifying the question asked (response-character of life) (Frankl 2010/1961, pp. 63–64). Orienting toward the meaning is a free decision – an intentional act (d). Taking

responsibility for actualising the discovered meaning potential is also a free and conscious decision (e). At the bottom of Figure 13, value-realisation (f) brings responsibility into concrete reality as valuable actions, experiences, encounters, and attitudes.

To summarise, the meta-level theory of meaning and values embraces four categories of meaning that are transcendent and bound to the reality of objective values (logos). Meaning presents itself to an individual as a meaning potential – an opportunity to change reality or oneself through value-realisation. As ideals and goals, values guide human conduct toward an ought, and as essentially objective, act as criteria for decision-making (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 503; Lehtonen 2009, p. 5). Altogether, in logotherapy, life is an expression of individuals' value-directed pursuits (Frankl 1953, p. 10).

## 4.4 The meta-level theory of knowledge

The third meta-level theory contemplates the epistemological foundation of logotherapy. To be able to study human (noetic) phenomena and, therefore, to understand humans and human behaviour holistically, the meta-level theory of knowledge is proposed to include the constituents of 'realist epistemology', 'value-ethical knowledge', and a 'broad knowledge base'. Value-ethical knowledge incorporates the sub-constituents of 'conscience'<sup>49</sup> and 'intentional emotions'. At the end, the constituents are synthesised into a schematic representation.

### 4.4.1 Realist epistemology

Like Husserl, Heidegger, and Scheler, Frankl was interested in describing human existence from an everyday, practical perspective (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 76; Toikka 2000, pp. 7, 9), and from the person's subjective viewpoint. In his aim to include the uniquely human, the noological mode of being into the study of humans and human conduct, Frankl draws on phenomenological analysis and the epistemology of early phenomenologists, especially Scheler (DuBois 2024, pp. xi–xii; Frankl 2018b, p. 170). This approach advocated a realist form of

<sup>49</sup> In addition to distinguishing authentic conscience as a meaning organ from Freud's superego, Frankl makes a distinction between ethical and artistic conscience. Then, the former relates to ethical intuition and the ethical unconscious, and the latter to inspiration and the aesthetic unconscious; further, both originate in the spiritual unconscious. This dissertation, like most of Frankl's work, focuses on the ethical conscience, enabling the attainment of intuitive value-ethical knowledge, that is, pre-moral axiological knowledge. (Frankl 1987, pp. 29–30; 2008, p. 42; 2010/1966, p. 146; 2011, pp. 42–43).

phenomenology, in which the ‘world’ given in the subjective experience is the world itself, not “some construct produced by the human mind” (Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 8). Hence, instead of regarding phenomenology as a method to interpret “a given phenomenon after preconceived patterns” (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 108), for Frankl, building on Scheler’s phenomenological attitude (Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 7), it “is an attempt to describe the way in which man understands himself [sic] and interprets his [sic] own existence” in a phenomenological experience (Frankl 2010/1967, p. 124).

From an epistemological perspective, knowledge is grounded in facts (preferably empirical) and knowledge claims are based on ways of knowing, that is, “how we know what we claim to know” (Tsoukas & Chia 2011, p.10). Epistemologically, the world can thus be considered to consist of facts, which appear to humans in their perceptions, and from which they form (or in them is formed) ideas and concepts (Turunen 1995, p. 198). In turn, epistemological realism usually holds that a reality independent of humans exists, and that reliable knowledge can be obtained from it through empirical methods. The realist phenomenologists like Scheler and Frankl, in his wake, build on a broader notion of reality; for them, the realist epistemology primarily means that humans are in relation to a mind-independent reality in their inner world of subjective experience, to which access is gained through inner perception, insight, and intuition (Turunen 1995, pp. 117–119, 199). For Scheler and for Frankl accordingly, humans’ “most original and primordial relation to the world” is their “grasping of value” (Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 9). Characteristic of this reality is that the individual is “in relation to a highly structured, mind-independent world” (DuBois 1993, p. 58; 2004, pp. xi–xii), in which values present themselves as a priori facts. Knowledge thus builds on a scientifically controversial assumption about moral facts (Pritchard 2018, p. 139) – in the logothoretic context, more specifically, about value-ethical facts and value-ethical or pre-moral axiological knowledge (Frankl 1987, pp. 29–30; 2008, p. 81).

#### 4.4.2 Value-ethical knowledge

The way of knowing about the value-ethical facts is not empirical but philosophical or phenomenological, in other words, philosophical reflection of the lived experience. According to Scheler, the world gives itself to personal subjects as essential intuitions or insights, in which individuals immediately and intuitively grasp the essence of an object’s being (intentional referent) (Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 8; DuBois 1993, p. 58). In Franklian terminology, objective values are revealed to the spiritual person in an intentional act (Kotkavirta 2005, p. 78). When sensing or perceiving objective values, the spiritual person is the bearer of the acts,

and “not oriented to the sensual world, but to an order behind it” (ibid.). Since objective values exist “independently of acts of apprehension”, an object has value for us before it is felt, perceived, or known. Therefore, instead of being constructed, values are discovered in a subjective experience of value, that is, in an act of value-apprehension. (Davis & Steinbock 2024, pp. 10–11; DuBois 1993, p. 63).

In logotherapy, value-ethical knowledge and moral judgements are based on a priori knowledge about a normative order of values common to all (Solasaari 2003, p. 107). In particular, the value-ethical facts are within the reach of the human meaning-organ, i.e. the conscience. It contains an unconscious, pre-reflexive, and hierarchical order of values exposed to an individual in an intuitive phenomenological experience (DuBois 1993, p. 64; Frankl 1992/1959, p. 145; Frankl 2010/1961, p. 234; Frankl 2014b, p. 73; Solasaari 2003, pp. 79, 80, 84). The conscience presupposes the human capacity for self-detachment and enables an inner dialogue related to values and value-apprehension (Frankl 2014a, p. 5; 2014b, p. 73; 2011, p. 61; 2010/1964, p. 73). Overall, the conscience directs man toward an ought (Lukas 2020b, p. 16), that is, toward the objective value of truth – the search for which is a “personal commitment” (Frankl 1953, p. 12; 2010, p. 46).

Man’s conscious relationship to values implies that knowledge about values can be felt. Again, building on Scheler, Frankl differentiates between intentional (rational) emotions and emotions as feelings and moods (DuBois 1993, p. 61; Frankl 2011, p. 44): moods reside in the psychological dimension and, as such, are in an obligatory relationship with physical and social dimensions. In turn, intentional emotions need an object to which they relate: only through an individual’s conscious relationship to an object (e.g. another person, a particular decision-making situation) can intentional emotions arise and thus be perceived and experienced (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 146). They originate in the spiritual unconscious and, through intuition, provide the individual knowledge of what ought to be (Frankl 2018a, pp. 31–32). According to Frankl (2011, p. 44), “[F]eeling [intentional emotion] can be much more sensitive than reason can ever be sensible”<sup>50</sup>. In other words, the ‘ought to’ is experienced, more precisely, felt or known intuitively (Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 10; DuBois 2004, p. xii).

In different terms but referring to the same kind of experience, John Dewey and William James speak of an ‘emotion of rightness’ or ‘feeling of rightness’ (Dewey 1902/1886, p. 344; Heintzelman & King 2013, p. 88), Turunen of a ‘truth experience’ (1995, p. 111), and Heintzelman and King (2013, p. 88) of a “felt presence of meaning”. For example, according to Dewey (1902/1886, pp. 344–345),

<sup>50</sup> The original in German (Frankl 2018a, p. 28): “Das Gefühl kann viel feinfühlicher sein als der Verstand scharfsinnig”.

[T]he feeling of rightness necessarily passes over the into the judgement of rightness. We regard the feeling not as something which we subjectively experience, but as an attribute of the act of personality. ... The moral judgement is the explicit presence in consciousness of the objective factor involved in all personal feeling. The moral judgements, taken together, are referred to a power called conscience. ... Conscience is, therefore, intuitive. ... It is the internal side of every personal experience.

What all the above share, is that an experience of what ought to be – rightness, truth, or presence of meaning – is a phenomenological state, which builds on the assumptions “that the world *makes sense* and that human beings ... are equipped to detect that sense” (Heintzelman & King 2013, p. 88; italics in the original).

### 4.4.3 Broad knowledge base

In logotherapy, the object of study is the human being. Epistemologically, logotherapy is interested in how the human, as a multidimensional being, knows, and how this knowledge relates to one’s choices, behaviour, and the experience of life as meaningful or meaningless. As Frankl’s geometric laws demonstrate, as an object of study, the human being cannot “be reduced to what is given from one perspective”, that is, to findings of individual sciences or methods (DuBois 2004, p. xii). Therefore, to study humans as multidimensional beings acting in a multidimensional world, logotherapy builds on a “broad theory of knowledge”, as DuBois puts it (2004, p. xiii). Then, evidence is understood, in accordance with realist phenomenology, “as any form of givenness of an object to a personal subject” (DuBois 1993, p. 57). To illustrate,

colors are seen, sounds are heard, logical conclusions may be deduced, scientific conclusions may be inferred, basic truths are to be intuited (like responsibility presupposes freedom), and the value of an object is felt or known intuitively (e.g. the value of a beautiful landscape or a beloved person) (DuBois 2004, p. xii).

In logotherapy, the different modes of being (dimensions) are disclosed in different ways and relate to different ways of knowing, types of knowledge, organising principles, methods, and claims of knowledge (DuBois 2004, pp. xii–xiii). For instance, the noological mode of being functions according to the principle of noodynamics (a tension between what is and what ought to be), while the other modes (physical, psychosocial) follow the homeostatic principle of traditional motivational theories striving for inner balance and need satisfaction (see Chapter

5). While need satisfaction is an important feature of human well-being in the psychosomatic dimension, in the noological dimension, maintaining equilibrium is not enough (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 114). Frankl argues that rather than creating an inner equilibrium (homeostatic principle), man's striving for meaning arouses inner tension (noodynamic principle) (Frankl 2010/1962, p. 57). Further, the physical, psychological, and social dimensions lend themselves to empirical methods and laws of causation, whereas the noological dimension calls for a conscious relationship with values, philosophical methods, and final causes (Frankl 2010/1971, pp. 168–169), that is, reasons. In explaining human behaviour, the different dimensions thus relate to different motivational bases and kinds of why-questions, namely explanation-seeking and reason-seeking ones (Niiniluoto 1983, p. 267). The former refers to causal explanation, and the latter to a connection between the contents of intentional states. Indeed, Frankl distinguishes between causes and reasons (Lukas 2020a, p. 190, citing Frankl):

Causes are not the same as reasons. People who cut onions cry. Their tears have a cause. But they have no reason to cry. And if they are unhappy and drink a whiskey, they will be less unhappy, and the whiskey is the cause of this. But the reason for being unhappy is far from being removed.

Reasons relate to intentional emotions and basic motivations concerning man's conscious relationship with an object, whereas causes do not presuppose a conscious relation to an object to arise (DuBois 1993, pp. 61–62; Lukas 2020a, p. 191). Causes simply cause something; for example, a drug may cause euphoria or a state of anxiety, brain stimulation in laboratory settings causes emotions, or drinking whiskey may make an unhappy person feel less unhappy (DuBois 1993, p. 61; Lukas 2020a, p. 190). Causes relate to conduct determined by, e.g. instincts, moods, and need satisfaction, to which man can take a stand or decide for or against (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 108; Lukas 1989, pp. 46–47). Reasons, in turn, call for understanding finality; the for-the-sake-of something, that is, what a decision is made for (telos) (Lukas 1989, p. 47; Niiniluoto 1983, p. 253–254, 258–259). Lukas (2020a, p. 258) aptly encapsulates the nature of the decisions guided by the conscience:

1. Human decisions are free acts of will that cannot be explained.
2. There are reasons for these free acts of will, but not causes.
3. These reasons do not explain the choice of a particular behavior, but only its meaning.

All three items above point to a fundamental incompatibility of the noological dimension with the mechanistic-deterministic view of reality and the ideal of causality inherent in it. In relation to laws of causation, logotherapy acknowledges determinism in dimensions other than the noological (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 108). In a sense, it aligns with compatibilists, such as social psychologist Roy Baumeister (2008), who hold that free will is compatible with determinism, but on different grounds given logotherapy's multidimensional view of human nature (Visala 2018, pp. 21–23). From a holistic perspective, man is no cause-and-effect-system.

DuBois (1993, p. 65) brings forth the incapacity of empirical science in the face of value-ethical knowledge. He insists on combining empirical and philosophical methods in the study of humans and human conduct and highlights phenomenology's potential to enable philosophical reflection on lived experience (*ibid.*, p. 60). Both empirical and philosophical methods have their limitations, which is why logotherapy accommodates knowledge from both and integrates them in its effort to understand humans and human behaviour "wholistically" (DuBois 1993, p. 60; 2004, p. xxxix). According to DuBois (1993, pp. 54–55), Frankl's broad theory of knowledge generates a theoretical rationale with internal consistency and explanatory power, and Frankl's broad idea of evidence "justifies the use of many methods of gaining knowledge and thereby preserves the unity of psychological inquiry".

#### 4.4.4 Synthesis of the third meta-level theory

The third meta-level theory, the here compiled theory of knowledge, incorporates the constituents of 'realist epistemology', 'value-ethical knowledge', and a 'broad knowledge base'. **Figure 14** illustrates this meta-level theory through the six characteristics on the left, and through the human multidimensional mode of being distinguished at the top.

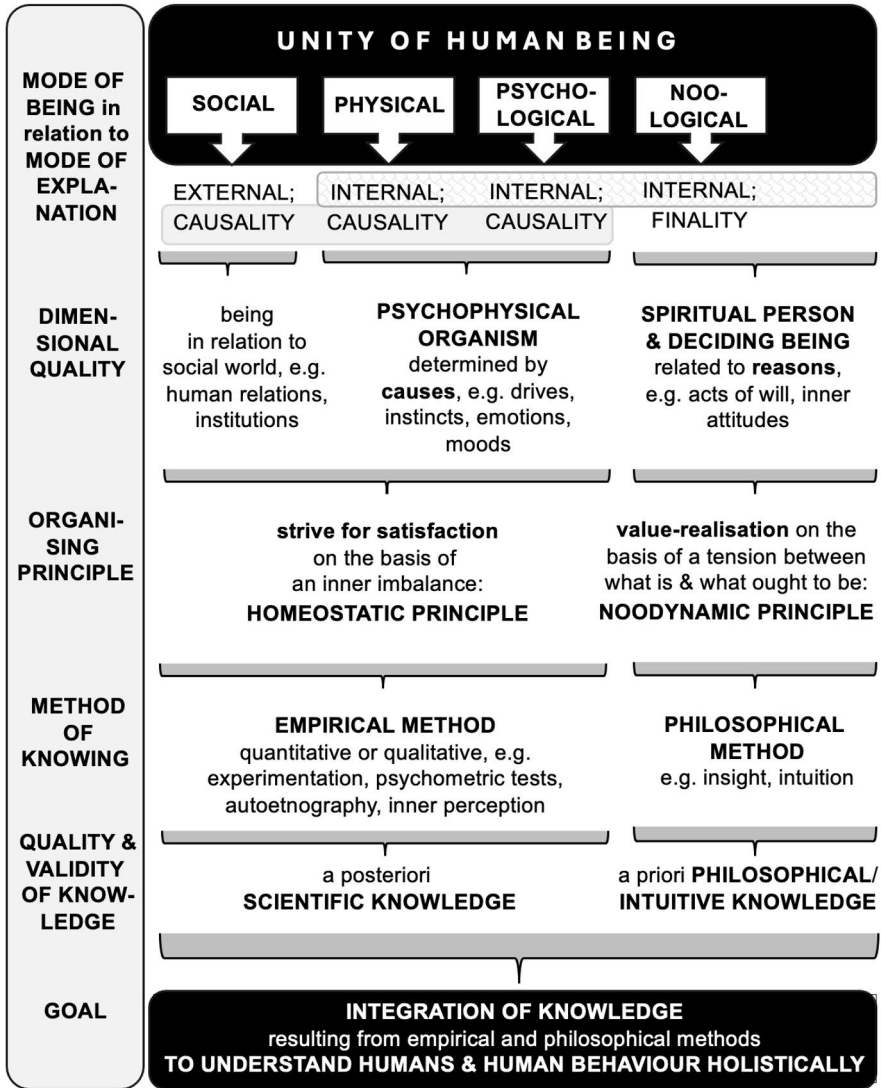


Figure 14. The meta-level theory of knowledge combining the multidimensional view of man and reality, as well as empirical and philosophical methods.

Figure 14 highlights that the logotheoretic epistemology aims to open “the possibility of gaining knowledge of the whole person” (DuBois 2004, p. xiii). Then, in addition to quantitative research aiming for hypothesis confirmation or qualitative research aiming for thick description, for example, valid knowledge for understanding humans and human behaviour can also be acquired through inner-perception, intuition, and insight, the last indicating the principal method of gaining knowledge in philosophy (DuBois 1993, pp. 56–58). In other words, when a

posteriori knowledge resulting from empirical methods is coupled with a priori intuitive knowledge resulting from philosophical methods (DuBois 1993, p. 59; Pritchard 2018, pp. 88, 151), e.g. pre-moral axiological knowledge, a holistic foundation for understanding human behaviour is established.

## 4.5 The meta-level theory of motivation

The fourth meta-level theory addresses the motivational foundation of logotherapy (Frankl 2024, p. 9). According to Frankl (2010/1971, p. 164), “it is a characteristic of man that he [sic] relates to intentional objects in terms of values and meanings which serve and function as reasons and motives”. To piece together and visualise the motivational meta-level theory, this section explores the constituents of ‘will to meaning’ and ‘meaning fulfilment’. The ‘will to meaning’ is the most established logotherapeutic concept in the research areas of ‘meaningful work’ and ‘meaningful life’, whereas the entire process of ‘meaning fulfilment’, which also contains the ‘will to meaning’, has been neglected in both. Arguably, the situation is at least partly due to the fact that ‘meaning fulfilment’ has not been clearly depicted. To understand ‘meaning fulfilment’ more profoundly, this dissertation proposes a five-step process based on Frankl’s thought. In essence, the meta-level theory of motivation bridges being (ontos) and meaning (logos), that is, subjective existence and its objective counterpart, meaning and values. In the following, the constituents of ‘will to meaning’ and ‘meaning fulfilment’ are described, and, to conclude, a schematic representation of the fourth meta-level theory is synthesised.

### 4.5.1 Will to meaning

In logotherapy, “man is motivated by the will to meaning” (Frankl 2010/1962, p. 49). This basic tenet of Frankl’s logotherapy underlines that humans are “not drive-determined but meaning-oriented, ... not striving for pleasure”, power, or self-actualisation but for value (Frankl 2021, 5. thesis). More precisely, the ‘will to meaning’ concerns the value and meaning-orientation of the (spiritual) person (ibid.), “the striving to find a concrete meaning in personal existence” (Frankl 2010/1961, p. 61–62). Ultimately, the ‘will to meaning’ points toward objective values (DuBois 1993, p. 64; Frankl 2013, p. 113) and incorporates all four categories of meaning depicted above (4.3.1).

Originally, Frankl based his argument on a human ‘will to meaning’ on phenomenological analysis (Frankl 2010/1967, p. 125), and stressed that it “cannot be reductionistically returned to other motives or derived from them” (Frankl 2014b, p.153). Following Frankl’s footsteps and with him, the first to study the ‘will to meaning’ empirically to develop a psychometric tool, were Purpose in Life

-test developers Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964, pp. 200–202). Like Frankl, they highlighted that the ‘will to meaning’ concerns both, the real and the possible (Frankl 2014b, p. 59). Crumbaugh specifies that originating from Scheler, “the human capacity to contemplate the possible” points to a “distinctly human creative ability” “to grasp a possible meaning in his [sic] own life in relation to the world about him [sic]” (Crumbaugh 1971, p. 382). DuBois (1993, pp. 63–64) captures the foundational role of the ‘will to meaning’ for meaningful living by pointing to its foundation in self-transcendence and inherent value-orientation: “it is of the human condition to seek meaning, to transcend one’s self in being related to the [objective] values which make the individual’s life meaningful and give it direction”.

In the ‘will to meaning’, Frankl deliberately employs the term will, not need, drive, or instinct<sup>51</sup>. In logotherapy, needs, drives, and instincts are phenomena in the psychological dimension that call for satisfaction and/or reduction of tension amounting to a (badly) desired equilibrium (Frankl 2014a, p. 26). The will, instead, calls for a direction – an orientation toward something or someone. Frankl (2014a, p. 27) specifies that the “[W]ill cannot be demanded, commanded, or ordered. One cannot will to will [for example, to love someone]. And if the will to meaning is to be elicited, meaning itself has to be elucidated”. Lukas (2020b, pp. 16–17) particularises that our personal ‘want’ may result from various motivational sources, where the ‘will to meaning’ aligns with the ‘ought’. Importantly, in the conscious relationship to an object or state of affairs, two aspects point to the deciding nature of being human and man’s freedom to choose, albeit within boundaries: First, a decision is made regarding the motivational foundation of our ‘want’, that is, whether our act of will is based on a ‘will to meaning’ or some other will (rather, need, instinct, drive), for example, the Freudian ‘will to pleasure’ or Adlerian ‘will to power’. Second, the deciding individual needs to be conscious of the quality of what she wants, that is, whether that which is wanted “is superimposed on us by outside influences” like parents, peers, society, or whether the ‘ought’ is in harmony with a (objective) value-orientation, that is, the ‘will to meaning’. (Lukas 2020b, pp. 16–17; Lukas 1989, pp. 46–47). Lukas (2020b, p. 17) states that, as a therapeutic approach,

[L]ogotherapy deals with both the want and the ought, and tries to harmonize them toward an objective meaning. In this manner, logotherapy stands in contrast to most other schools of psychotherapy, which focus attention on what

<sup>51</sup> Misunderstandings in this area are common due to Frankl’s inconsistent use of the terms ‘will’ and ‘need’. For more information, e.g. Frankl 2010/1964, pp. 111–113; 2010/1966, p. 100.

is wanted, especially in intrapsychic area of human drives, and less in area of trans-subjective meaning.

Instead of an inner imbalance, in logotherapy, motivation is based on the tension between ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’. As a psychiatrist, Frankl stresses that “a strong meaning orientation” [will to meaning] is life-prolonging, even life-preserving, and central for both physical and mental health (1966a, pp. 103–104).

#### 4.5.2 Process of meaning fulfilment

This dissertation proposes that, as a process, ‘meaning fulfilment’ implies five steps: 1) the demand, 2) orientation, 3) discovering, 4) commitment, and 5) action; or conceptually: 1) identifying the question, 2) will to meaning, 3) meaning-discovering, 4) taking responsibility, and 5) value-realisation. Though Frankl never presented ‘meaning fulfilment’ as such, based on in-depth reading and the rereading of his and Lukas’s works, as well as the hermeneutic cycle of understanding, these five steps emerge as necessary ones for ‘meaning fulfilment’ to occur. (e.g. Frankl 2010/1962, p. 49; 2010/1966, p. 180; 2010/1960, p. 100; 1992/1959, p. 145; Lukas 2020a; 2020b; 1989). The following first describes the steps of ‘meaning fulfilment’ and then discusses them in relation to a linear and inner time conception.

**The first step: demand.** The first step, ‘identifying the question’, concerns a unique individual in a concrete situation and assumes the individual has internalised the response-character of life. The individual recognises the unique situation as a question in the present moment, and chooses to engage with it – that is, to decide to answer ‘yes’ to the question they have identified. This answering ‘yes’ initiates the process of ‘meaning fulfilment’. The question may concern, for example, what do I do when a certain person is being bullied in my class or at work, whether I travel to a conference by plane or train, how I will handle today’s encounter with a difficult client, the death of my dog, or what cancer treatment option would be best for my child. As the examples show, the identified questions and their answers may span different temporal periods – from moments to years. While identifying the question may be challenging, oftentimes even more challenging is the decision to take up the challenge the question poses, i.e. giving the yes-answer (Lukas 1989, p. 47).

**The second step: orientation.** The second step, orientation toward meaning, i.e. the ‘will to meaning’, forms a tension between ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’. Here, the ‘what is’ (*Sein*) signifies the current situation, i.e. the perceived reality, and the ‘what ought to’ (*Sollen*) concerns the intuitive ideal, the “change (however small) in the constructively changed situation”, providing the noodynamic tension

between reality and ideal (Lukas 2020a, pp. 45–46). Although the ‘what ought to’ – such as behaving respectfully towards nature, acting friendly at work – is rarely fully attainable, it affords the necessary direction for human conduct (ibid.). Lukas highlights that (1989, pp. 19–20) psychological powers and functions<sup>52</sup> affect the ‘will to meaning’ and the subsequent ‘meaning fulfilment’ process. The psychological powers, e.g. instincts, moods, and emotions, are linked to man’s inner willingness for meaning orientation (the want). The psychological functions – e.g. observation, memory, and cognition – are, in turn, associated with the possibilities for meaning-discovering and decision-making, that is, Steps 3 and 4. Lukas (2020a, p. 18) accentuates that if an individual’s ‘will to meaning’ is limited by, for example, illness, immaturity, or infirmity, this is specifically related to the challenges of meaning-discovering (the 3<sup>rd</sup> step) that require cognitive abilities, while one’s internal willingness to meaning orientation remains intact.

**The third step: discovering.** The third step of ‘meaning-discovering’ refers to detecting the most valuable ‘meaning potential’ in the possible. While the individual may perceive more than one ‘meaning potential’, the meaning-discovering “boils down to becoming aware of” “what can be done about a given situation” (Frankl 1992/1959, p. 145). According to Frankl, the discovery of meaning can be compared to “a Gestalt perception — precisely in the sense of Max Wertheimer and Kurt Lewin, who spoke of the “demand quality” present in certain situations” (Frankl 2004, p. 10). However, instead of perceiving figures emerging from the background, in meaning-discovering, man perceives possibilities “against the background of reality” (ibid.). For this, humans are equipped with the conscience (Frankl 2014b, p. 58), the meaning organ, i.e. man’s intuitive capacity to become aware of<sup>53</sup> the unique meaning in a concrete situation (Lukas 2020a, pp. 34–35).

Our relationship with the conscience is dialogical (Frankl 2011, p. 60). In essence, the meaning-discovering contains an intuitive constituent of discovering (*Sinnfindung*) and a rational constituent of interpretation in relation to an ought (*Sinngebung*) (Frankl 2024, p. 61). While the intuitive constituent is described above, the interpretation or “bestowal of meaning” concerns evaluating the detected ‘meaning potentials’ “in moral and ethical terms”, that is, in relation to (objective) values. (Frankl 2024, p. 61; 2014a, p. 5; 2010/1964, p. 73). Each

<sup>52</sup> The notions of ‘psychological powers’ and ‘psychological functions’ were developed by the German psychologist Hubert Rohracher, who, along with Frankl and Giseler Guttman, supervised Lukas’ dissertation completed in 1971.

<sup>53</sup> In relation to the becoming aware or conscious of a meaning potential, Frankl interchangeably uses the verbs ‘discover’, ‘perceive’, and ‘find’. Accordingly, they are used synonymously in this dissertation.

situation permits diverse interpretations among which the individual must choose based on intuitive, felt knowledge about values, together with reason (Frankl 2010/1966, p. 180). Choosing means ‘decision-making’ where the aim is “the bull’s eye” (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 120 citing Goethe), the most meaningful and valuable act (Frankl 2010/1960, p. 100; Lukas 2020a, p. 247; Lukas 2020b, p. 16). Frankl (2010/1961, p. 134) expounds that

[I]nterpretation of meaning [potentials] presupposes that man is spiritual. Fulfillment of meaning takes for granted that he is free and responsible. These three existential elements [spiritual, free, responsible] are accessible only when we follow them into the noological sphere where man as a whole is transcending the psycho-biological level and establishing himself truly.

While the aim of the ‘meaning-discovering’ is the most meaningful act in a specific situation, Frankl acknowledges the limitations of the human being and the human conscience by repeatedly highlighting that the conscience can also err: Therefore, “[O]ne never knows whether or not it is the true meaning to which he [sic] is committed” (Frankl 2010/1966, p. 183).

**The fourth step: commitment.** The fourth step concerns the individual’s conscious decision to take responsibility for actualising the discovered meaning potential. Lukas highlights that “[O]nly people who are aware of their own capacity to decide will take responsibility for what they decide in freedom” (2020a, p. 260). These “personal responses to values cannot be mechanical” or driven by instincts, “they must be free and responsible” (Frankl 2010/1961, p. 231; DuBois 1993, p. 65), in relation to personal capabilities (internal) and the current situation (external) (Frankl 2013, p. 106). The better the individual understands this task-quality of life, the more meaningful the individual’s life seems to her (ibid., p. 105). Distinguishing this step from the previous one – the meaning-discovering – is important because one’s conscious commitment to actualise the ‘meaning potential’ only occurs at this point.

**The fifth step: action.** The fifth step of the ‘meaning fulfilment’ process highlights that decisions need to be implemented. The individual responds to life with actions (not decisions) (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 405) through actualising creative, experiential, and attitudinal values, as briefly introduced previously (4.4.3). Then, actualising ‘creative values’ means the individual gives something valuable to the world in terms of creation, for example, through work. Actualising ‘experiential values’ means receiving something from the world in terms of encounters and experiences. Essentially, ‘experiential values’ presuppose that we are receptive and appreciative of the value offered to us, for example, the joy of a musical piece, birdsong, the company of good friends. In turn, actualising

‘attitudinal values’ means taking a stand on something that cannot be changed, as Frankl suggests, or taking a conscious stand on positive things and events, as Lukas has specified. (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 118; Frankl 2010/1966, p. 179; Lukas 2018; Lukas 2020a, p. 193); for example, dealing with an incurable disease, getting fired, having a child, aging. Due to the three potential avenues of value-realisation in unique situations, “life never ceases to hold meaning” (Frankl 1992/1959, p. 146).

### The temporal dimensions of meaning fulfilment

The logothoretic concept of time encompasses a linear and an inner time conception and connects them by the individual ‘being responsible’. Frankl illustrates this connection with the metaphor of an hourglass (Frankl 2010/1966, pp. 171–172). The hourglass portrays a linear conception of time, where the narrow passage through which the sand flows, represents the present. The future would be the sand in the upper part, and the past would be the sand in the lower part. The future consists of possibilities, and the past is the “true reality”, materialised values – everything man has brought into existence (Frankl 2010/1962, p. 58; 2010/1966, p. 172). The possibilities [meaning potentials] are opportunities for value-realisation. In the present, the individual can freely choose which transitory possibility one fulfils and thus, transfers to the eternal reality of the past. Importantly, as “time is irreversible” (unlike the hourglass that can be turned upside down), the individual has “the responsibility of selecting what becomes part of the eternity as a consequence of our [one’s] choices”. While the past is fixed, the individual “can “shake up” and change the future” – like the hourglass – “and thus also change” oneself. (ibid., pp. 172–173). Besides the linear or outer time conception with its discrete present, past, and future, an inner time conception in which past, present, and future, with conscious and unconscious, intermingle is also natural to a human being (Kenyon 1999, pp. 12–13). Importantly, in the present moment, both conceptions of time are present in the individual’s subjective experience.

In the meaning fulfilment process, Steps 3 and 5, i.e. meaning-discovering and value-realisation orient toward different realities and concepts of time: (i) the meaning-discovering toward the possible is characterised by inner time and relates to a dialogical relationship with one’s conscience, and (ii) value-realisation toward the concrete present defined by linear time and manifesting in changes in one’s behaviour (Frankl 2010/1966, p. 173). Further, the elements of the psychological dimension affect the meaning-discovering, while the elements external to man (in broad terms, the external environment, social conditions, and expectations) influence the value-realisation process. Connecting meaning-discovering and value-realisation to their respective realities and time-conceptions creates a gap

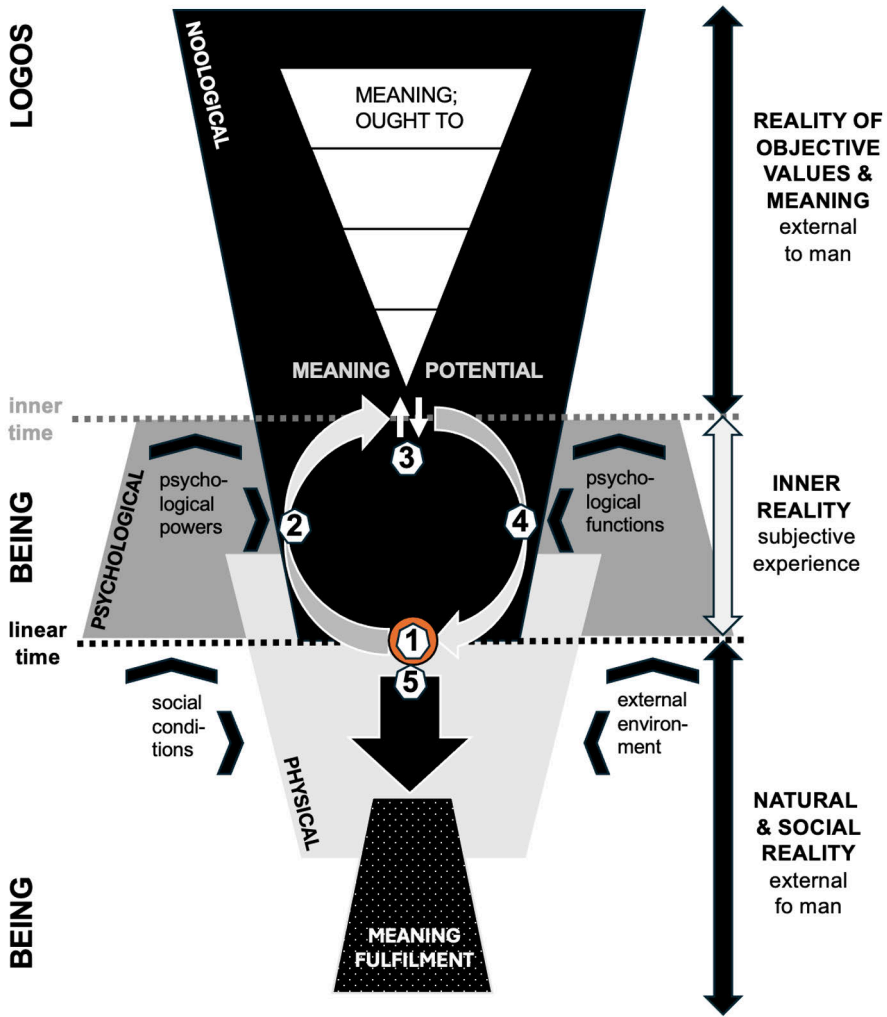
between them. For an individual, the existence of this gap is indicated, for example, by value or moral conflicts, an awkward feeling of not doing the right thing, or existential frustration (e.g. Lukas 2020a, pp. 197–200). Importantly, without the individual's conscious decision (Step 4) meaning-discovering (Step 3) does not manifest in value-realisation (Step 5).

The unpleasant feelings depicted above may also stem from the fact that the individual does not initially answer 'yes' to a question she has identified as hers. Or, even worse, she does not even stop to consider what life is asking of her. Put simply, meaning is unfulfilled if an individual answers 'no' to the question the unique situation presents (consciously or unconsciously; Step 1); if the individual ignores her meaning orientation (psychological powers; Step 2); if the individual is unable to discover the meaning potential (psychological functions; Step 3); if the individual does not consciously decide to take responsibility for the discovered meaning potential (Step 4); or if the individual's decision is not translated into actions, that is, into value-realisation (Step 5).

#### 4.5.3 Synthesis of the fourth meta-level theory

The meta-level theory of motivation contains the constituents of 'will to meaning' and 'meaning fulfilment', with the 'will to meaning' representing the second step of the process. **Figure 15** illustrates the five-step process of 'meaning fulfilment' in a multidimensional world comprising natural, social, psychic, and noetic realities with humans' physical, psychosocial, and noological modes of being.

In Figure 15, the noological (black), psychological (dark grey), and physical (light grey) modes of being are portrayed from top to bottom. For illustrative purposes, the dimensions are presented separately, however; in 'being human' and in the human experience, they are intertwined and form a unity. To portray this, in Figure 15, all modes of being are also in the realm of inner reality (subjective experience). As in Figure 13, depicting the meta-level theory of meaning and values, the qualitatively different realities are on the right and the entities are on the left. The ought-to nature of the reality of meaning and values is depicted by a white triangle containing the four interrelated categories of meaning: meaning of the moment, overall meaning of one's life, meaning in life, and ultimate meaning – from more concrete to more abstract. In the middle, the horizontal dashed lines on either side of the inner reality of being (subjective experience) describe the different time conceptions: inner time and linear time. The process of 'meaning fulfilment' engages all dimensions, specifically, the noological one. The eight wide black arrowheads around the psychological powers (left), psychological functions (right), social conditions, and external environment indicate how 'meaning fulfilment' is linked to psychosocial and natural realities.



**Figure 15.** The meta-level theory of motivation described as the process of ‘meaning fulfilment’ consisting of five steps (1–5) and related to two time conceptions: inner time, orienting toward the possible, and linear time, occurring in the concrete present. The five interrelated steps are: (1) identifying the question in a concrete situation; (2) will to meaning (intentional act); (3) meaning-discovering in the possible; (4) taking responsibility; and (5) value-realisation (action) in the concrete present.

In everyday life, meaning fulfilment is “muddled” since it represents a (play)ground where values, psychological powers and functions, social forces and expectations, and physical contexts and environments collide and interact. Each situation “is at once chance and challenge”, a question; it “is a call, first, to listen, and then to respond” (Frankl 2010/1971, p. 169). While meaning is experienced subjectively, it must be evaluated with objective criteria: “the validity of the

concrete, subjective meaning” must not be extrapolated only from the practicality; instead, it “must be connected with something higher, more general”, for example, universal values (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 387). Hence, meaning fulfilment always concerns something that is in-itself-valuable, an end goal – not a means to an end (Frankl 2010/1960, pp. 93–94; Lukas 2020a, pp. 250–251). Lukas (2020a, p. 251) highlights that if an individual does something to feel better afterwards (e.g. good conscience) or only for the sake of excitement, this is not about ‘meaning fulfilment’; rather, it can be considered need satisfaction or self-actualization (see Chapter 5).

In sum, in logotherapy, man’s main concern is ‘meaning fulfilment’ (Frankl 2010/1961, p. 63; 1966a, p. 100), which implies a conscious relationship with values, value-ethical apprehension, and ‘deciding being’ (4.4.2 and 4.2.3). One’s orientation toward meaning engages the free and responsible, noological dimension of being human (Frankl 2010/1958, p. 81; DuBois 2004, p. xvii; xxxix). Detecting one’s responsibility postulates freedom and leads to being responsible (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 486). ‘Being responsible’ presumes a moral anchor (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 483), the conscience, or meaning organ in the logothereutic terminology, and manifests in decision-making in unique situations (Frankl 2011, p. 59). Lukas (2020a, p. 263; italics in the original) highlights that “[T]o *decide, act accordingly, and stand behind* one’s actions forms a stable triad” whose byproduct is a peace of mind, that is, “harmony between oneself and the logos”.

## 4.6 The meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy

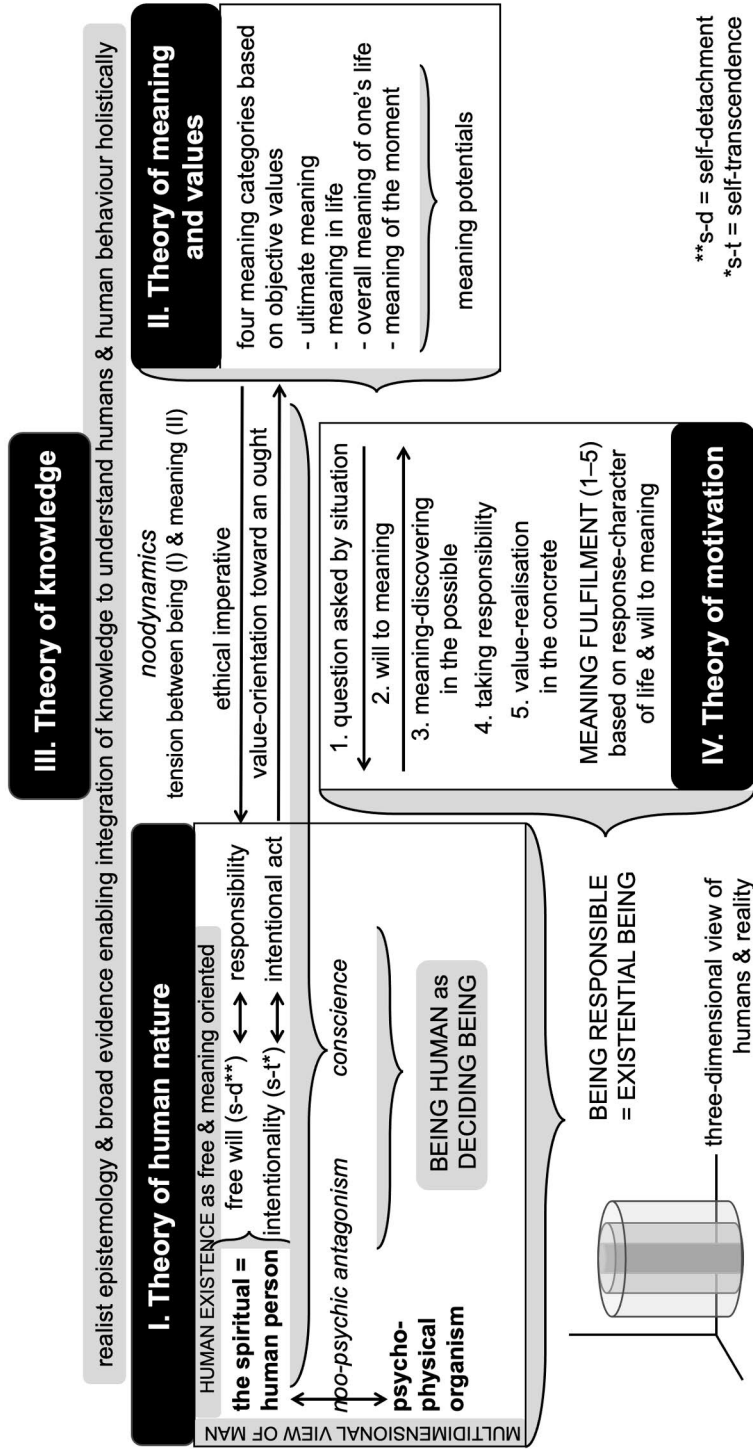
Based on reading and rereading, the critical conceptual thinking skill of ‘delineating’, as well as the hermeneutic cycle of understanding between parts and wholes, this dissertation proposes that logotherapy incorporates four interconnected meta-level theories and stands out as a scientific-philosophical approach with particularised assumptions on ontology, epistemology, and human nature. Specifically, logotherapy incorporates multidimensional reality and being as well as empirical and philosophical modes of knowing. Integrating logotherapy has several advantages.

- First, the meta-level theoretical framework and the associated schematic representations illustrate the nomological network of logotherapy and individual concepts: For example, the anthropological concept of ‘self-transcendence’ presupposes ‘self-detachment’, and the motivational concept of ‘will to meaning’ is based on ‘self-transcendence’.

- Second, logotherapy highlights the coherence and comprehensiveness of Frankl's theorising, which may pleasantly surprise scholars who consider Frankl, above all, a psychiatrist who survived concentration camps and wrote a popular book on the importance of finding and fulfilling meaning.
- Third, introducing logotherapy into research on meaningfulness provides a firmer foundation for theory development and application based on Frankl's thought.
- Fourth, the integration enables comparison with and contemplation of other scientific-philosophical approaches (e.g. cognitive psychology, social constructionism, and critical realism), especially, for understanding what is seen and what is not (Hines 1988, p. 258) through various approaches.
- Fifth, the logothereutic meta-level theories can serve as method theories, i.e. theoretical lenses (Lukka & Vinnari 2014), particularly, when studying human conduct, axiological, and existential questions.
- Finally, proposing 'logotherapy' as an umbrella concept for 'logotherapy' and 'existential analysis' advances conceptual clarity, as theory and therapeutic practice are referred to by different terms.

**Figure 16** condenses the key constituents of each meta-level theory into an integrated framework of logotherapy.

*I. The meta-level theory of human nature:* Building on Frankl's dimensional ontology and anthropology, logotherapy holds a three-dimensional view of humans and reality, where human existence is free and oriented toward meaning and values. The spiritual (human) person is the centre of activity and embraces the free and intentional quality of man in the noological dimension through the meta-level human capacities of self-detachment and self-transcendence. 'Being human' means an intentional orientation towards objective values and is something that man decides about responsibly (deciding being), that is, in relation to an ethical imperative. The bearer of responsibility is the will of the spiritual person, which strives to convert one state of being into another, guided by the human conscience that involves an intuitive understanding of value.



**Figure 16.** The axiomatic system of thought, or meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy consists of four interrelated meta-level theories (I-IV). In this figure, the meta-level theories are positioned relative to each other as in the black box at the top of Figure 9 (from logotherapy to logotherapy, Section 4.1, p. 89).

*II. The meta-level theory of meaning and values.* The existential (noun) of spirituality has an objective aspect, the logos, and a subjective aspect, the nous, or the spiritual person. Logos is represented by meaning and objective values that exist independently. The logothetic concept of meaning includes four interrelated categories that build on the assumptions of value-objectivism and the meaningfulness of life. Logotherapy discerns four kinds of values based on their ontological and epistemological foundation: objective values (normative), intersubjective values (prescriptive), social and cultural values (descriptive), and personal valuations (descriptive). Values are qualities of objects and states of ethical awareness that guide human action and choices. Objective values lend themselves to human perception as ‘meaning potentials’, which are temporally limited possibilities that an individual becomes aware of in a concrete situation, and which contain potential to change reality or oneself. ‘Meaning’ can be defined as the most valuable possibility that man can fulfill in a concrete situation.

*III. The meta-level theory of knowledge.* The physical, psychological, noological, and social dimensions inherent in the human mode of being are qualitatively different. Thus, they are connected, for example, to different ways of knowing and research methods. Basically, the theory of knowledge calls for including the human, noological mode of being into the study of humans and human conduct. Epistemologically, the noological dimension is characterised by man’s conscious relationship with values, philosophical mode of knowing, and understanding the ‘what for’ of human behaviour and decisions, that is, reasons (instead of causes). In relation to meaning and values (logos), the world the individual encounters in his or her subjective experience, is the world itself (i.e. a mind-independent reality) to which access is gained through inner perception, insight, and intuition. For the act of value-apprehension, individuals need their conscience, which contains an unconscious and normative order of values common to all and reveals itself to the individual in an intuitive phenomenological experience. Based on the realist epistemology of early phenomenologists and their broad notion of evidence (DuBois 1993, p. 57), in logotherapy, gaining knowledge about the whole person is possible.

*IV. The meta-level theory of motivation* forms a bridge between being and meaning, nous and logos – in Figure 16, between the theories of ‘human nature’ (I) and ‘meaning and values’ (II). The meta-level motivational theory builds on the noodynamic tension between ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’, captured by the concept of the ‘will to meaning’, which refers to an individual’s inner willingness to meaning orientation and acceptance of responsibility. In the five-step process of ‘meaning fulfilment’, the object pole is represented by the meaning potential, and the subject pole by an individual with the possibility to discover, interpret, and, subsequently, to actualise the value the situation offers through the three value avenues of creative, experiential, and attitudinal values (value-realisation) (Frankl

2010/1961, pp. 63–64). In the present moment, the individual is free to choose which transitory possibility (meaning potential) she fulfils and thus transfers to the reality of the past.

The most distinctive feature of logotherapy is the uniquely human dimension of being and reality that constitutes the core of Frankl's humanised psychology. Indeed, Frankl (2010/1964, p. 71) considered the three basic tenets of 'logotherapy' to contrast the three principles characterising the then dominant approaches to man and reality: The 'freedom of will' opposes pan-determinism, which holds that man is a product of his heredity and environment, thus denying the unpredictability of human behaviour, and, in fact, considers him or her subject to fate (Frankl 2010/1961, p. 66; Lukas 2020a, pp. 27, 32). The tenet of 'meaning in life' opposes reductionism, which means ignoring human phenomena at their face value and regarding them as nothing but, for example, psychological mechanisms or functions of neural networks (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 71). The 'will to meaning' confronts the homeostasis theory, which alludes to psychological motivational theories that underscore individual efforts to maintain inner equilibrium, satisfy needs, and reduce tensions (Frankl 2010/1960, pp. 93–94; 2010/1966, p. 144). Originally, Frankl directed his criticism toward psychodynamic and behavioural research. However, from the viewpoint of man's humanness, his claims still largely hold their point in the sphere of mainstream psychology, which draws on "objectively measurable behaviours, attitudes, or cognitive capacities" (Gantt & Thayne 2014, p. 194). Although Frankl's multidimensional view of man cannot be proven right or wrong by scientific methods, its accurate description and coherent meta-level foundation can still be attributed to him.

In essence, logotherapy is a meta-theoretical, holistic, individual-level value-ethical framework of meaningful living based on a three-dimensional view of man and reality. Frankl parallels 'being responsible' to authentic being and 'deciding being' and concludes that "it is existential being" (Frankl 2018, p. 16) (Figure 16). As such, 'being human' includes knowledge of what one, as a spiritual person, is free to do and what for (responsibility toward meaning). By emphasising responsibility, being human as deciding being, and the role of the conscience in decision-making, Frankl opposed the *Zeitgeist* of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that saw humans as powerless in their manifold linkages, be they physical, psychological, or social (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, p. 212; Frankl 2019, p. 20). With the three-dimensional view of man capable of changing reality or oneself, he provided a view where "man's reality is a possibility and his [sic] being is a capability" in relation to an ought (Frankl 2014b, p. 90).

# 5 Advancing research on meaningful work

To advance research on meaningful work, this chapter subjects the domain and method theory to a dialectical interrogation. Before this, building on Frankl, Section 5.1 depicts three meta-level motivational approaches of ‘need satisfaction’, ‘self-actualization’, and ‘meaning fulfilment’. They are important for exposing implicit assumptions about motivational dynamics in the research area of meaningful work and, more broadly, in psychology. Section 5.2 involves the dialectical interrogation between logotherapy and the five paradoxes of meaningful work raised in the introductory article of the *Journal of Management Studies Special Issue on Meaningful Work* (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, pp. 489–495). The discussion Section 5.3 presents theoretical contributions and a meta-level future research agenda for meaningful work. This chapter is guided by the main research question of how integrating logotherapy can advance theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience and research on meaningful work.

## 5.1 Three meta-level motivational approaches

This section lays the foundation for the meta-level study of motivation in this dissertation. Notably, Frankl does not use the terms ‘meta-level motivation’ or ‘meta-level motivational dynamics’. They are introduced by the author. The realisation that the motivational approaches of ‘need-satisfaction’, ‘self-actualization’, and ‘meaning-fulfilment’ represent a meta-level of theorising arose during the doctoral research process in 2024, as part of the awakening to the meta-level research approach this dissertation adopted, as the methodology chapter (2.5) describes. This section depicts and compares these three approaches and, in Section 5.3, distils underlying field assumptions in the form of key characteristics of each approach. To remind, field assumptions concern meta-level foundational beliefs “about a specific subject matter that are shared across different theoretical schools” in a particular paradigm or “across paradigms and disciplines” (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, pp. 55, 70).

In logotherapy, the motivational impetus of a mature adult is the ‘will to meaning’ and the “the final goal of human life” is meaning fulfilment – not happiness, self-

actualisation, flourishing, success, or well-being; yet, these may emerge as side-effects of meaning fulfilment (Frankl 1966a, p. 99; 2010/1960 pp. 95–96). Originally, Frankl proposed that the psychodynamic approach was concerned with need satisfaction, while humanistic psychology, especially as Maslow presented, introduced a new view of man, concerned with “self-actualization and the realization” of one’s “potentialities” (Frankl 1990, p. 63). Frankl argued that if the aim is to understand the human being, reality, and human behaviour holistically, ‘need satisfaction’ and ‘self-actualization’ are to be complemented with ‘meaning fulfilment’. For Frankl, these three meta-level motivational viewpoints represent, what an individual must, can, or ought to do. Then, the ‘must’ relates to need satisfaction – a category of necessities in the sense of man’s being determined by instinctual drives and hereditary, as well as conditioned by environmental factors and social circumstances. The ‘can’ is linked to self-actualisation, a category of personal potentialities that man is able to fulfil. In turn, the ‘ought’, communicates with meaning fulfilment, where subjective existence is complemented by its objective counterpart, the category of meaning and values. (Frankl 1990, p. 63).

Frankl developed his classification as an alternative to Freud’s psychoanalysis, Watson’s and Skinner’s behaviourism, and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Psychoanalysis, with psychodynamic psychology based on it, is built on the idea of the gratification of drives or the satisfaction of basic needs or instincts (e.g. hunger, aggression), the process of which discharges tension and restores a balanced state (Frankl 1966a, p. 97;<sup>54</sup>). Instincts are considered the basic biological drives that – while having a somatic source, create a psychological effect – must be satisfied to maintain psychological and physical equilibrium (Frankl 2010/1960, p. 93;<sup>55</sup>). In behaviourism or behaviour analysis, the emphasis is on (empirically) observable facts, interaction between behaviour and environment, such as stimulus-response relationships, and learning rather than subjective processes of the human mind concerning feelings and motives, for example (Frankl 2004, p. 3–4;<sup>56</sup>). Psychodynamic and behaviourist approaches cherish the ideal of natural science. To this end, Freud distinguished psychology from problems of ethics and philosophy, while (classical) behaviourism ruled out the mind, that is, the psyche. (Fromm 1984, p. 15;<sup>57</sup>).

Like Frankl, Maslow, the pioneer of humanistic and transhumanistic psychology (Maslow 1996, p. 98), developed his hierarchy of needs partly as a reaction to the determinism inherent in psychoanalysis and behaviourism (Hoffman 1996, p.

<sup>54</sup> <https://dictionary.apa.org/satisfaction-of-instincts>

<sup>55</sup> <https://dictionary.apa.org/instinct>, <https://dictionary.apa.org/drive>

<sup>56</sup> <https://dictionary.apa.org/behaviorism>, <https://dictionary.apa.org/behavior-analysis>

<sup>57</sup> <https://dictionary.apa.org/behaviorism>

205;<sup>58</sup>). Importantly, Maslow (1996, pp. 89–90, 93) distinguished between deficiency-needs and being-needs. The four lower levels of the need hierarchy can be characterised as deficiency-needs created by a lack of a substance or a state required for well-being, as well as striving to balance this physiological or psychological deficit through need satisfaction<sup>59</sup>. The being-need (i.e. meta-need, B-need, growth need; Hoffman 1996, p. 204) concerns the top of the need hierarchy operating at the level of self-actualisation and transcendence, indicating man’s need for B-values (ibid., p. 206;<sup>60</sup>). Maslow (1996, p. 93; spelling as in the original) states that

the Being-values obviously are not Deficiency-needs. They are *metaneeds*, and they have a different quality. What I am describing now, is growth motivation, and *growth-needs* are quite different from Deficiency-needs. For one thing, you never get bored with growth. Never. This is in direct contrast to the [four] basic needs [Hoffman 1996, p. 203], which can definitively become satiated.

Besides being-values and -needs and deficit-values and -needs, Maslow distinguishes between being-world and deficit-world, among others. Specifically, being-values refer to “intrinsic and ultimate human values, such as truth, beauty, and justice”, which “are the objects of our metaneeds”. (Hoffman 1996, p. 204–205). When referring to being-values or being-needs, Maslow does not employ the term ‘satisfaction’, but actualisation, realisation, or fulfilment. Similarly, to draw attention to the different motivational quality of being- or meta-needs, instead of using the term ‘need’, he speaks of drives (in the sense of motivating an activity), yearning, capacities, and potentialities, when explaining them. (Maslow 1996, pp. 26–28; Hoffman 1996, p. 206<sup>61</sup>). Yet, it seems that being-needs, being-values, and their connection to human behaviour have received scant attention from psychologists and organisational scholars. While Maslow’s need hierarchy has been widely criticised, within the management and leadership literature, his influence remains substantial, for example, in the transformational leadership theory<sup>62</sup> and the adoption of the needs-based thinking (Burrell & Morgan 2019/1979, pp. 144–145).

<sup>58</sup> <https://dictionary.apa.org/maslows-motivational-hierarchy>

<sup>59</sup> <https://dictionary.apa.org/deficiency-need>; <https://dictionary.apa.org/deficiency-motivation>

<sup>60</sup> <https://dictionary.apa.org/metamotivation>

<sup>61</sup> <https://dictionary.apa.org/self-actualization>

<sup>62</sup> Introduced by James Burns (1979) and refined by Bernard Bass (1985), transformational leadership still dominates leadership research (Zhu et al. 2019, p. 225; Meuser et al. 2016, p. 1385). Maslow, among others, influenced Burns (Burns 1979, p. 79, 117; Bass 1999, p. 12).

Several need theories have emerged since Maslow, often to complement or revise the hierarchy of needs. Among the most well-known for organisational scholars are McClelland's acquired needs theory, Alderfer's ERG theory (existence, relatedness, growth), Herzberg's two-factor theory, and McGregor's theory X and Y. Along the lines of Maslow, Ryan and Deci's (2017, p. 10) self-determination theory (SDT) differentiates between basic physiological needs and basic psychological needs that "must be satisfied". Specifically, they define needs "*as nutrients that are essential for growth, integrity, and well-being*" (ibid., italics in the original). Accordingly, SDT focuses "on wellness and flourishing, and the conditions that support (or thwart) them" (Ryan & Deci 2017, p. 3). From the viewpoint of logotherapy, what is noteworthy about need theories is that, in emphasising their empirical foundation, they aim for a measurable mechanism of deprivation and satisfaction (Ryan & Deci 2017, p. 10) and are fundamentally concerned with how satisfaction affects desire/need and how need/desire influences satisfaction (Alderfer 1977, p. 660). Although need theories consider man as a self-determining entity, they study this entity within a mechanistic-deterministic framework. The locus of attention is the individual self – her needs and desires.

Instead of realisation, actualisation, or fulfillment of the *self*, 'meaning fulfilment' shifts the focus to actualising *values* and, through value-realisation, fulfilling the *meaning*. In essence, 'meaning fulfilment' suggests meaningfulness is deeply intertwined with responsibility and man's value-ethical apprehension (Frankl 2019, p. 174). Then, instead of highlighting what an individual 'must' (need satisfaction) or 'can' (self-actualisation) do in a specific situation, 'meaning fulfilment' draws attention to what one 'ought' to do – even though one's behaviour is simultaneously affected by emotional states, physical needs, other people's expectations, work team atmosphere, etc. (Frankl 1990, p. 63). In 1960, in the *Journal of Existential Psychiatry*, Frankl aptly summarised his criticism on need satisfaction and self-actualisation (Frankl 2010/1960, p 103):

those theories of man which are circumscribed by the individual himself, whether based upon the reduction of his tension as in homeostasis theory, or the fulfillment of the greatest number of immanent possibilities — as in self-actualization — when weighed, are found wanting. It is the contention of the author that an adequate view of man can only be properly formulated when it goes beyond homeostasis, beyond self-actualization, even beyond man himself to that transcendent sphere of human existence in which man chooses what he will do and what he will be in the midst of an objective world of meanings and values.

In summary, need satisfaction, self-actualisation, and meaning fulfilment are motivational concepts that, from a meta-level perspective, involve three

complementary dimensions of internal motivation; the must, can, and ought. Like meaningfulness, motivation is a phenomenon that manifests itself in the individual's subjective experience (Morris, Grehl, Rutter, Mehta & Westwater 2022, p. 1801). Instead of studying what motivates humans, i.e. the 'what of motivation', the meta-level exploration directs attention to the 'how of motivation'. In other words, it highlights the different dynamic processes of need satisfaction, self-actualisation, and meaning fulfilment, which call for an understanding of the differences between the categories of necessities, potentialities, and meaning potentials, as logotherapy suggests. This dissertation argues that the meta-level how-based view of human motivation extends understanding of the traditional why-based view of motivation.

## 5.2 Dialectical interrogation of meaningful work paradoxes

To expose underlying assumptions and advance research on meaningful work, this section conducts the dialectical interrogation between logotherapy and the five fundamental paradoxes of meaningful work (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019). These paradoxes concern meaningfulness in relation to (1) need satisfaction, (2) 'self' and 'other', (3) subjective assessment and objective context, (4) (personal) finding and (managerial) control, and (5) temporality. Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. argue that these paradoxes are "non-resolvable" "when framed within existing thinking" (ibid., p. 489). Yet, when explored through the lens of logotherapy, these paradoxes find a theoretical explanation.

### 5.2.1 Paradox 1: meaningfulness and need-satisfaction

Paradox 1: "[i]ndividuals have an innate drive to seek out meaningful work to satisfy their inner needs, yet this same drive can push them to harmful excesses" (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 489). The first assertion equates the search for meaning with a need or drive necessitating satisfaction. The paradox arises from the fact that the "inner drive" to seek meaningful work can lead to equilibrium and positive effects in general, or equally to detrimental consequences for the individual, such as when one experiences "too much meaning". Hence, the search for meaningful work may draw "the individual into behaviours that may run counter to their ultimate human interests". (ibid., pp. 486, 489).

While Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. (2019, pp. 482, 489; see also Lips-Wiersma & Morris 2009, p. 492) support the idea of the 'will to meaning' as central to human motivation, they frame the concept along the traditional motivational psychological theories aiming for inner balance and need satisfaction (homeostatic principle). From the logotherapy perspective, the acts of satisfaction and fulfilment represent different

modes of existence – psychological and noological. Moreover, in the logothetic context, the ‘will’ and the ‘satisfaction’ are incompatible concepts (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 482). Basically, the search for meaning does not generate meaning and meaning-orientation is not a way to satisfy needs or drives (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 119; Lukas 2020a, p. 250).

Theoretically, need satisfaction ignores the noological dimension, the interplay between ontos and logos. Whereas equilibrium is essential for the physical (e.g. blood pressure, metabolism) and psychological (e.g. emotional stability, mental health) dimensions, for the noological dimension, an equilibrium is insufficient: It builds on intentionality and thus seeks direction, which is (ultimately) offered by the objective values and actualised in tasks and encounters in everyday life. Building on phenomenological analysis, Frankl highlights the difference of being driven to and striving for something (Frankl 2014a, p. 26): It is in the nature of instincts and needs that they push us to do something, whereas the demanding quality (Frankl 2011, p. 140) of meanings and (objective) values attract us (Frankl 2010/1964, pp. 77–78). Lukas (2020a, p. 45) states that “[F]or us humans, a balance of inner drives means anything but inner peace and contentment”. On the contrary, it generates a feeling of emptiness – an aimless existence – because when most needs are satisfied, nothing is left to be striven for (ibid.). Gordon W. Allport, who wrote the preface for the U.S. edition of Frankl’s book *Man’s Search for Meaning* in 1959 and is one of the founding figures of personality psychology, highlighted the tensional nature of the human mode of being in 1955 (Frankl 2010/1960, p. 93):

Motivation is regarded as a state of tenseness that leads us to seek equilibrium, rest, adjustment, satisfaction, or homeostasis. From this point of view personality is nothing more than our habitual modes of reducing tension. This formulation falls short of representing the nature of intentional striving. The characteristic feature of such striving is its resistance to equilibrium: tension is maintained rather than reduced.

In other words, from the perspective of logotherapy, man is both pushed and pulled (Figure 15). However, as a motive, the pulling element (values) is considered superior to and more mature than the pushing element (needs, etc.). Importantly, if either is ignored, the wholeness of the human being is disrespected (Lukas & Schönfeld 2019, p. 13).

In logotherapy, life – working life included – is considered a task: a task of responsibly discovering meaning and realising values (Frankl 2014b, p. 117). ‘Meaning fulfilment’ puts the focus on the unique situation and the possibilities it offers to the unique person, whereas the first paradox focuses on the individual’s inner needs and their satisfaction. Whether an individual becomes exhausted from

something she considers meaningful – the issue of having too much meaning – suggests the meaning potential that the situation or the phase of life offers is misunderstood or, for example, that meaningfulness is assessed based on a one-sided value system (Lukas 1984, pp. 24–25).

To illustrate, Mark works as a public relations officer for a book publishing house. He enjoys learning new things, working with non-fiction books and well-known people writing them. For Mark, meaningful work matters, as does career advancement. He associates meaningfulness with positive things, such as successes and the attention and appreciation received from others, especially outside the workplace. Gradually, Mark finds himself in a situation where work takes up the lion's share of his time and energy in life. On the recommendation of a colleague, Mark meets with a logotherapist. With him, Mark discusses, what is good about his job; what he has done well and for what reason; who he would be without his job; what is important to him in life and at work in general, and at this particular phase of life; what is the order of priority of these important things in his current life situation; what Mark thinks life/his job has given him and what he considers life/the job expects from him; what does he feel responsible for, and further, to what; and how this responsibility manifests in his everyday life. The reflection allows Mark to step back and see more widely what matters in his life and surroundings. Instead of asking whether his work is meaningful, Mark begins to ask what the most meaningful choice is in each situation. He aims to act according to his conscience, even when it requires courage or brings difficult emotions. Over time, as a byproduct of these meaning-oriented choices and acts, Mark finds a more balanced relationship with work and work as a part of life.

To summarise, inner needs and drives are something that are subject to man's conscious value assessment and stance-taking. While logotherapy offers a theoretical solution to the paradox, it admits that, in practice, living guided by objective values and a finite conscience is a process of human growth and learning that also naturally includes excesses. The paradox thus appears as an example of a situation that offers an individual an opportunity to mature in terms of better understanding one's personal task in life (will to meaning); in Mark's case, inner growth from a one-sided (pyramidal) value-system to a more diverse (parallel) one (Lukas 1984, pp. 22–26).

## 5.2.2 Paradox 2: self and other

Paradox 2: “[m]eaningfulness arises in the context of self-fulfilment and self-actualization<sup>63</sup>, yet it is dependent on the ‘other’ for its realization” (Bailey, Lips-

<sup>63</sup> Frankl (1966a, p. 99) considers self-actualisation and self-fulfilment equivalent terms.

Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 490). This paradox requires specifying the notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ and their relationship. Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. (ibid.) highlight the same necessity, but end up with a different framing than logotherapy: “If meaningfulness implies going ‘beyond the self’, this raises questions about the nature of the ‘self’ and what lies beyond, the ‘other’, as well as the processes by which meaningfulness arises within this ontological space.” From the logothereotic perspective, this paradox finds an explanation in the concept of self-transcendence.

In this second paradox, the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ represent tensional poles “in the realization of the experience of meaningfulness”. The self relies on the other; it cannot be understood in isolation but is “co-constituted in interaction with others”, with special attention given to recognition. The ‘other’-pole principally refers to other individuals, groups, or collectives. (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, pp. 490–491). Working toward “a desired future self” is triggered by the need to satisfy individuals’ personal motives and provides them “a cognitive bridge”, “a meaning-making mechanism” between the present actual self and the future one (ibid., pp. 485, 490).

In logotherapy, the intentional and transcendent quality of self-transcendence refers to man’s inherent openness to the world and his orientation toward the ought. Most often, Frankl explained self-transcendence in relation to Maslow’s concept of self-actualisation. The key is to comprehend whether one fulfils meaning for his or her own sake or for *its* own sake (Frankl 1966a, p. 100). Frankl argues that self-actualisation like happiness, good conscience, peak-experiences, and success, are side effects of self-transcendence<sup>64</sup> (Frankl 1992/1959, p. 115; Frankl 1966a, p. 98). He used to open this side-effect-assertion by contrasting the search for meaning (will to meaning) with the search for pleasure or happiness. While searching for meaning implies intentionality, pleasure and happiness as inner states of mind cannot be goals for human conduct. Instead, they ensue because they require a reason for their occurrence (Frankl 2010/1972, p. 44; 1966a, p. 98). Thus, the path to happiness, pleasure, or self-actualisation is to strive for the reason<sup>65</sup>, that is, meaning in the world external to man, the pursuit of which may generate positive feelings, make us happy, or give us pleasure. Furthermore, in logotherapy, self-transcendence is

<sup>64</sup> In a lecture at Columbia University, New York, on June 30, 1966, Frankl (2010/1966, pp. 149-150) said: “I do not wish to debase the concept of self-actualization. I am in touch with Abraham Maslow and admire him very much. We both agree that self-actualization is an excellent thing. However, self-actualization is only obtainable to the extent to which a man fulfills the meaning of his life or for that matter, the unique meaning of each unique life situation“. For more detail, see e.g. Frankl 1966a, pp. 98–99; 2014a, p. 18–21).

<sup>65</sup> Philosopher Robert Nozick’s thought experiment on an experience machine (1974, pp. 42–45) highlights the difference between feeling happy and the reason for happiness.

“regarded as the highest level of development of human existence” (Lukas 2020a, p. 47). This argument links Frankl even more closely to Maslow and his hierarchy of needs, in which self-transcendence replaced self-actualisation at the top of the hierarchy in the 1960s<sup>66</sup> (Koltko-Rivera 2006, p. 304).

An important difference between self-actualising and self-transcending people emerges when examining collaboration from both motivational perspectives. Theoretically, the locus of the self-actualising individual is on oneself, e.g. ‘What do I want or do not want?’ or ‘Can I do this?’ Instead, the self-transcending individual focuses on the situation, and reflects ‘What does the situation ask of me?’ and ‘What is the most meaningful act in this situation for all involved?’ When self-transcending individuals cooperate, their cooperation is oriented toward something that can be considered meaningful in itself (ought). In Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al.’s theorising, self-actualisers and self-fulfillers lack an ought – at least theoretically, even though in practice, they could have one; the same holds for the study of pro-social motivation that Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. (2019, p. 490) raise. Referring to Martin Buber, Frankl (2010/1967, p. 125, italics in the original) explains that a “dialogue defeats itself unless I and Thou transcend themselves. ... Speaking *from I to Thou* always *refers to* something, and unless this point of reference [logos] is not included, the dialogue remains a dialogue without logos”. Hence, in logotherapy, meaningful interaction involves three parties: the ‘self,’ the ‘other,’ and the ‘logos’. The ‘other’ corresponds to the ‘other’ as Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. postulate, and ‘logos’ equates to ‘meaning’ as in logotherapy. As for the ‘self’, logotherapy builds on the multidimensional view of man depicted earlier. While man as a psychosocial organism can be regarded as being co-constituted in interaction with others, the core, the (spiritual or human) person incorporating that which is free in man, cannot; instead, it remains intact, even in the case of mental illness. (Biller & de Lourdes Stiegeler 2020, pp. 28, 101, 214).

In summary, the logothereotic view of self-transcendence shifts the focus to understanding subjective experiences in the context of the reasons for experiencing them and points to the fulfilment of meaning for its own sake. Meaning fulfilment – not a sense of meaningfulness, need satisfaction, or self-actualisation – is considered

<sup>66</sup> Koltko-Rivera (2006, p. 304) depicts Maslow’s shift as follows: “After his 1961 paper, Maslow began to think that Being-cognition characterized a different motivational level than self-actualization. At least by October 1966, as shown by his unpublished critique of self-actualization theory (Maslow, 1966), Maslow thought that “self-actualisation is not enough” (p. 31) for a full picture of the optimally functioning human being. Maslow came to clearer sense of what was missing during the following year”. Notably, precisely in 1966, Frankl’s article on self-transcendence was published in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, as well as Maslow’s counterpart to it. Koltko-Rivera’s paper ignores Frankl and logotherapy (Salo 2013, p. 65).

the goal of human conduct. In the case of Mark presented earlier, this could mean that as a self-actualiser, Mark's experience of meaningfulness may depend on the quality of his interactions with authors, how interesting he finds the topic of the book, or whether the publishing house recognises his efforts. In turn, Mark's possible self-transcending work orientation is best evidenced by the fact that he rarely feels guilty or has a bad conscience about the choices he makes at work. His experience of meaningfulness stems from realising the demands of different situations. This might be as simple as agreeing to a spontaneous lunch with an author, even if he initially felt too busy.

### 5.2.3 Paradox 3: subjective assessment and objective context

Paradox 3: “[m]eaningfulness is a subjective assessment, yet it is also grounded in an external, objective context that shapes and legitimizes what may be considered meaningful by the individual” (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 491). This assertion addresses the criteria for meaningful work. The paradox arises from the fact that these criteria stem from both subjective and objective contexts. Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. outline that when work is considered meaningful, this is an “interplay between individuals’ perceptions of the societal worthiness and the subjective meaningfulness of their work”. The criteria for the objective, external context originate from political theory, social constructivist accounts, or the worthiness of work captured by “moral and institutional imperatives” or “social norms and values”. Likewise, the criteria for subjectively assessing meaningfulness are treated as an issue of being governed by the institutional, societal, or cultural context, and whether one’s work “has wider value beyond the self”. (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, pp. 483, 492–93).

The line of reasoning suggested by Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. for the objective context of meaningfulness builds on the objective facticity of the social world that Berger and Luckmann (1991/1966, p. 30) proposed in their seminal book on the social construction of reality. From the logothery perspective, this does not provide an objective foundation for something to be considered meaningful since, for example, social and cultural values vary. Likewise, the subjective assessment pole of the paradox leaves open, “whether or why” an individual “may be right or wrong to experience and perceive” something as meaningful (Michaelson 2021, p. 421). Finally, the criteria for the objective and subjective poles of meaningfulness suggested by Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. are closely linked to values and ethics. While pointing to the importance of “moral anchors” (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 483), the authors, however, do not address the individual’s relationship to the contested issue of moral knowledge (Pritchard 2018, p. 139) or conscious

relationship to values (DuBois 1993, p. 65). Logotherapy, in turn, builds on explicit assumptions about value structures surrounding the human being, how objective values lend themselves to human perception, and the role of the conscience in ‘meaning-discovering’, for example.

To summarise, in logotherapy, the subjective and objective poles of meaningfulness do not contradict; rather, the objective values serve as the criteria for subjective evaluation. Thus, social and cultural context, autonomy of work, organisational purpose, political propaganda, “shifting discursive context”, or subjective preferences (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 493) do not form criteria for meaningfulness. Instead, they are issues or elements that call for conscious evaluation and stance-taking, and, furthermore, can only be aligned with or non-aligned with the normative criteria base that the objective values offer. For Mark, before meeting the logotherapist, meaningfulness meant being noticed and appreciated in and through his work. In other words, his criteria for meaningfulness stemmed from the combination of subjective preferences and the surrounding society or culture. These things still matter to Mark, but from the perspective of experiencing meaningfulness, his focus has shifted. He now practices connecting with his inner, intuitive mode of knowing (conscience), and relies on it in important decision-making situations. Mark does not contemplate whether conscience provides an objective criterion for meaningfulness. Instead, he recognizes a genuine, sincere pull toward truthfulness that resonates with him.

#### 5.2.4 Paradox 4: personal finding and managerial control

Paradox 4: “[m]eaningfulness is subjectively ‘found’ (Thompson and Janigian, 1988) and is not amenable to managerial control, yet it is also normatively regulated” (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 493). This paradox addresses meaningfulness in the organisational context and highlights the role of the organisation’s normative control in the employee’s subjective and personal meaning-making process (ibid., pp. 493–494). In contrast, the logothereotic five-step process of meaning fulfilment is similar, regardless of context, and, in each situation, there is a meaning to be found. External physical and social realities (e.g. organisations) affect value-realisation; however, that which one can consider objectively or normatively meaningful does not originate from social worth, organisational culture, or one’s work tasks – from subjective or social accounts of meaningfulness, as Michaelson puts it (2021). Nor is managerial control considered normative in the logothereotic context, but rather, a mode of social norm. Thus, although the criteria for meaningfulness are beyond the reach of organisations and managers, from the logotherapy perspective, these can facilitate individuals’ ‘meaning fulfilment’ directly and indirectly, for example, by

improving working conditions, providing training opportunities, and involving employees in strategy work. In Mark's case, this might mean his manager keeps his PR workload reasonable, allows him flexible working hours, offers him an electric company car, and makes time for shared reflection when needed.

From a logothoretic viewpoint, this paradox contains a conceptual incongruence that prevails in the research area of meaningful work more broadly. Consistent with logotherapy, Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. (2019, p. 493) formulate that “meaningfulness is subjectively ‘found’”. However, they further sketch meaning-finding (meaning-discovering) through expressions of meaning-making (process incorporating sensemaking and sensegiving) and meaningfulness construction. (ibid., pp. 493–495.) Within logotherapy, the words ‘finding’ and ‘discovering’ are used synonymously, when referring to detecting or perceiving meaning potentials in the possible, that is, the third step of the meaning fulfilment process (Figure 15, Section 4.5.2). Additionally, sensemaking, meaning-making, and meaning construction lack a conscious connection to axiology and an understanding of different kinds of meanings (meaning categories), and are based on cognitive reasoning. Within logotherapy, these activities are considered phenomena of the psychosocial dimension. Conceptually, when meaningfulness is something to be constructed, made, or invented, one assigns value to things instead of discovering or finding an existing value (Dubois 1993, p. 41). In this case, the same flaw concerns Thompson and Janigian's (1988, pp. 260–261, 263, 275) conceptualisations of ‘meaning finding’ and ‘found meaning’, even though the authors claim to be building on Frankl. In fact, the debate over whether meaning is something found or constructed, discovered or invented, originates in the research area of meaningful life. There, one effort to overcome this contradiction is Reker and Wong's (2012, p. 437) contextual model of personal meaning in life, which builds on Frankl, social constructionism, and positive psychology (see more in 6.1.3).

### 5.2.5 Paradox 5: meaningfulness and temporality

Paradox 5: “[m]eaningfulness is a pervasive sense of the value of one's work, yet it is also linked with spatial, temporal, and material contexts which may be temporary, partial, or episodic” (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 495). This paradox highlights the contradiction that an individual's sense of meaningfulness is simultaneously sustained and transitory. Specifically, Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. ponder “how frequently and how intensely the individual needs to find their work meaningful for it to be deemed ‘meaningful work’” and how the sense of meaningfulness “is enmeshed in a wider temporal landscape”, for example, in relation to “a desired future self” (ibid.). An alternative perspective on this paradox

opens, if the poles are considered to refer to different time conceptions and categories of meaning. In fact, from the perspective of logotherapy, the coexistence of a sustained and transitory sense of meaningfulness, along with the variations in the intensity of this sense, is natural.

The four interconnected logotherapeutic categories of meaning (Section 4.3.2) relate to various temporal lengths. Hence, the transitory sense of meaningfulness concerns the separate meanings of the moment, from which also follows the episodic nature of this feeling. The sustained sense of meaningfulness arises from the individual reflecting (whenever necessary and in the sense of what is the individual's take on these) the three other categories of meaning (i.e. overall meaning of one's life, meaning in life, and ultimate meaning). Basically, the idea of "generating and sustaining a sense of meaningfulness" (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 495) is foreign to logotherapy, as meaning is fulfilled for its own sake, not to sustain a sense of meaningfulness (cf. footnote 65 on Nozick). By considering a sense of meaningfulness as a goal to be attained, this paradox subscribes to the assumption that humans are driven by a Freudian pleasure principle. Frankl equated the pursuit of pleasure with the pursuit of happiness. He repeatedly emphasised they are byproducts of meaning fulfilment, i.e. behaviour based on the will to meaning. (Frankl 1966a, p. 98; Salo 2013, pp. 61, 69–73). Frankl (1966a, p. 98) highlighted that "[O]nly if one's original concern with meaning fulfilment is frustrated, is one either content with power, or intent on pleasure". From the perspective of the logotherapeutic concept of time, meaningfulness as a pervasive sense of the value of one's work relates to man's inner time conception, whereas meaningfulness as temporary, partial, or episodic is more associated with the linear one.

In summary, logotherapy and the five paradoxes of meaningful work are based on different assumptions about human motivation and the reality of meaning and values. The sense of meaningfulness is thus connected to different ontological sources and different ways of knowing that may affect, for example, the intensity of the feeling. To exemplify, in logotherapy, intentional emotions relate to man's conscious relationship to values, whereas feelings and moods are value-blind phenomena of the psychosocial dimension (DuBois 1993, pp. 60–61; Frankl 2018, pp. 31–32). Returning to Mark's case, having discussed with the logotherapist, Mark finds himself facing work situations and challenges with greater flexibility. He uses his sense of meaningfulness as an embodied mode of knowing that guides him in finding solutions in different situations. Awareness of what is important in work, in his current phase of life, and, in life more broadly, is Mark's bedrock. From this grounding, Mark can look at the shifting emotions and moods that arise with more calm.

### 5.3 Discussion and theoretical contributions

This section first proposes the key characteristics of the three meta-motivational approaches (Table 2) and, based on the dialectical interrogation in Section 5.2, exposes field assumptions of the research area of ‘meaningful work’ (Table 3). The discussion then extends to work motivation, the view of human nature within psychological science, and the role of ethics in psychological research. The section concludes with a meta-level future research agenda for the research area of ‘meaningful work’. This agenda will likely also be of interest to ‘meaningful life’ researchers.

Based on the dialectical interrogation between logotherapy and the five paradoxes of meaningful work, it can be concluded that the meta-motivational approaches of need satisfaction and self-actualisation still dominate the apprehension of human motivation in the research area of meaningful work. The third approach to man’s internal motivation that Frankl suggested, the ‘meaning fulfilment’, building on the concept of ‘will to meaning’, emerges as a new way of seeing the meta-level human motivation in the research area of meaningful work. **Table 2** summarises the key characteristics of the meta-level motivational approaches of need-satisfaction, self-actualisation, and meaning fulfilment.

Meaning fulfilment does not supersede need satisfaction or self-actualisation; they are complementary. Specifically, Frankl’s categories of necessities, potentialities, and meaning potentials refer to qualitatively different aspects of meta-level human motivation, which can be captured by the terms ‘must’, ‘can’, and ‘ought’, that is, ‘being determined and conditioned’, ‘being capable’, and ‘being responsible’ (Table 2). As meta-level motivational approaches, need satisfaction and self-actualisation concern the psychosocial and physical modes of being, whereas meaning fulfilment prioritises the noological one. To understand human conduct holistically, all modes of being and motivational aspects are relevant. For example, in his criticism of self-actualisation, Frankl (2010/1960, p. 99; 1966a, p. 102) targets the self-focus of Maslow’s concept and the disregarding of otherness, the objectiveness of the object, not being-needs or being-values per se. For Frankl, appointing self-actualisation as man’s ultimate motive meant devaluating “the world and its objects to mere means to an end” since self-actualisation, like happiness, “is an effect and cannot be the object of intention” (DuBois 1993, p. 64; Frankl 2010/1960, p. 99). The ‘in-itself-valuable’ perspective of meaning fulfilment orients the individual’s attention to the possibilities of a specific situation (self-transcendence and meaning potentials), not to oneself and questions like whether I am enough or capable of something (Lukas 2020a, p. 47).

**Table 2.** Key characteristics of the three meta-level motivational approaches.

META-MOTIVATIONAL APPROACH	NEED-SATISFACTION	SELF-ACTUALISATION	MEANING FULFILMENT
FRANKL'S CATEGORIES	I must (necessities)	I can (potentialities in self)	I ought (meaning potentials in world)
EXPLANATION	Man is determined by instinctual drives & hereditary & conditioned by environmental factors & social conditions*	Focus on personal potentialities that man is capable of actualising; originally yearning for B-values	Focus on man's orientation toward the in-itself-valuable & freedom to choose responsibility
EQUIVALENT EXPRESSION	Being determined & conditioned	Being capable	Being responsible
ORIGIN OF THE APPROACH	Freud's psychoanalysis	Maslow's need hierarchy	Frankl's logotherapy
KEY QUESTION	What do I want or need?	What am I capable of?	What does life ask of me?
GOAL	Physical and psychological equilibrium	Well-being	Harmony between subjective being & objective meaning
FOCUS	Self	Self → social & natural worlds	Social & natural worlds ← self ← objective world of meaning & values
VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE	Two-dimensional: physical & psycho-social	Two-dimensional: physical & psycho-social	Three-dimensional: physical, psycho-social & noological

\*Conditioned originates from (classical) behaviourism.

Based on the dialectical interrogation in Section 5.2, the five paradoxes of meaningful work point to a reductionist or “truncated understanding of the human being at work”, as Lips-Wiersma and Wright put it (2012, p. 657, referring to Driscoll & Wiebe, 2007). Briefly and simplifying, to empirically study human motivation and behaviour in the work context, the human being is currently framed as a two-dimensional physical and psychosocial being, whose main concern is to satisfy their physical and psychological needs to reach an inner equilibrium and well-being, together with value-blindly actualising and fulfilling personal potentialities – while also being determined as a psychophysical organism and conditioned by the external world and social circumstances. The research area of meaningful work seemingly conducts research based on a meta-theoretically unspecified view of human nature and takes for granted that man assigns values to things.

Traditionally, psychology has strongly influenced the view of human nature within organisational science, even to the extent that organisational scholars may have simply imported psychological concepts into organisational (or work) settings without paying attention to their original nomological networks. Much of the meaningful work research has developed from a psychological viewpoint, and tends to employ concepts such as identity, self, and the whole person to explain the human being. With respect to these notions, little research has emerged in the research area of meaningful work. A positive sign is that scholars call for research on different conceptions of the self (Madden & Bailey 2019, p. 157; Rosso et al. 2010, p. 99).

When exploring the development of work motivation research and advances in psychological science more broadly, the current situation outlined above appears as a logical result. In the work context, motivation has been studied since the 1930s with the aim of predicting workers' behaviour by understanding the relationships among job satisfaction, job performance, and job attitudes, for example. While the early work built on the 'economic man' assumptions adopted in political economy and subsequently economics-derived Taylorism, from the 1940s onwards, through the emergence of humanistic psychology with Maslow, the "higher level psychological needs for recognition, achievement, self-actualisation [sic], etc." entered the scene, and put forward a "view of man as a social being motivated by affective needs". (Burrell & Morgan 2019/1979, pp. 143–145). However, researchers came to understand that work motivation and behaviour could not be explained by these two approaches, which were based on behaviourism and humanistic psychology.

Since 1960s, inspired by the cognitive approach to psychology, research emphasis shifted into studying work motivation through cognitive models, emphasising inner mental states and processes like learning, memory, reasoning, and perception. Under the influence of the cognitive approach, especially 'expectancy theory', which assumes humans are pleasure maximisers and pain minimisers, a refined version of the 'economic man', the "rational, calculating, hedonistic" human, entered the focus of motivation research, and has since strengthened its position with the development of neuropsychology, cognitive neuroscience, and neurobiology (Burrell & Morgan 2019/1979, pp. 143–146; McKenna 2012, p. 5; Morris et al. 2022, p. 1801). To illustrate, a recent review in *Psychological Medicine* on what motivates humans is based on the assumption that "[I]ntrinsically motivated behaviours are computationally similar to extrinsically motivated behaviours, in that they strive to maximize reward value and minimize punishment" (Morris et al. 2022, p. 1801). Thus, with the cognitive approach, the "complex psychological man" was again slotted "into the framework of a deterministic theory of work behaviour" (Burrell & Morgan 2019/1979, p. 146). Within psychology, this view of human nature has since been broadened by positive psychology, which emerged alongside the cognitive

approach in the late 1990s, and emphasises studying strengths and emotion-focused, self-based, and coping approaches, for example (Snyder & Lopez 2002, pp. xi–xiii). However, according to Wong (2014, p. 153),

most positive psychologists do not realize that to make the pursuit of happiness and well-being one's basic life orientation seems at odds with the basic orientation of meaning and self-transcendence. Positive psychology models of well-being have a limited view of meaning, which actually hinders a fuller understanding of the pervasive role of meaning in human affairs.

Against this background, it is no wonder that need satisfaction and self-actualisation, whether in the more sophisticated form of Ryan and Deci's SDT or in earlier need theories, emerge as the underlying dynamics of human motivation in analysing the five paradoxes of meaningful work.

To advance research on meaningful work, **Table 3** condenses the meta-level assumptions of meaningful work and logotherapy, identified through the dialectical interrogation in Section 5.2, into seven key aspects.

What is most perplexing in the view of human nature cherished in mainstream research on meaningful work is the role of free will. The prevailing research approach in meaningful work, as in positive psychology, seemingly operates within “a fundamentally incoherent intellectual position”, where humans are active and self-directed entities, yet the proper mode of generating knowledge about them is based on “the objectivist methods of traditional science” (Gantt & Thayne 2014, pp. 194–195; see also Martela & Steger 2016, p. 532). A prime example is (again) offered by the job characteristic theory. The model assumes a deterministic view of human nature and treats the social world as natural, in which relationships can be identified, studied, and measured (Burrell & Morgan 1979, pp. 7, 26). Likewise, mainstream psychology examines the human person and human conduct within a mechanistic-deterministic framework originating in classical physics (Gantt & Thayne 2014, p. 194; Kallio-Tamminen 2012, p. 15). In this context, man's subjective reality (consciousness, experience) is understood as some kind of a byproduct of physiological processes (Kallio-Tamminen 2012, p. 21). When psychic and noetic phenomena are derived from somatic ones, from the logothoretic perspective, human free will and moral responsibility remain illusions (*ibid.*, pp. 82–83) and, naturally, meaningfulness is stripped from normative elements. Yet, the problem of free will and responsibility can also be circumvented, if free will is limited to actions and the philosophical basis is considered irrelevant, as, for example, Baumeister (2008) (Section 4.4.3) and the pragmatists do.

**Table 3.** Key differences in field assumptions between ‘logotherapy’ and ‘meaningful work’.

Key differences in ASSUMPTIONS	LOGOTHERY	MEANINGFUL WORK
<b>View of human nature</b>	Three-dimensional view of man; basic human capacities of self-detachment & self-transcendence	Meta-theoretically not specified, but builds on the idea of a two-dimensional view of man
<b>Goal of human life &amp; dynamics</b>	Meaning fulfilment based on noodynamic principle	Need satisfaction & self-actualisation* based on homeostatic principle
<b>Meaning</b>	Matter of reality objective to man; meaning is discovered, intuitively known, & experiential	Matter of subjective & social realities; meaning is constructed, reasoned, & subject to cognition
<b>Values</b>	Differentiates between objective values, social & cultural values, subjective valuations. Highlights one’s conscious relationship to values and orientation toward objective values.	Emphasis on subjective valuations. Societal, cultural, & organisational values acknowledged. Since values are mind-dependent, man assigns values to things.
<b>Ethics &amp; morality</b>	Phenomenological ethics, where meaningfulness is intertwined with one’s value-ethical apprehension embodied by the conscience	Meaningfulness is assumed a psychological & social phenomenon unrelated to frameworks of normative ethics**
<b>Tension</b>	Between what is and what <i>ought</i> to be; intentionality establishing a tensional relationship between the subject and object	Between what is and what one <i>wants</i> to be; between different areas of life
<b>Criteria for meaningfulness</b>	Individual’s evaluation against objective values guided by the conscience	Individual’s evaluation against subjective valuations and/or societal worthiness and/or socio-cultural values**

\* Maslow’s original delineation that self-actualisation is not about seeking an equilibrium has been obscured.

\*\* Michaelson’s (2021) conceptual paper on normative meaning of meaningful work was the first to highlight normative aspects of meaningfulness in the research area of meaningful work and address criteria for meaningfulness, suggesting an objective or intersubjective foundation. He also highlights that, for most meaningful work scholars, ‘objective’ refers to “the external, objective context that shapes and legitimizes what may be considered meaningful by the individual (Bailey et al. 2018a, p. 11)” (2021, p. 421). Unlike logotherapy, ‘objective’ thus stems from social reality.

Logotherapy builds on phenomenological ethics<sup>67</sup> (Table 3), a movement in normative ethics and interested in the nature of the human lifeworld and its relationship to external reality. For Frankl, moral judgements (about what to do in a specific situation) are based on a priori knowledge of an ethical hierarchy of values embodied by human conscience. Specifically, the conscience ensures that decisions are made responsibly (Frankl 2014b, p. 60). Frankl argues that if humans ignore the intuitive knowledge the conscience offers on value-ethical facts, people are in danger of either wanting “only that which others are doing”, that is, conformism, or “they do only that which others want – want from them – and then we have totalitarianism” (Frankl 2004, p. 5; 2014b, 60). This view was timely not only before and during the WWII, but today.

Seemingly, mainstream psychology, along with the research on meaningful work in its wake, continues to uphold Freud’s legacy by pursuing the ideal of natural science and/or cherishing a view of man that omits the spheres of philosophy and ethics. If, however, human conduct is grounded in man’s limited free will and responsibility, as Frankl’s meaning fulfilment suggests, it cannot be explained with the closed mechanism of need satisfaction necessitating inner balance, or the self-actualisation focusing on potentialities of the self, or with scientific empirical methods only. For example, while Ryan and Deci’s self-determination theory has congruence with logotherapy in its emphasis on relatedness, efficacy, and autonomy, their theory lacks the normative sphere of ethics, the ought (see Wong 2014, pp. 167–168).

Essentially, psychology is an empirical science that studies the mind and behaviour<sup>68</sup>. It has a wide influence across disciplines, including organisational science, sociology, economics, and individual research areas, such as meaningful life and meaningful work. Besides Frankl, for example DuBois (1993, p. 55), Fromm (1984, p. 9), and more recently, Gantt and Thayne (2014, pp. 188–190, 194–196), and Smedslund (2016, p. 185) have argued – albeit on different grounds – that psychology cannot only be an empirical science. To illustrate, Fromm maintained in 1947 that, in attempting to make psychology a natural science, psychoanalysis erred by distinguishing psychology from the problems of philosophy and ethics (Fromm 1984, p. 15). DuBois claims that if psychology strives to constitute “as complete a picture of human being as possible”, it must be a kind of “hybrid science” that not only appreciates scientific inquiry but also draws on methods of philosophy (DuBois 1993, pp. 55, 68). Such a hybrid approach enables the holistic or humanised view Frankl called for (Frankl, 2014a, p. 3). In the same spirit as above, Churchill and

<sup>67</sup> [https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:fenomenologinen\\_etiikka](https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:fenomenologinen_etiikka)

<sup>68</sup> <https://dictionary.apa.org/psychology>

Fisher-Smith (2022, italics in the original) offer sharp criticism of the methods still used in mainstream psychological research:

What are our methods really getting at when they are used to grasp at the meaning of human behavior and motivation? ... emphasis on hypothesized causal relationships means that we are always *explaining* behavior in light of such presumed *causes*. In other words, we are always framing (and thus predisposing) human behavior and motivation to be revealed as an effect of an underlying cause within the situation or environment. [p. 474] ... My “future self” is not determined by my present self, any more than my present self is determined by my past acts. There is no linear determinism in psychological life. So why do we succumb to such explanations? [p. 488] ... What is rarely considered in mainstream psychology (particularly from the established methodological perspective) is an emphasis on *understanding* behavior through how individuals make choices in the face of their circumstances, which would help us grasp the meaningful motivational contexts of their behavior. In short, persons are rarely viewed as agents within their contexts and circumstances even when they have a role to play in crafting the meanings that undergird their behaviors and motivations. If we want to *understand* the meanings and intentionalities behind behavior and human motivation, we need an alternative paradigm. [p. 474].

Frankl’s explicit goal in developing logotherapy was to combine the fields of psychology and philosophy, thereby helping individuals holistically (Frankl 2000, p. 59). Unlike a reductionist view, in a holistic approach, like Frankl’s dimensional ontology or his theory and therapy of mental disorders (Frankl 2024), the whole comes before its parts, and the characteristics and modes of the parts are studied from the perspective of the whole and the laws governing it (Kallio-Tamminen 2012, p. 73). Today, psychology appears as a host of special sciences like moral psychology, health psychology, clinical neuropsychology, and cognitive psychology, each generating accurate knowledge about man and/or behaviour, however, approaching the research subject from a partial view instead of a holistic one (Niiniluoto & Saarinen 2002, p. 32). While special sciences have tremendously increased knowledge about humans, their minds and behaviour, basically, no empirical psychological model suffices to explain questions inherently related to meaningfulness: the human mode of being, the meaning of human existence, and an individual’s worldview, which is a deeply personal matter but also involves far-reaching political significance (DuBois 1993, p. 54; Harva 1980, p. 3).

As meaningful living and working are increasingly important for modern people, this dissertation asks, should psychology, and particularly the researchers studying

‘meaning in life’, take seriously Frankl’s challenge of humanisation and being responsible, where values, an individual’s value-ethical apprehension, and one’s conscious choice to strive for truthfulness form the foundation of the experience of meaningfulness? This contemplation is also fundamental from the perspective of the current planetary ecological crisis, which calls for major transformation in how humans behave (IPBES 2022, pp. 2, 4, 22).

### Future meta-level research agenda for meaningful work

This dissertation emphasises the meta-level study of the phenomenon and experience of meaningfulness and, by extension, a meta-level future research agenda. Yet, logotherapy also offers opportunities for scrutinising individual concepts used in the research area of meaningful work, such as the ‘self’, ‘self-actualization’, ‘self-transcendence’, ‘meaning construction’, ‘meaning-making’, ‘sensemaking’, ‘tensionality’, and ‘value’. These were presented in Section 1.2.4, when justifying the need for a logothoretic study of meaningfulness; in Section 3.1, when reviewing the meaningful work literature; and in Section 5.2, on the five paradoxes of meaningful work. In the future, building on the theorising of logotherapy in Chapter 4, scholars can engage in promoting empirical research on meaningfulness based on particular logothoretic constructs, for example, the four meaning categories, i.e. meaning of the moment, meaning in life, overall meaning of one’s life, and ultimate meaning (4.3.1); the distinction between causes and reasons for behaviour, or between moods/feelings and intentional emotions (4.4.3); or the four value categories, i.e. descriptive subjective valuations, descriptive socio-cultural values, prescriptive intersubjective values, and objective values (4.3.2).

Based on the ‘systematic search and review’ of meaningful work literature in Section 3.1, and the dialectical interrogation between logotherapy and the five paradoxes of meaningful work in this chapter, this dissertation proposes three broad meta-level future research priorities for advancing research on the existential facet of the experience of meaningfulness within the research area of meaningful work and, more broadly, in meaningful life. The first concerns the view of human nature, the second concerns the criteria for meaningfulness, and the third concerns the methodology.

- First, if a deeper layer, nature, or dimension of the *human mode of being* or *existence* is existential, how does it differ from a psychological or social mode of being? Further, how do existential needs differ from psychological ones, or ‘existential significance’ from ‘significance’, for example, from Morin’s (1995) definition of ‘significance’ or those within the research area of meaningful life (e.g. George & Park 2014; King & Hicks 2021; Martela & Steger 2016; Schnell 2021). In terms of the view

of human nature, what are the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions about the self and mode(s) of knowing that reach this deeper, existential mode of being raised by meaningful work scholars?

- Second, if a deeper layer or dimension of the experience of *meaningfulness* is existential, what are the criteria by which an individual judges something to be existentially meaningful? Further, on what basis might we be right or wrong in our judgement?
- Third, as an existential experience, how ought the experience of meaningfulness be studied?

Morgan and Smircich (1980, p. 492) highlight that “assumptions about ontology and human nature ... provide the grounds for social theorizing” and that the distinct worldviews or ways of seeing each of these assumptions reflect, imply different grounds for knowledge (ibid., p. 493). In science today, the “guideline” is that ontological questions are only asked after methodological and epistemological decisions (Heiskala 2000, p. 82; DuBois 1993, p. 57). However, shifting attention from the primacy of methods to the primacy of ontological assumptions (and the epistemological assumptions associated with each ontology) is particularly important to consider if one wants to study the human being as a whole and meaningfulness as a deeply human phenomenon, as the recent definitions of meaningful work incorporating the term ‘existential’ convey.

Frankl (2011, p. 146) phrases that “[W]here an intellectual fails, an existential decision is due”, thus suggesting that, ultimately, meaning and meaningfulness are beyond rationality, emotions, or well-being. They are existential matters concerning the human mode of being, meaning of human existence, and man’s will to meaning, as Frankl’s delineation of the term ‘existential’ captures (1.2.3).

## 6 Advancing theorising on meaningfulness

This chapter focuses on advancing the theorising of the phenomenon and existential experience of meaningfulness through logotherapy and is thus guided by the overarching research question. However, the chapter first answers the fourth sub-question: What are the implicit assumptions about meaningfulness in organisational science? Most organisational scholars, especially the large group of researchers that study organisational phenomena from the social constructionist interpretive perspective of social science (Holt & Sandberg 2011, p. 225), operate with meanings and meaningfulness. Except for meaningful work scholars, they are not familiar with meaningfulness as its own field of research, which this dissertation defines as the research areas of ‘meaningful life’, ‘meaningful work’, and ‘logotherapy’. Revealing the implicit assumptions about meanings and meaningfulness in organisational science is important for advancing theorising on meaningfulness (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, pp. 55, 58).

Section 6.1 examines organisational science’s approach to meaningfulness from the perspective of its sociological and psychological roots, as these disciplines exert a strong influence on it. The dialectical interrogation of the two classic books in Section 6.1.1 reveals organisational scholars’ assumptions about meaningfulness as a social phenomenon. These are summarized in Section 6.1.2 by a conceptual framework (Figure 17) and by five field assumptions. Since, as a social phenomenon, the connection of meaningfulness to human motivation and values was considered unclear (6.1.2), Section 6.1.3 examines meaningfulness as a motivational phenomenon within psychology, specifically in the research areas of meaningful life and meaningful work. This dialectical interrogation confirms that in organisational studies and psychology, meaningfulness is associated with human motivation and values, albeit vaguely. The interrogation also highlights that organisational science and psychology approach the phenomenon of meaningfulness in fundamentally different ways: the former as a social, and the latter as a psychic phenomenon. Importantly, both lack an understanding of meaningfulness as a noetic phenomenon.

Sections 6.2–6.4 focus on theorising through philosophical inquiry and phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis. Consequently, Section 6.2 proposes three

complementary conceptual contexts of meanings: the subjective, collective, and value-contexts (Figure 18). Building on this, Section 6.3 advances theorising on meaningfulness by developing a typology of meaningfulness (Figure 19), and thereby extending understanding of meaningfulness in a value-context. The final Section 6.4 proposes a conceptual framework of the experience of meaningfulness as a phenomenological state (Figure 21), thereby outlining a basic structure of the existential experience of meaningfulness.

The theoretical outcomes of this chapter promote research on meaningfulness in all three research areas and respective disciplines: i) within ‘meaningful work’ in organisational science and sociology; ii) within ‘meaningful life’ in psychology and humanities; as well as iii) within ‘logotherapy’ in psychology, sociology, humanities, nursing, and medicine.

## 6.1 The nature of meaningfulness in organisational science

Research on meaningfulness is largely based on empirical investigation of individuals’ subjective experiences. This dissertation observes, that, from a meta-theoretical perspective, disciplines approach the subjective experience of meaningfulness in varying ways, depending on their inherent connection to the kinds of phenomena they study. Social sciences, organisational studies included, strive to understand social phenomena or the social world and consider subjective experiences as embedded in this wider context. Emphasis is put on the study of the subjective meaning underlying behaviour, or rather action, which equals “to behavior plus meaning” (Coulter 1974, p. 135). The discipline of psychology, as the study of mind and behaviour, seeks to understand the subjective experience primarily in relation to the individual’s psychic world or psychic phenomena, and speaks rather of personal meanings or experiences of meaning or meaningfulness. Logotherapy, in turn, emphasises noetic phenomena and is based on an understanding of meaningfulness in a value-context. To explicitly justify theory elaboration of meaningfulness as a noetic phenomenon in Sections 6.2–6.4, in the following, through two dialectical interrogations, implicit assumptions regarding meaningfulness as a social phenomenon (6.1.1 and 6.2.2) and as a motivational phenomenon (6.2.3) are revealed.

### 6.1.1 Sociological roots

Organisations are social entities; associations of people to organise activities with a goal (Daft, Murphy & Willmott 2020, p. 10). Organisational science operates at different levels of analysis, for example, at the individual, group, and organisational

levels, as well as with social and psychic phenomena. Drawing from sociology, organisational science has a long tradition in studying the relationship between subjective meanings and social action and, since the 1970s, of examining ‘experienced meaningfulness’ in the work context (Hackman & Oldham 1975, p. 161). To grasp the organisational scholars’ way of seeing the phenomenon and the experience of meaningfulness, a dialectical interrogation between logothory and research on subjective experiences and subjective meanings is next conducted based on two classic works: Burrell and Morgan’s (2019/1979) book on sociological paradigms and Berger and Luckmann’s (1991/1966) book on social construction of reality, the latter being based on “a phenomenological analysis of the reality of everyday life” (1991/1966, p. 7), that is, exploration of subjective experiences and subjective meanings.

According to Burrell and Morgan’s paradigm taxonomy of organisational research (2019/1979; pp. 6–7, 28, 31–32, 279), the ‘interpretive’<sup>69</sup> and ‘radical humanist’ paradigms are characterised by the following: emphasis on the subject’s subjective experience or consciousness; subjective epistemology; the more or less free will of human beings enabling individual interpretation; the intangible and processual nature (becoming) of the social world; and the treatment of humans as participants and creators of the social world in which they live (unlike the functionalist or positivist view of the observer of action). The intellectual roots of the interpretive and the radical humanist paradigms lie in the work of early German idealists. In articulating their ontological and epistemological foundations, both paradigms owe much to Kant. Most of all, the paradigms are shaped and influenced by the works of Dilthey, Weber, and Husserl, who were all dissatisfied with the positivist approach to science of the time and sought new approaches to allow for the subjective aspects of scientific inquiry. (ibid., pp. 227–228, 230, 234, 279). In their fundamentally distinctive ways, Dilthey, Weber, and Husserl strived to integrate the perspectives of idealism and positivism, “or at least place the cultural [human] sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*)<sup>70</sup> upon a firm foundation in terms of their ‘objective validity’” (ibid., pp. 228–229).

<sup>69</sup> In Sandberg and Holt’s book chapter (2011, pp. 225, 231), the interpretive is renamed as a social constructionist interpretive (SCI) view of social science incorporating interpretive, interpretative, social construction, constructionist, and constructivist research approaches.

<sup>70</sup> Unlike Burrell and Morgan (2019/2017, p. 197), e.g. Makkreel (2021, p. 1) translates Dilthey’s term ‘*Geisteswissenschaften*’ as human sciences, not cultural sciences. For Dilthey, the human sciences, unlike natural sciences, “include both the humanities and the social sciences” (Makkreel 2021, p. 1). This dissertation will also henceforth use the term ‘human sciences’ for *Geisteswissenschaften*.

Burrell and Morgan (2019/1979, p. 28) delineate that “[T]he interpretive paradigm is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience”. Specifically, “interpretive theories concentrate on the study of ways in which social reality is meaningfully constructed and ordered from the point of view of the actors directly involved” (ibid., pp. 31, 254), that is, based on the actors’ subjective and intersubjectively shared meanings. The method of ‘*verstehen*’, that is, interpretive understanding presented by Dilthey and refined by Weber, is considered a means to connect the subjective, inner experience to outward actions in the social world (ibid., pp. 82–83). For Dilthey, the main task of human sciences (including social sciences) is “understanding the meaning of human action and interaction” (Makkreel 2020, pp. 1, 4, 33). In Weber’s treatment, subjective meaning is related to action and its causes:

[F]or Weber, explanations of the social world had to be ‘adequate on the level of [cause and] meaning’. Explanations of social affairs, he argued, had to take account of the way in which individuals attached subjective meaning to situations and orientated their actions in accordance with their perceptions of those situations. (Burrell & Morgan 2019/1979, pp. 83, 349).

Indeed, Weber argued in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that “the essential function of social science was to be interpretive, that is, to understand the subjective meaning of social action” (Burrell & Morgan 2019/1979, pp. 230, 244). For Weber, the important aspects of the subjective meaning are interpretation, specific situation, and the connection between the subjective meaning and external action, not the subjective experience of the individual *per se*. Nor does Weber consider the assumptions related to the subject (i.e. the human being) or the interpretation process as a phenomenological state. Weber’s thinking mainly represents the functionalist or positivist intellectual tradition, and, in that context, the above appears sufficient to understand human action in the social world.

The importance of the individual’s interpretation and the related subjective meaning was also recognised by symbolic interactionists, most notably by Weber’s contemporary, American social philosopher and psychologist George Mead (1863–1931). Mead was a major figure in the Chicago School, which, like Weber, provided a compromise position between idealism and sociological positivism. The Chicago School placed focus “upon ‘interaction’, within which the study of ‘action’ and subjective meaning played an important part”. (Burrell & Morgan 2019/1979, p. 86). Mead’s point of departure was a consciously communicating self that evolves through “a process of interaction which involves the development of language and hence ‘mind’ and ‘self’”. Humans, unlike animals, have “the capacity to become

aware of what they are about”<sup>71</sup>; for this to happen, the individual “must be able to interpret the meaning of his personal gestures” [social act]. (ibid., p. 74). This interpretation “involves an internal ‘conversation’ or process of thinking from the standpoint of ... ‘the generalized other’”, a notion that Mead used to explain the emergence of self through interaction (ibid., pp. 74, 92). While Mead, like Weber, draws attention to the connection between subjective meaning and action, he, based on the elements of phenomenological tradition (ibid., p. 86), puts notably more effort on understanding the process of the individual’s meaning interpretation and on indicating the elements in the consciousness (experience) needed for this interpretation process to happen.

Influenced by Weber and Husserl (and familiar with the works of Henri Bergson and Max Scheler, among others), Alfred Schütz (1899–1959), considered a representative of the existential wing of the phenomenological movement, broadened the notion of subjective meaning with his phenomenological analysis of the social world (Barber 2023, pp. 5, 15; Burrell & Morgan 2019/1979, pp. 243–244). According to Burrell and Morgan (2019/1979, p. 247), Schütz demonstrated “that the notions of subjective meaning, understanding [*verstehen*], and social action have much wider ramifications than those reflected in Weber’s work” (ibid.). In his “theory of meaning and action”, Schütz argued that meaning depends on the concept of reflexivity, which has a temporal dimension connected to motivation, specifically, “in-order-to motive” of action oriented toward the future, and “because-motives” of action oriented toward the past (Barber 2023, pp. 5–7; Burrell & Morgan 2019/1979, p. 244). His central concern was to understand “the meaning structure of the world of everyday life”, i.e. the phenomenology of the ‘natural attitude’ (ibid., p. 246), a concept introduced by Husserl (Holt & Sandberg 2011, p. 231). At large, Schütz brought phenomenology down from the realm of philosophical discourse, focusing on the (subjective) consciousness, to an approach more concerned with the (social) ‘life-world’ (*Lebenswelt*) – the world of everyday experience (ibid., p. 243).

Within organisational studies, the Schütz’s work has inspired scholars, especially in the action frame of reference, which fuses idealist and positivist approaches to social science in addressing the nature of action, meaning, and interpretation. Building on Weber, Dilthey, and Schütz, David Silverman (1943–) highlighted that action arises from meaning. He developed a seven-point action schema emphasising the importance of understanding the subjective meaning behind social action. Hence, if aiming to comprehend the full significance of the individuals’ acts, the “explanations of human actions must take account of the meanings which those concerned assign to their acts”, that is, subjective meanings. (Burrell & Morgan

<sup>71</sup> Cf. the logothoretic concept of self-detachment.

2019/1979, pp. 189–190, 196–198). Furthermore, based on her reading of Burrell and Morgan, the author assesses that ethnomethodology, which derives particularly from Schütz’s phenomenology and Mead’s phenomenological symbolic interactionism, did not, at least at the time (1979), provide new understanding of subjective meaning with its concern on issues like taken-for-granted identification, making sense, and (rational) accounting practices (ibid., pp. 247–248, 250). It seems that, with their commitment to developing methodology and fieldwork, linguistic and situational ethnomethodologists have lost connection to the phenomenological essence of subjective experience (ibid., pp. 248–249).

Regarding the paradigm of ‘radical humanists’ in Burrell and Morgan’s taxonomy, their key concern was to “develop a sociology of radical change from a subjectivist standpoint” and “change the social world through a change in modes of cognition and consciousness” (Burrell & Morgan 2019/1979, pp. 32–33). This paradigm has found its expression in two differing strands: French existentialism and critical theory, often used synonymously with the Frankfurt School of social theorists (ibid., pp. 282–283). While French existentialism harnessed “the phenomenological approach in the service of radical humanism”, critical theory stands “in the idealist tradition of critique deriving from Kant” and builds particularly on the work of young Marx (ibid., pp. 283, 284, 306). Both approaches “share a common concern for the release of consciousness and experience” from the domination of the superstructure or totality (e.g. organisation) (ibid., pp. 33, 311).

Although the radical humanists pursue change in the social world through a shift in consciousness, the author considers this change a rather rational process grounded in reason while ignoring, for example, emotions. To illustrate, Habermas (ibid., p. 295) argues that language provides a key to the study of social formations and the social world. For him, critical theory is emancipatory, dialectical, “and hermeneutic in its endeavour to understand the sociocultural world in which subjective meaning is located” (ibid., p. 294). Burrell and Morgan add that (ibid.) “recent developments in linguistics and ordinary language philosophy demonstrate to Habermas’s satisfaction that today [1979] the ‘problem of language’ has replaced the traditional ‘problem of consciousness’”. This shift in research focus is known as the ‘linguistic turn’, the impact of which on organisational science can be traced back, particularly to Berger and Luckmann’s book (1991/1966), based on phenomenological analysis. (Berger & Luckmann 1991/1966, p. 20; Puusa & Juuti 2020, pp. 64–65, 71–72).

For Berger and Luckman (1991/1966, p. 34), the social reality of “everyday life, or rather of the subjective experience of everyday life” is “an intersubjective common-sense world”, which is constructed by “objectifications of subjective processes (and meanings)”, forming the foundations of knowledge. Besides communication, language provides the means to construct social reality, understand one’s identity, and serves as an “objective repository of vast accumulations of

meaning and experience” capable of transcending the ‘here and now’ through which “an entire world can be actualized at any moment” (ibid., pp. 52, 54). Language thus acts as a means to transform subjective experiences and their related subjective meanings into a reified, dehumanised world of things in the social sphere. This reified world “is experienced by man as a strange facticity, an *opus alienum* over which he has no control rather than as the *opus proprium* of his own productive activity” (ibid., p. 106). Essentially, the social world combines “objective facticity and subjective meaning”, specifically illustrated by Durkheim’s notion “[C]onsider social facts as things”, and Weber’s observation that “the object of cognition is the subjective meaning-complex of action” (ibid., p. 30). Thus, for Berger and Luckmann, the society contains a dual character as an objectified world of things while constantly constituted or “built up by activity that expresses subjective meaning” – basically the same idea from which Anthony Giddens later developed structuration theory (Berger & Luckmann 1991/1966, p. 84, 106; Giddens 1984).

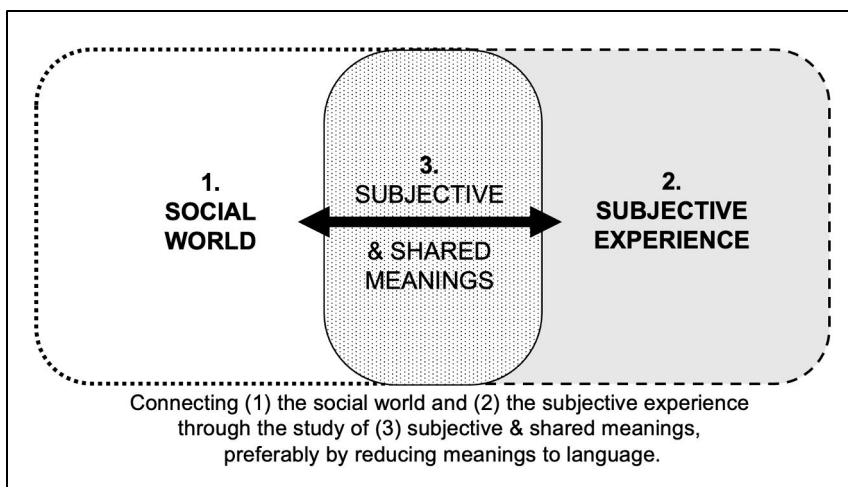
As in phenomenology, Berger and Luckmann (1991/1966, p. 34) consider consciousness intentional in that “it always intends or is directed towards objects”, allowing perceived objects to appear meaningful, whether “belonging to an external physical world or ... an inward subjective reality”. From the logothory perspective, when the focus is on subjective meanings (as Berger and Luckmann above), whether they are reduced to language or not, we lose sight of the subjective experience itself (see 2.2 and 6.4). The phenomenological approach advocated by this dissertation is, to quote Spiegelberg (1986, p. 50), “neither non-linguistic nor anti-linguistic”, but rather its focus is on studying phenomena and experiences, not language. Then, language serves as a means to understand the object of study and is “never an end in itself” (Spiegelberg 1986, pp. 52). Nor does the phenomenological approach start with meanings but “with the phenomena, going to them as directly as possible without first attending to meanings” (ibid., p. 51). A common, but not universally shared, premise among those studying experiences is that they can be expressed linguistically to some extent, but not exhaustively (Kukkola 2020, p. 44). In addition to language, experiences can be expressed in other ways, such as images, music, and bodily movements.

To summarise, inherent in the sociological and organisational research is the fact that humans are viewed primarily as social beings, and the main aim is to understand the systemic or shared level of analysis, as well as the interaction of the systemic and individual levels, not the subject, that is, the human person or the subjective experience per se. In contrast, logothory aims to reach and understand the human person holistically, that is, as a three-dimensional being living in a three-dimensional world. In their fundamentally different ways of seeing and studying humans, behaviour, and action, the sociological and organisational approaches, and logothory can be considered complementary rather than inferior or superior. The

premise of this dissertation is that organisational studies can benefit from logotherapy’s insights into the experiencing individual and the multidimensional nature of human existence.

### 6.1.2 Meaningfulness as a social phenomenon

Building on the foregoing, broad, yet by no means exhaustive, interrogation of the sociological roots of subjective experiences and subjective meanings, **Figure 17** illustrates organisational science’s basic approach to research on meaningfulness.



**Figure 17.** Meaningfulness as a social phenomenon in organisational science.

Figure 17 portrays that in organisational research, understanding meanings and meaningfulness builds on three components: (1) the systemic level of the social world, (2) the individual level of the subjective experience, and (3) subjective and shared meanings, which connect the intertwined and qualitatively different subjective and social worlds. Figure 17 also illustrates one of the basic tensions inherent in the world of organisational science, which research on meaningfulness inevitably faces and has been raised by Schütz, Berger and Luckmann, and Giddens (1984): the interplay between the subjective and the objective, objectified, or systemic spheres. In addressing Schütz’s effort to combine sociology and phenomenology, Burrell and Morgan (2019/1979, p. 246) phrase this tension as follows: “The inner world of intentional consciousness [subjective experience] and the outer manifestations of the world of everyday life [social world] are at times uneasy bedfellows”. Basically, Figure 17 illustrates these bedfellows and their connection through meanings. It also seeks to highlight that the home of subjective

and shared meanings, as well as the social world, is subjective experience; without the subjective, there would be no social, as subjective experience is the most basic element. However, the subjective is not purely subjective, for it is always intertwined with the social.

Based on Figure 17, it can be phrased that the interest of organisational scholars is directed toward the social world (1) and the subjective and shared meanings (3), for example, through studying sensemaking and sensegiving (Weick et al. 2005). Then, rather than studying the relationships between subjective meanings (3) and subjective experiences (2), or subjective meanings as motivational concepts connected to human action or involving an experiential dimension, research focuses on understanding the subjective and shared meanings (3) within the socio-cultural network of meanings in which they are embedded – in the words of Berger and Luckmann, “the dialectic between knowledge and its social base” (1991/1966, p. 224). The experiential foundation of meanings becomes even more blurred due to a tendency to focus on the reality constructed by and/or reduced to language (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, p. 58), as well as on the study of meanings and experiences as conveyed by language. Thus, Husserl’s idea of experiences as meaning relationships, with Dilthey’s and Weber’s emphasis on understanding the subjective meaning of social action and interaction, have led to some assumptions being taken for granted in the sphere of organisational research that may cause confusion in and complicate research on the ‘experience of meaningfulness’, in particular, the following:

- (1) A reality of meanings exists, that is, a network of meanings in the socio-cultural world that enables shared understanding. This network of meanings extends across time and may relate to any aspect of reality (multiple realities, e.g. everyday life, dreams, external physical world; Berger & Luckmann 1991/1966, pp. 34–35).
- (2) Meaningfulness is a social phenomenon. That which is considered meaningful concerns the relationships of subjective and shared meanings within the nomological network of cognitive meanings shared by humans. Basically, meanings, meaningfulness, and what is considered meaningful do not concern the experience of meaningfulness as a phenomenological state.
- (3) The construction of reality (becoming) is based on subjective meanings that, in turn, are based on individuals’ value-blind interpretations. This rests on the idea that, basically, the sociology of knowledge or the interpretations are not concerned with the normative sphere, e.g. truth, but with the social *construction* of knowledge<sup>72</sup>.

<sup>72</sup> <https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:tietoteoria>

- (4) In relation to action, subjective meaning is considered a motivational concept. For example, Sandberg and Alvesson (2021, p. 498) highlight that in the interpretative approaches, meaning is considered “constitutive of organisational phenomena” (i.e. a social phenomenon), “because humans cannot act without understanding the meaning of phenomena”, such as trust or leadership. However, in the context of social phenomena, subjective meanings are rarely studied as motivational concepts. Instead, motivation is explored through, for example, intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation and self-determination theory (Rosso et al. 2010, pp. 96–97).
- (5) If the ‘experience of meaningfulness’ is explored empirically – as in the research area of meaningful work – the method is usually decided first, rather than opening up the nature of the phenomenon under study: its givenness (see Section 2.2.2). In this case, the method determines what is seen about the phenomenon of meaningfulness. For example, the positivist method is blind to the content of the ‘experience of meaningfulness’, but does reach the ‘experienced meaningfulness’. In other words, the subjective experience of meaningfulness is reduced by the method used to subjective meaning, an interpretation, which concerns, for example, the enrichment of working life or management practices.

This dissertation argues that, in the field of organisational science, the phenomenon of meaningfulness has largely lost its connection to the experience of meaningfulness as a phenomenological state. Due to the sociological research’s natural emphasis on the study of the social sphere of life, social dynamics, and social explanation, and the widespread linguistic objectification of the social world (Berger & Luckmann 1991/1966, p. 56), its origin in subjective experience has become obscured. In particular, the social constructionist interpretive (SCI) approach can be understood as “a cognitive theory of meaning”, where meaningful human action means it is “carried out within a system of meaning that enables us to interpret the meaning of our own and others’ actions and experience” (Yagi & Kleinberg 2011, p. 635). In this context, knowing is based on interpretation, that is, knowing the meaning of something (Turunen 1995, p. 35). Welch and Piekari (2017, p. 718) recapitulate that in the traditions of “phenomenology, pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics and constructionism”, “knowledge production is inescapably an act of human interpretation”. In this line of thought, facts and values have cognitive content. Values are naturally embedded in the interpretation process and thus, in the resulting subjective and/or shared meaning (Baumeister & Landau 2018, p. 5). Unlike in logotherapy, the interpretation process is not based on the individual’s value-apprehension, which is why logotherapy considers interpretation within the SCI-approach value-blind. That is, the values that individuals by nature hold,

unconsciously affect and guide their decision-making, aspirations, and actions (Baumeister & Landau 2018, p. 5). Recently, the relationship between interpretation and the normative sphere, to which values belong, has also been highlighted in the field of hermeneutics. According to George (2021, p. 39, italics in the original),

[R]ecent interest in the role played in interpretive experience by normative considerations, though, has also led to a revival of interest in these matters in hermeneutics before Heidegger. Kristin Gjesdal, in her recent *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism*, for example, recommends that we return to Schleiermacher in order to focus attention on “critical-normative standards in interpretation” (Gjesdal 2009, 7). Rudolf Makkreel, in his recent *Orientation and Judgment in Hermeneutics*, argues for the priority of judgment, and with it, reflection and criticism, in interpretive experience.

To conclude, in organisational studies, meaningfulness is studied as a social phenomenon. Then, subjective meanings are based on subjective experiences; stand in the socio-cultural reality of which the subjective experiences are part and parcel; are connected to human action and the construction of reality; involve (value-blind) interpretation; can be shared with fellow human beings; have a temporal dimension; can be and are preferably reduced to language; and can be studied by quantitative and qualitative research approaches. As such, the organisational and sociological roots of research on subjective experiences and subjective meanings (6.1.1) do not provide a basis for studying the experience of meaningfulness as an existential phenomenological state related to mattering.

### 6.1.3 Meaningfulness as a motivational phenomenon

This section explores meaningfulness as a motivational phenomenon through a dialectical interrogation of Reker and Wong’s two book chapters addressing ‘personal meaning in life’ (1988, 2012) and Rosso et al.’s review article on meaningful work (2010). The critical focus of the interrogation is on how meaningfulness is connected to motivation and values.

Motivation is a psychological concept. According to logotherapy’s motivational theory, humans are motivated by their ‘will to meaning’ (4.5.1). In psychological science, only social psychology, as well as some streams of existential psychology and some meaningful life researchers explicitly endow causal power to meaning, and therefore, consider meaning a motivational concept. For example, social psychologist Baumeister states that “without meaning, behavior is guided by impulse and instinct” (Martela & Steger 2016, p. 538 citing Baumeister 1991, p. 18). In Martela and Steger’s (2016, p. 534) conceptual framework of ‘meaning in life’,

‘purpose’ is considered a normative and evaluative motivational component defined as a “sense of core goals, aims, and direction in life”. In turn, psychologists Reker and Wong (1988, pp. 220–222), influenced by Frankl, include a motivational component alongside the cognitive and affective components in their framework of ‘personal meaning’. In the proposed structure of personal meaning, the motivational component concerns values and the individual’s value-system: particularly, “the value system constructed by each individual”, where values are “guides for living, dictating what goals we pursue and how we live our lives” and “determined by our needs, beliefs, and society” (ibid., p. 220). In distinction to logotherapy, Reker and Wong’s framework of personal meaning is “tied to personal and societal values” (ibid., p. 215). According to them (Reker & Wong 1988, p. 220),

personal meaning, as distinct from definitional meaning, is concerned with the meaning in life. It is related to such constructs as value, purpose, coherence, and belief system. When we ask, “What is the meaning in life?”, we are asking; “What is worth living for? What is the purpose of life?” Such questions call for value judgments and cannot be answered apart from one’s belief system or world view.

Generally, in psychology, motivation is conceived of “as the impetus that gives purpose or direction to behavior and operates in humans at a conscious or unconscious level”<sup>73</sup>. Further, motives are divided into broad categories of physical (primary) and personal or social (secondary) motives, or internal and external motivating forces or factors (Reker & Wong 1988, p. 220). To better understand human behaviour, Reker and Wong highlight the importance of studying meanings alongside unconscious or conscious internal and external motives. Their book chapter on personal meaning is important because they aim to broaden the scope of empirical research methods used in psychology by introducing “a conceptual analysis of personal meaning from the” perspective of interpretive social science (Reker & Wong 1988, pp. 214–215, 242). In essence, their construct of personal meaning introduces an amalgamation of subjective and social realms, the afore-introduced ‘uneasy bedfellows’, to psychological research (ibid., pp. 216–217). Building on the sociologist and symbolic interactionist Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) (Burrell & Morgan 2019/1979, pp. 80–81), Reker and Wong state (1988, p. 217) that

personal meanings attached to objects and events are more significant realities for investigation than the physical attributes of the natural world. “The meaning

<sup>73</sup> <https://dictionary.apa.org/motivation>

that things have for human beings are central in their own right. To ignore the meaning of the things toward which the people act is seen as falsifying the behavior under study” (Blumer, 1969, p. 3).

As the previous section depicts, in organisational studies, subjective and shared (or intersubjective) meanings form a shared reality that individuals experience as given and as something they construct and interact with. Subjective meanings are not studied as motivation concepts although they relate to action and interaction, but not (wittingly) to values or individuals’ value-systems, as in Reker and Wong’s conceptualisation.

Organisational science studies meaningfulness, especially in the research area of meaningful work, which theoretically combines the sociological and psychological approaches and selectively draws on Frankl’s ideas, but not on logotherapy. Based on Rosso et al.’s (2010) influential review of the meaningful work literature (precisely, ‘meaning of work’), meanings, meaningfulness, sense of meaningfulness, experienced meaningfulness, or the construction of meaningfulness arise as outcomes of, for example, belongingness (p. 111), cultural and interpersonal sense-making (p. 112), experience of self-efficacy (p. 109), or sense of purpose (p. 111). The article offers numerous valuable insights about the sources and mechanisms of meaningful work and assumes that empirical research is based on the study of the ‘experience of meaningfulness’. However, from the logotherapy perspective, the article does not actually explore the ‘experience of meaningfulness’ but the “perceptions of meaning [that] are rooted in individuals’ subjective interpretations of work experiences and interactions” (Rosso et al. 2010, p. 94). The focus is on the meaning of the experience (subjective meaning), not on the ‘experience of meaningfulness’ (see more 6.4).

In logotherapy, motivation is based on the ‘will to meaning’. For Rosso et. al (2010), meaning-orientation is not the impetus of behaviour or action. Instead, they view the interconnection of meaningfulness and motivation, basically, according to Hackman and Oldham’s (1976) job characteristics model, where “experienced meaningfulness of work” ... is a psychological state ... “necessary to the development of internal work motivation” (Rosso et al. 2010, pp. 96–97, 103, 113). In the theoretical framework proposed by the authors, meaningfulness is an attribute of actions (ibid., p. 115). Specifically, the framework’s “four major pathways to meaningful work”, the individuation, contribution, self-connection, and unification

are related to human action, through the motive for the action and the target of the action, respectively. As suggested by our theoretical model, action directed toward the self (internally) or others (externally), and with the aim of expressing agency or achieving communion, seems to be particularly meaningful. We

propose that such a sense of purposeful action is vital to the experience of meaningful work because it represents a directedness or progression toward something valuable (valuable for the self, for various others, or both)". (ibid., pp. 114, 115).

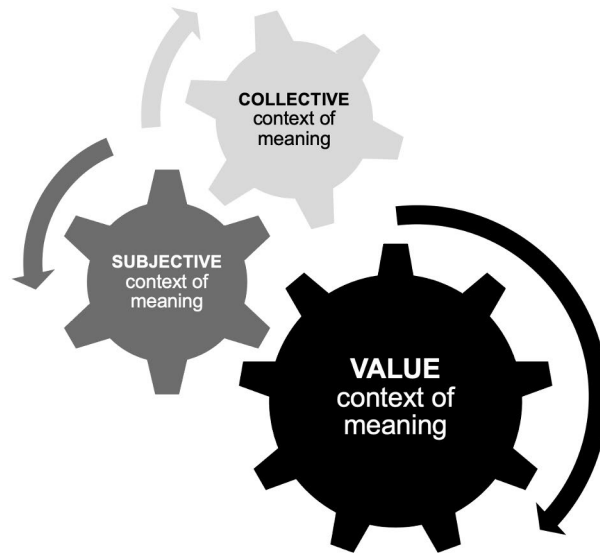
While the fundamental difference between Rosso et al.'s theoretical framework and the earlier-presented logothoretic process of meaning fulfilment (4.5.2) lies in their views of motivation, both frameworks ultimately require an apprehension of what is valuable. Unlike logotherapy, Rosso et al. do not take a position on how an individual knows what is valuable. Nor do they connect motivation to values and value systems, as Reker and Wong do, or to an apprehension of values or a conscious relationship to values, like Frankl; however, Rosso et al. (2010, p. 100) call for further research on values in the meaningful work context. As stated, in logotherapy, meaningfulness concerns striving for truthfulness, and the will to meaning is considered man's primary motivation, combining the realities of being (ontos) and meaning (logos).

To conclude, whether addressed as a social phenomenon connected to subjective meanings, or as a psychic phenomenon connected to personal meanings, meaningfulness concerns motivation and subjective experience. While organisational studies generally approach meaningfulness value-blindly, both research areas of 'meaningful life' and 'meaningful work' connect meaningfulness to values, but not to different kinds of values, ethics, or value-apprehension. This creates a space and an invitation to theory development from a logothoretic perspective, particularly on the argument that meaningfulness concerns not only relationships of meaning but also relationships of values. Thus, meaningfulness can be approached as a descriptive, prescriptive, or normative phenomenon, which Section 6.3 will elaborate.

## 6.2 Three conceptual meaning contexts

Regarding research on meaningfulness, social psychologists and meaningful work scholars have thus far distinguished between the study of denotative, definitional, or linguistic sort of meanings, as well as meaningfulness as something related to subjective experience, significance, values, coherence, and purpose locating in the psycho-socio-cultural sphere of human existence (Baumeister & Landau 2018, pp. 1–4; Michaelson 2021, p. 415). Likewise, meaningful life scholars Reker and Wong (1988, pp. 227–228) discern social definition and self-definition as two different "meaning-producing contexts". Drawing on theorizing the meaning relationships also as value relationships, this dissertation proposes that to more fully grasp the nature of meaningfulness, we need to distinguish between three, rather than two, interconnected conceptual meaning contexts (MacInnis 2011, p. 138), on which

arguments about meaningfulness are based. They concern different systems of meaning relationships based on which something is considered meaningful. These three conceptual contexts are proposed to be the (1) subjective context of meaning, (2) collective context of meaning, and (3) value-context of meaning (**Figure 18**).



**Figure 18.** Three conceptual meaning contexts: subjective, collective, and value-context.

The first, the **subjective context of meanings**, concerns ‘experienced meaningfulness’ or meanings of experiences, that is, interpretations. It refers to individuals’ unique subjective or personal meanings, which take shape in one’s psyche and through which individuals attach to, construct, are influenced by, and form a part of the constantly changing social world. Further, the subjective meanings are connected to action and interaction, have causal power, and relate to how the individuals understand themselves and the world. There is no one way of understanding the meaning of something; rather, the ways are as countless as people and situations.

The second, the **collective context of meanings**, concerns the shared network of social meanings, which individuals experience as objectified, a priori, and given; a network into which individuals are born into (Berger & Luckmann 1991/1966; Reker & Wong 1988, p. 227). It includes, for example, meanings of words and sentences; signs like numbers; symbols like traffic signs; constructs like power, efficiency, organisation, trust, success, family, marriage, management, democracy, recession, and artistic and scientific outputs. In relation to action or behaviour, social meanings may involve causal power, such as defining criminal activity through law, valuing

success by the amount of money made, or weaving human dignity into citizenship or ideology. In this second collective context, meanings and meaningfulness are culturally and/or linguistically bound and constantly evolving.

The third, the **value-context of meanings** builds on understanding relationships of meaning (intentionality) concurrently as relationships of value, as in logotherapy. Then, values are entities that guide our actions and what we strive for in our lives. Values also serve as criteria for the quality of the goals we pursue and the decisions we make when pursuing these goals in practice. (Hietalahti 2022, pp. 206–207; Lehtonen 2009, pp. 4–5). This context of meanings directs attention to one’s value-orientation as a human developmental process, value judgement, and to various value bases on which one’s value judgements can be founded. Basically, the value-context brings into focus the ‘experience of meaningfulness’ as a phenomenological state, where axiological assumptions are connected to what is considered meaningful.

Combining the relationships of meaning and relationships of value, and thus establishing a new meaning context is justified for several reasons:

1. First, as Chapter 4 depicts, in logotherapy, humans’ most original relationship to the world is their apprehension of value. Meaningfulness and values are closely connected. Understanding meaningfulness is based on assumptions about different kinds of values, man’s conscious relationship with values, and that knowledge about values is intuitively felt or known, not merely reasoned (DuBois 2004, p. xii; Davis & Steinbock 2024, p. 10). Then, the relationships of meaning are intentional in two ways: They are value-conscious and volitional (Frankl 2014b, p. 55).
2. Second, Sections 3.1.1 and 6.1.3 uncovered that in the research areas of meaningful work and meaningful life, the current framing of ‘mattering’, that is, ‘significance’, ‘existential mattering’, or ‘existential significance’, as well as understanding the term ‘purpose’, are inherently connected to values, valuing, and that something is considered valuable. In general, these research areas do not discuss how the individual knows what is of value or what is the quality of an individual’s value-apprehension.
3. Third, influential theorists, who have studied human growth and individual moral development emphasise the importance of values and value-apprehension in these developmental processes. For example, psychologist Mihály Csikszentmihályi (1934–2021) (2010, pp. 317–319) speaks of a complex meaning system and human growth through a spiral of complexity, where the final (4<sup>th</sup>) goal is to create a connection to universal values. For psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987), the final (6<sup>th</sup>) stage of human moral development builds on “a rational belief in the validity of universal moral principles and having a personal commitment to them” (Bell 2008, pp.

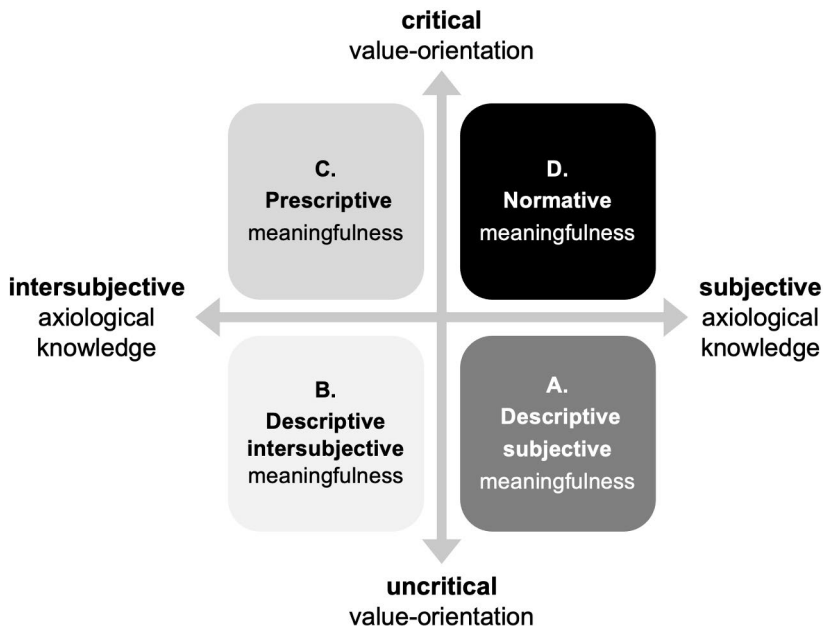
217–218). Building on Frankl and “Rokeach’s (1973) hierarchy of values”, Reker and Wong’s (2012, pp. 437–438) refined conceptual model of personal meaning in life distinguishes four successive horizons for meaning finding, the highest of which is “values that encompass cosmic meaning and ultimate purpose”.

4. Fourth, Section 5.1 highlighted how Maslow distinguishes between being-values and being-needs, where being-values concern the top of his hierarchy of needs and refer to intrinsic human values, such as truth and justice.
5. Finally, Section 6.1.3 argued that Rosso et al.’s (2010) theoretical framework of four major pathways to meaningful work entails an apprehension of what is valuable. More recently, other meaningful work scholars have also underlined the importance of values. For example, Lepisto and Pratt (2017, pp. 99, 107–108) propose two alternative conceptualisations of meaningful work, the predominant ‘realization’ perspective and the critical ‘justification’ perspective, where the latter concerns (moral) values, worth, and how one legitimises the value/worth of action. Likewise, the subjective, social, and normative accounts of meaningful work proposed by Michaelson (2021) are based on different value bases, although Michaelson does not highlight this. To illustrate, the normative account is built on a “normative progress toward value consensus” or an “[O]bjectivist naturalistic account”, which is based on the idea of the existence of “something of enduring value” (e.g. truth) (ibid., p. 423).

The three conceptual meaning contexts – the subjective, collective, and value-contexts – are complementary and interrelated as the gear shapes and arrows in Figure 18 show. Basically, the first, the subjective context, relates to meaningfulness as a psychic phenomenon; the second, the collective context, relates to meaningfulness as a social phenomenon; and the third, the value-context, relates to meaningfulness as a noetic phenomenon. The first two frameworks are familiar to organisational scientists, as organisational research often draws on psychology and sociology. The third framework is inherent in logotherapy, yet it has not been clearly brought out or presented. For example, in his 1953 article about *Logos and existence in psychotherapy*, Frankl uses the expression “value-oriented basic character of human mind” (p. 10). In fact, it seems that in the English-language logotherapy literature, besides Frankl, only DuBois (1993, pp. 62, 64) raises the role of values as one’s relationship to the world. In essence, the subjective and collective meaning contexts provide a cognitive framework for understanding meaningfulness, whereas the value-context is an existential one.

### 6.3 A value-based typology of meaningfulness

This section develops a typology of meaningfulness in a value-context. The typology proposes four value-based categories, in each of which the subjective ‘experience of meaningfulness’ (first-person perspective) is grounded in different assumptions about values, specifically the quality of one’s value-orientation and axiological knowledge. As noted earlier, values have a dual role: they (1) guide our choices and goals, and (2) act as criteria for their quality. Like the value-context of meanings in the previous section, the here developed typology rests on the assumption that meaning relationships are also relationships of value. Specifically, the value-based typology of meaningfulness builds on assumptions about (a) whether the individual’s mode of knowing about values (axiological knowledge) is subjective or intersubjective, as the horizontal axis in **Figure 19** depicts, and (b) whether one’s value-orientation is critical or uncritical, as the vertical axis depicts.



**Figure 19.** The value-based typology of meaningfulness.

As for the horizontal axis, epistemologically, subjective axiological knowledge concerns that which exists only for the subject in her *inner reality*. Ontologically, the inner reality can be theorised as merely subjective (A) or, as the early phenomenologists and logothory propose, a coexistence of the subjective and objective spheres (D). The latter (D) involves objective values that are common to all, the subject as the bearer of acts, the object as the bearer of value, and the human

conscience as a bridge connecting the subjective and objective spheres through an intuitive mode of knowing about values. The former (A) is thus based on subjective epistemology and the latter (D) on realist epistemology (see Section 4.4 on the meta-level theory of knowledge). The other end of the horizontal axis – the intersubjective axiological knowledge (B, C) – concerns that which exists for everyone in the *social reality*. Epistemologically, the two meaningfulness categories on the left (B, C) are based on social constructionism.

The vertical axis distinguishes between critical and uncritical value-orientations. The critical orientation (C, D) is based on the individual's volitional (consciously decided) value relationship and understanding of the quality of the criterion, based on which she considers something valuable. In the uncritical orientation (B, A), values are also connected to the individual's decisions, actions, and behaviour, yet implicitly or unconsciously. Thus, the individual's relationship to values is blind in that it lacks a volitional value-orientation and conscious, critical-normative, or critical-prescriptive assessment of the value base, and, by extension, the content of the experience. Hence, what is considered valuable aligns with what is valued personally or within the surrounding social reality, culture, or group, e.g. wearing branded clothes or the number of social media likes.

In Figure 19, the terms 'descriptive', 'prescriptive', and 'normative' express the different value bases that logotherapy discerns (see 4.3 and 4.6). Then, normative refers to objective values, prescriptive to intersubjective values defined as "moral and ethical principles, as they have crystallized in the framework of human society throughout its history" (Frankl 2013, p. 90), and descriptive to either social and cultural values or subjective valuations. Section 2.3.1 delineated that

- (a) the 'normative' is related to 'an ought' based on intrinsic value and the individual's conscious orientation towards it,
- (b) the 'prescriptive' is related to 'an ought' based on mutual agreement and understanding on what grounds something is considered valuable and the individual's conscious orientation towards it,
- (c) the 'descriptive' is related to a value-apprehension, in which the individual justifies the value of something based on one's subjective valuations and/or cultural and social values without consciously taking a position on the quality of these valuations or values.

In summary, Figure 19 illustrates four value-based categories of meaningfulness, or four different foundations on which the subjective 'experience of meaningfulness' and, further, what is considered meaningful, can be based: (A) descriptive subjective meaningfulness, (B) descriptive intersubjective meaningfulness, (C) prescriptive meaningfulness, and (D) normative meaningfulness. The basic characteristics of

each value-based category of meaningfulness are (Berger & Luckmann 1991/1966; Frankl 2010; Lehtonen 2009; Michaelson 2021):

- A. Descriptive subjective meaningfulness** is based on subjective valuations: Values equate subjective valuations, belong to the mind-dependent subjective reality, and knowledge of them is personal. Individuals' value-blind subjective evaluations and preferences serve as the criterion for what is valuable. No common basis exists for what is of value, but different things are valuable to different people. Personal preferences, i.e. what is important to me, guide subjective interpretation.
- B. Descriptive intersubjective meaningfulness** is grounded in different social and cultural values: Values are relative, part of the mind-dependent socio-cultural reality, and axiological knowledge is based on intersubjective interpretation, i.e. it is constructed with others. The criteria for what constitutes as valuable are based on value-blind shared views among groups, societies, states, ideologies, sub-cultures, corporate cultures, markets, etc. Again, no common base exists for what can be considered valuable, but different things are valuable to different collectives. Social and cultural values, i.e. what society and other people consider important and valuable, guide interpretation. In this category, meaningful is identified with, for example, activities that conform to prevailing fashion or beauty ideals, or a certain ideology.
- C. Prescriptive meaningfulness** is based on all parties' consensus on the common foundation of diverse social and cultural values, originating from, for example, "the wisdom of generations of people in communities", as Michaelson (2021, p. 423) phrased, or "moral and ethical principles, as they have crystallized in the framework of human society throughout its history", as presented above (Frankl 2013, p. 90). Values are jointly reflected, negotiated, and agreed-upon ideals that belong to the mind-dependent socio-cultural reality, as in category B. Yet, this axiological knowledge is combined with a critical value-orientation rather than an uncritical one (B). Then, intersubjective interpretation is guided by a shared understanding of what is valuable and on what basis it is valuable. Prescriptive meaningfulness thus implies a volitional value-orientation, a conscious intention toward a value-consensus, criteria for what constitutes as valuable is based on agreement, and a conscious reflection on values from individuals and collectives. Recent practical examples of prescriptive value bases include the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity, which, based on "consolidated global consensus", establish "a shared vision of prosperity for people and the planet" (IPBES 2022, p. 10).

**D. Normative meaningfulness** is based on truth-orientation: Values are objective, part of the mind-independent objective reality, and knowledge of them is personal and intuitive. Objective values, toward which individuals as finite, human beings can only orient, create a uniform base and the criteria for what is considered valuable. This critical value-orientation is based on a conscious intention to seek truthfulness in the inner experience. Importantly, “values are not only abstract ideas”: they are something felt and lived (Bailey 2022, p. 7, referring to Scheler). Subjective interpretation is guided by objective values, i.e. critical-normative inner dialogue with one’s conscience. In addition to logotherapy, Gandhi’s thinking, for example, is based on a truth-orientation. For Gandhi, ‘truthfulness’ is an ethical norm that means the pursuit of truth. The truth that an individual can become conscious of is a kind of limit value that is sought in the “inner perception” – not in “external nature, society, or religious authority”. For Gandhi, as for Frankl, the conscience represents the ultimate authority. (Tähtinen 1970, pp. 34, 40–42).

In essence, the proposed four categories of meaningfulness are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. It is argued that one category provides the individual (or a group, an organisation) with a primary value base used as a criterion for what is valuable. Based on the studies of human growth and moral development presented in Section 6.2, it is further argued that the chosen category is related to one’s maturity. Most commonly, individuals equate meaningfulness with subjective valuations (Michaelson 2021, p. 416), that is, what is important (meaningful) to oneself (A), which, from a maturity perspective, is the least developed level. Typically, what is important and valuable to the individual (A) is intertwined with what is valued by the immediate circle and/or culture (B). Whether an individual places more emphasis on subjective preferences or socio-cultural values when judging meaningfulness may depend, for example, on cultural characteristics or a particular situation. The category of normative meaningfulness (D) is more encompassing than the others in the sense that if the individual’s understanding of meaningfulness is based on it, she is also inevitably aware of the other three categories. Ideally, critical-normative inner dialogue (D) forms the foundation for meaningfulness, which is constructed through critical-prescriptive dialogue (C) between individuals and collectives.

The developed typology of meaningfulness advances Michaelson’s (2021) Subjective, Social, and Normative accounts of meaningful work, and responds to his future research call. For Michaelson, the Subjective account distills what is ‘meaningful to me’ (category A); the Social account, what is ‘meaningful to others’ (category B); and the Normative account, what is ‘meaningful independently’ (categories C, D) (ibid., pp. 416–421). However, Michaelson’s accounts stem from the tradition of analytic philosophy, and thus do not capture the subjective experience

as a phenomenological state (category D), in which an object's givenness defines the mode of knowing, especially insofar as values are something felt and lived. Instead, in the Subjective, Social, and Normative accounts, values are treated as abstract ideas that lend themselves to cognitive reasoning. Unlike Michaelson's accounts, this dissertation theorises the phenomenon and experience of meaningfulness within the tradition of continental philosophy. In accordance with philosophical phenomenology, meaningfulness is considered a human phenomenon that is revealed and explored in subjective experience. Then, the normative or objective aspect of meaningfulness also falls within the scope of the subjective experience, from which it can be studied as a phenomenon and experience.

As for future research on the topic of meaningfulness, Michaelson (2021, p. 424) encourages researchers, *inter alia*, to elaborate on the difference between 'experienced meaningfulness' and 'normative meaningfulness', and to draw on "advancements in theorizing about the meaning of life". This dissertation has taken these calls seriously, not only from the perspective of the meaningfulness typology, but as a whole through a logothetic exploration of the topic of meaningfulness. Regarding the first call, however, this dissertation does not emphasise the distinction between experienced and normative meaningfulness but examines both as part of the subjective experience. By making this precise distinction, Michaelson seems to build on Wolf's bipartite view of meaningfulness, which, according to Wolf, contains "subjective and objective elements" (2010, pp. 9, 20):

On this bipartite view, in order for a life to be meaningful both an objective and a subjective condition must be met: A meaningful life is a life that a.) the subject finds fulfilling, and b.) contributes to or connects positively with something the value of which has its source outside the subject. (Wolf 2010, p. 20).

Michaelson's 'experienced meaningfulness' corresponds to the subjective, fulfilling aspect, i.e. "subjective attraction", and 'normative meaningfulness' to the objective condition, i.e. "objective attractiveness" (Wolf 2010, pp. 9, 11, 26; see also 1.2.1). From a Franklian perspective, the above combination of subjective and objective elements of meaningfulness and, in fact, most of Wolf's other key insights about the nature of meaningfulness are already included in logothetic theory. To exemplify, Wolf's proposal that meaningfulness is inherently connected to values (p. 3, 18); that we should adopt "models of human motivation and reason that are attentive to meaningfulness" (p. 3), endorsing that values are linked to motivation (p. 30); that meaningfulness is distinct from happiness (p. 3) and cannot be based on an "egoistic perspective" of self-interest (p. 2); that emphasis of the objective element, the 'normative meaningfulness', is about understanding the "larger than ourselves" view "not in size but in value" (p. 18); and that "the relationship between the subject and

the object of her attraction must be an active one” (p. 9). While Wolf’s “conception of meaningfulness” (p. 8) is important, coherent, timely, and engagingly argued and written, it provides a striking example of how Frankl’s logotherapy is ignored in the study of meaningfulness, as well as of why presenting it as its own philosophical approach, as this dissertation does, to science is necessary.

To further develop the Normative account, Michaelson calls for capitalising on advances in ‘meaning *of* life’ theorising (2021, p. 424). Based on the wording, keywords, and argumentation of his article, Michaelson seemingly refers to “analytic reflection of life’s meaning”, which, according to Metz (2021, p. 1) has emerged within the “Anglo-American-Australian philosophy” as a “distinct field of the meaning of life” since the 1980s and has deepened and diversified, especially in the 21st century. In his review article, *The meaning of life* (2021), Metz presents the current state of the field and notes that the review “leaves aside contributions from other philosophical traditions (such as the Continental or African) and from non-philosophical fields (e.g. psychology or literature)” (ibid., pp. 1–2). Building on the analytic tradition, the “nature of meaningfulness” is then addressed based on three “contemporary normative-theoretical approaches to life’s meaning”: supernaturalism, naturalism, and nihilism. Then, ‘normative meaningfulness’ concerns the objective pole of the subjective experience of meaningfulness; in other words, debates about whether, e.g. a soul-centred supernaturalist view is better from the perspective of life’s meaningfulness than a subjective naturalistic view. However, from the logothoretic perspective, these normative-theoretical approaches overlook assumptions related to the subject, the human person (e.g. intentionality, motivation), and the phenomenological experience itself (e.g. modes of knowing about values). In general, Frankl’s position on the logical reasoning of the ‘meaning of life’ can be argued to be contained in his phrase, ‘logos is deeper than logic’, introduced in the introduction of this dissertation.

The value-based typology of meaningfulness (Figure 19) thus responds to Michaelson’s research call, yet it is grounded on the continental philosophical tradition rather than the analytic one. In the developed typology (Figure 19), the ‘normative meaningfulness’ (D) assumes an objective reality of ‘meaning and values’ to which the individual may orient in his or her subjective experience. The (A) descriptive subjective, (B) descriptive intersubjective, and (C) prescriptive meaningfulness differ fundamentally from the category of ‘normative meaningfulness’ (D) in that in them, meanings are constructed or created; individuals assign values to objects; motivation follows the dynamics of the meta-motivational approaches of need-satisfaction and self-actualisation; and individuals are assumed to be two-dimensional: psychosocial and physical beings. Instead, the ‘normative meaningfulness’ (D) highlights the logothoretic approach to meaningfulness and builds on the three-dimensional view of humans. It posits that meanings (meaning-

potentials) are discovered; objects are bearers of values; motivation follows from one's 'will to meaning' and adheres to the principle of noodynamics; and value-apprehension is based on intentional emotions that are felt. The following quote from Edith Weisskopf-Joelson (1975, p. 239), who has a psychoanalytic background and was originally a critic of logotherapy, highlights the experiential dimension of meaningfulness advocated by logotherapy and conceptually described above:

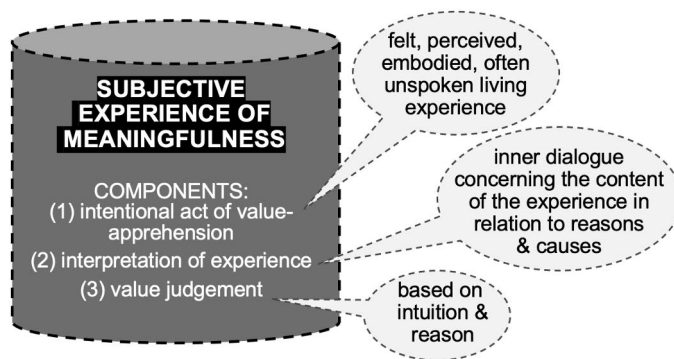
The basic tenets of Logotherapy [sic] are easy to grasp intellectually and may, at times, even seem trite. But the true experiential grasp of Logotherapy is difficult to achieve; it is based on subtle insight into one's own life which cannot easily be taught. I realize now that many years ago when I wrote about logotherapeutic concepts, such as the discovery of meaning (Weisskopf-Joelson, 1955, 1958), I did not truly understand the significance of this concept. I understood it intellectually, but not experientially. Only recently have I grasped the experiential aspect of the concept; only recently have I experienced how it feels to discover meaning.

To conclude, the four categories of meaningfulness (Figure 19) and the previous section's (6.2) three conceptual meaning contexts – subjective, collective, and the value-context (Figure 18) – overlap contentwise in that the subjective context of meanings (2) corresponds to the category of descriptive subjective meaningfulness (A), and the collective context of meanings (1) corresponds to the category of descriptive intersubjective meaningfulness (B). This dissertation argues that the conceptual frameworks illustrated in Figures 18 and 19 extend the understanding of meaningfulness independently and are necessary, as they serve different purposes. The diverse meaning contexts provide a convenient classification for organisational scholars and social scientists. Since the work of Weber, Dilthey, Schütz, Berger, and Luckmann, the subjective and collective meaning contexts are familiar to researchers operating within the social constructivist interpretive paradigm. In terms of Popper's three worlds, they relate to Worlds II and III (1978). For scholars in these disciplinary areas, only the third, the value-context, suggests an alternative way of seeing and studying meaningfulness. In turn, the proposed typology of meaningfulness serves scholars seeking to understand meaningfulness in relation to values, that is, as an existential experience. This is particularly the domain of the humanities and meaningfulness research, that is, 'meaningful work', 'meaningful life', and 'logotherapy'.

## 6.4 A basic structure of the existential experience of meaningfulness

This book is concerned with meaningfulness as an existential experience related to life's meaningfulness, that is, mattering. As stated (1.2.3), for Frankl, the term 'existential' refers to humans' three-dimensional mode of being, the meaning of human existence, and finding a concrete meaning in personal existence. Logotherapy and the process of meaning fulfilment (4.5.2) are grounded on this tripartite view of what existential is. In the research area of meaningful work, based on the analysis of this dissertation (3.1), the term 'existential' refers to a deeper dimension of the human experience of meaningfulness, a profound experience of what ultimately matters, which also involves inner processing of the experience of mattering/significance. However, in terms of the underlying views of the experience itself, human nature, and world/reality, this experience and the inner processing are neither explained nor conceptualised, leading to ambiguity about what the "subjective experience of existential significance" actually means (Both-Nwabuwe et al. 2017, p. 7; Lips-Wiersma & Wright 2012, p. 657; Martela et al 2021, p. 1). This dissertation posits that studying the 'experience of meaningfulness' as an existential experience requires postulating the basic concepts and their relationships, and explicating the underlying assumptions (Turunen 1995, p. 158).

Building on what has been presented and argued in this dissertation, philosophical inquiry, and phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis, **Figure 21** proposes the conceptual framework (MacInnis 2011, p. 138) of the existential experience of meaningfulness as an inner phenomenological state based on intentionality as a relationship of meaning and value. To make it easier for the reader to grasp Figure 21, **Figure 20** first illustrates the subjective experience of meaningfulness as a phenomenological state in a value-context.



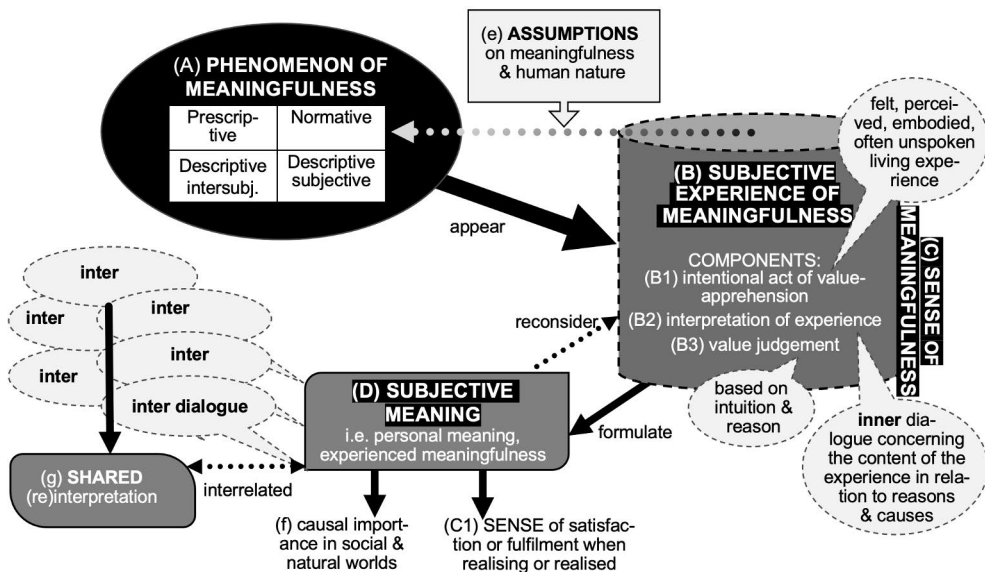
**Figure 20.** The components of the subjective experience of meaningfulness in a value-context.

This dissertation proposes that the **subjective experience of meaningfulness** contains three components: the (1) intentional act of value-apprehension as a living experience, the (2) interpretation of the content of the experience, and the (3) value judgement encapsulating one's value-apprehension in a specific situation and/or about a particular issue.

1. The first, (1) the intentional act of value-apprehension as a 'living experience' concerns, how we know about values (and ethics) and, further, what our criteria are for what is valuable. To elaborate, the value needs to be confronted, i.e., perceived consciously (Frankl 2010/1972, p. 45; Turunen 1995, pp. 115, 117), whereby the value is intuitively felt, and one's body may be used as an instrument of knowing (e.g. goose bumps). Most often, the living experience of value cannot be exhaustively put into words. Whether our value base is normative, prescriptive, descriptive intersubjective, or descriptive subjective (typology of meaningfulness), and whether we are aware or unaware of it, the act of value-apprehension occurs in one's subjective experience. Yet, only when it is based on an intention can we speak of a true act of value-apprehension.
2. The second component, the (2) interpretation of the experience, relates to one's inner dialogue concerning the content of the experience in relation to reasons and causes. Reasons connect the inner dialogue to the context of the moment, finality, and the question of what for; it is about prospective interpretation, or as Schütz puts it, an in-order-to motive of action oriented toward the future. Conversely, causes connect the inner dialogue to the context, facticity, and the question of why; it concerns retrospective interpretation, in Schützian terms, because-motives of action oriented toward the past. (Barber 2023, pp. 5–7; Morin 1995, p. 43). In logotherapy, this inner dialogue occurs with the conscience, in psychoanalysis with the superego, in positive psychology with the true self, for example. However, only in logotherapy is the interpretative inner dialogue critical-normative (George 2021, p. 39). In positive psychology, psychodynamic, or mainstream hermeneutic approaches, for example, interpretation is not guided by values.
3. The third component, (3) value judgement, combines the intuitive knowledge of values with the reason-based interpretation of the content of experience. Naturally, value judgements do not concern only the experience of meaningfulness but have a much wider scope. As the introduction (1.1) noted, scientific statements and organisational decisions are grounded in decision makers' value judgements based on "value-infused appreciations", that is, value-apprehension (Tsoukas et al. 2014, p. 1236). From a

psychological perspective, Reker and Wong (1988, pp. 220, 223) highlight that value judgements incorporate one’s belief system or world view, and further, relate to modes of conduct, as research shows. To note, in logotherapy, value-ethical knowledge and moral judgements are based on a priori knowledge of a normative order of values embodied by the human conscience common to all. Since the human being is capable of making value judgements, he or she is primarily a moral subject. In logotherapy, the meta-level dynamics of motivation originates from the ought, not can or must (see Sections 5.1 and 5.3).

**Figure 21** illustrates how the subjective experience of meaningfulness described above is intertwined with three other basic concepts, which, this dissertation proposes, form the phenomenological basic structure of the existential experience of meaningfulness.



**Figure 21.** The phenomenological basic structure of the existential experience of meaningfulness in a value-context.

In Figure 21, the basic concepts of the existential experience of meaningfulness as a phenomenological state are (text on a black background): (A) **phenomenon of meaningfulness**, (B) **subjective experience of meaningfulness** (Figure 20), (C) **sense of meaningfulness**, and (D) **subjective meaning**. In this conceptual framework, ‘personal meaning’ and ‘experienced meaningfulness’ are in the same item as the subjective meaning (D), although they are not identical concepts. Put broadly, ‘subjective meaning’ originates from Weber, ‘personal meaning’ from

Frankl, and ‘experienced meaningfulness’ from Hackman and Oldham’s job characteristic model. The point is that all three concepts are formulated in one’s subjective experience and associated with **(f)** causal importance in social and natural worlds (Hackman & Oldham 1976, pp. 255–256). Further, realisation of subjective or “personal meaning is always accompanied by feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment” (Reker & Wong 1988, p. 221), that is, **(C1)** in Figure 21.

Besides the basic structure, Figure 21 shows that what the subject perceives and consciously experiences of the **(A) phenomenon of meaningfulness** (depicted by the typology of meaningfulness) depends on his or her **(e)** assumptions about meaningfulness and human nature. With respect to these assumptions, the first distinction concerns whether meaningfulness is based on a critical or uncritical value-orientation (Figure 19). If the latter, then what is considered meaningful in the experience of meaningfulness is based on the individual’s interpretation and reasoning within a value-blind cognitive web of meanings, for example, subjective and/or collective meaning-context (6.2), where “meaning is not accessed in separate bits but rather in networks of related concepts (Peirce, 1982)” (Baumeister & Landau 2018, p. 2).

The third basic concept, a **(C) sense of meaningfulness**, is based on the meta-level assumption that values are intuitively felt or known. It is related to all three components of the **(B) subjective experience of meaningfulness**: **(B1)** the intentional act of value-apprehension, **(B2)** interpretation of the content of the experience, and **(B3)** value judgement. Further, **(C1)** the sense of satisfaction or fulfilment arises when one is realising or has realised **(D)** the subjective meaning. Currently, the phrase ‘sense of meaningfulness’ is used more in the research area of meaningful work (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019), whereas the research area of meaningful life employs the phrases ‘sense of meaning’ or ‘sense of meaning in life’. To clarify and operationalise the latter – meaning in life – scholars increasingly distinguish theoretically three components: ‘sense of coherence/comprehension’, ‘sense of purpose’, and ‘sense of significance/mattering’, on the basis of which meaningfulness as judgement and feeling then emerges (George & Park 2016, pp. 205–206, 208; King & Hicks 2021). As noted (3.1.1 and 6.1.3), in this tripartite view (George & Park 2016, p. 205), the components of ‘sense of purpose’ and ‘sense of significance’ are intertwined with values and value-apprehension. However, they overlook the subject’s relationship to values, different kinds of values, and how the knowledge about values is obtained. The current theorising of the ‘sense of meaningfulness’ is based on the idea that values are abstract ideas subject to cognitive reasoning, which is why they do not reach the experiential dimension of values.

Since Figure 21 depicts the phenomenological basic structure of the existential experience of meaningfulness in the value-context, this dissertation proposes an

alternative conceptualisation of the (C) sense of meaningfulness. It suggests that, in the value-context, the key is to identify whether the basis of the sense of meaningfulness is vertical or horizontal. Then, the vertical sense of meaningfulness arises from our conscious relationship with the possible and is grounded in the (intuitive) intentional emotions related to truthfulness. The horizontal sense of meaningfulness is related to the psychosocial reality. Then, the sense of meaningfulness arises from the experience that one's aspirations or decisions are congruent with the surrounding social and cultural values and/or one's own subjective valuations.

Building on Reker and Wong's empirically validated (2012, p. 438) depth postulate (1988, pp. 226; 2012, p. 437), according to which "an individual's degree of personal meaning will increase in direct proportion to his or her commitment to higher levels of meaning", it is further proposed that the vertical sense of meaningfulness is more profound, and the horizontal one is more shallow. Individuals who fulfil meaning at higher levels through serving others or orienting toward enduring values are more satisfied with life and experience a deeper sense of meaningfulness than those who are preoccupied with hedonistic pleasure and comfort (e.g. individuals who put their efforts into acquiring material possessions) (Reker & Wong 2012, pp. 437–438). Taken together, the sense of meaningfulness (C) can be considered an attribute of the (B1) act of value-apprehension, (B2) interpretation, (B3) value judgement, and to some extent, (D) subjective meaning. Basically, the vertical sense of meaningfulness appears in the normative category (Figure 19) as an intuitive mode of knowing. The horizontal sense of meaningfulness, in turn, emerges in the 'prescriptive', 'descriptive intersubjective', and 'descriptive subjective' categories (Figure 19) as a cognitive act of reasoning.

The fourth basic concept, (D) **subjective meaning**, is based on the subjective experience of meaningfulness. It concerns a particular situation, issue, or state of affairs, is retrospective, "an effect and product of human activity" (Morin 1995, p. 42), and evolving in the sense that it can be both reconsidered by oneself and shared with others, reflected upon and refined, resulting in new subjective and (**g**) shared interpretations. Currently, the research areas of meaningful work and meaningful life inform that they study meaningfulness, meaning in life, or meaningful work empirically based on 'subjective experience'. While this is true, most research focuses on the subjective formulation (includes interpretation, Figure 21) of this experience, that is, the meanings of experiences captured by 'subjective meanings', 'personal meanings', or 'experienced meaningfulness', as the introduction (1.2, 1.3) argues. Figure 21 illustrates, how these two basic concepts, 'subjective experience' and 'subjective meaning', differ. In the same vein, it highlights the fact that if we lose sight of the basic assumptions of the experience or the basic meta-level concepts

related to the study of experience (Kukkola 2018, p. 43; Tsoukas & Chia 2011, p. 3; Tsoukas et al. 2024, pp. 1229, 1230, 1238), we may end up confusing key concepts, for example, ‘subjective experience’ with ‘subjective meaning’, or ‘experience of meaningfulness’ with ‘experienced meaningfulness’. Within the research area of meaningful work, the blurring of the philosophical foundation has led to an inability to grasp meaningfulness as an existential experience.

To summarise, from a logothoretic perspective, studying the ‘experience of meaningfulness’ requires understanding and expressing the philosophical assumptions related to the experience itself, the experiencing subject, and the object of experience (phenomenon of meaningfulness) because they determine the basis on which something is deemed meaningful. Figure 21 illustrates a meta-level conceptual framework of the ‘experience of meaningfulness’ that builds on logothory. Then, the ‘experience of meaningfulness’ is an inner phenomenological state based on intentionality, referring to a relationship of meaning and a relationship of value. In addition to advancing theorising on the phenomenon of meaningfulness and the existential experience of meaningfulness as a phenomenological state related to mattering, Figure 21 highlights that what is easily overlooked, when focusing on the study of subjective meanings, social, or shared meanings (whether reduced to language or not), or experienced meaningfulness. It also becomes evident that current research on meaningfulness rests on an unstructured framework of basic concepts about the subjective experience of meaningfulness.

## 7 Summary and conclusions

This theoretical monograph has been investigating how integrating logotherapy can advance theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience, and research on meaningful work. It contributes by generating new ‘ways of seeing’ (Hines 1988) the phenomenon and experience of meaningfulness through theorising outcomes, as presented in Chapters 4–6. Specifically, the theoretical contributions, future research avenues, and discussion and conclusion in relation to the meta-level framework of logotherapy, and how logotherapy can advance research on meaningful work, are presented in Chapter 4 and in Sections 5.3 and 3.2. In turn, the theoretical contributions of Chapter 6 are related to advancing theorising of the research topic, that is, meaningfulness, and research on meaningfulness within organisational studies.

This final chapter first summarises the theoretical contributions and key findings of each methodological step in relation to the main research question and the four sub-research questions guiding this dissertation (Section 7.1; Table 4). Section 7.2 discusses the methodological contributions and conclusions of the meta-level research approach adopted by this dissertation. Section 7.3 summarises how this dissertation contributes to understanding the *existential nature of meaningfulness*, as stated in the dissertation title. These two sections also contain new suggestions for future research directions related to the meta-level research approach and the humanisation of management research. Lastly, Section 7.4 distills practical implications into five calls for action for work-life professionals, discusses limitations, and evaluates the overall contribution of this dissertation regarding interestingness (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, pp. 67–68, drawing on Davis 1971).

### 7.1 Summary of theoretical contributions

**Table 4** summarises this dissertation’s theoretical contributions in relation to the methodological steps, the research question, and the four sub-questions.

**Table 4.** The dissertation's theoretical contributions.

RESEARCH QUESTION: <b>How can integrating logotherapy advance theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience and research on meaningful work?</b>			
RESEARCH PROBLEM: meta-level & theoretical. RESEARCH INTEREST: emancipatory, that is, critical. RESEARCH DESIGN: Figure 2.			
PROBLEMATISATION STEP & related chapter	RESEARCH STEP & METHODS & related figures & tables	RESEARCH QUESTION & SUB-QUESTIONS (1-4)	THEORISING OUTCOMES or FINDINGS & related figures & tables
<b>I. Identifying literature on meaningfulness:</b> 1.2.	Mapping review identifying three research areas of meaningfulness: meaningful work, meaningful life & logotherapy. Figure 1.		Research areas subjected to problematisation: meaningful work as domain theory & logotherapy as method theory.
<b>II. Identifying state of the art of the domain theory = meaningful work</b> (home theoretical stance): 3.1.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Systematic search &amp; review of domain theory. Figure 5.</li> <li>2. Theory-driven content analysis of the term 'existential'.</li> <li>3. Critical analysis of the definitions of meaningful work. Table 1.</li> <li>4. Critical analysis of the term 'significance', i.e. mattering, existential sign./matter.</li> </ol>	SQ1: How does the research area of meaningful work address the existential facet of meaningfulness?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. References to Frankl, but not to logotherapy further confirmed.</li> <li>2. The term 'existential' is used loosely.</li> <li>3. Meaningfulness is connected to values, but theorising about how values, meanings &amp; meaningfulness are interrelated &amp; how the individual knows what is valuable, is lacking.</li> </ol>
<b>III. Identifying state of the art of the method theory = logotherapy</b> (alternative theoretical stance): 3.2.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Critical analysis of Frankl's key books.</li> <li>2. Critical review of logotherapy literature compiled based on Scopus, citation-tracking, &amp; prior knowledge. Figure 8.</li> </ol>	SQ2: How is the meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy as an axiomatic system of thought described & schematically represented in the research area of logotherapy?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A meta-level description &amp; a schematic representation of the axiomatic system of thought underlying logotherapy is lacking.</li> <li>2. The term logotherapy is ambiguous because it can refer to both theory &amp; therapy.</li> <li>3. Future research avenues for logotherapy.</li> </ol>
<b>IV. Developing the alternative assumption ground</b> (method theory elaboration) 4.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Two elementary propositions on logotherapy based on the literature review of logotherapy in the previous section 3.2.</li> </ol>	SQ3: What is logotherapy?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Justification of the term logotherapy. Figure 9.</li> <li>2. Meta-level description of logotherapy containing four interconnected meta-level theories &amp; encapsulating a distinct scientific-philosophic. approach</li> </ol>

	<p>2. Conceptual thinking as 'delineating' &amp; hermeneutic cycles of accumulated understanding resulting from immersion in Frankl's works, other specified logotherapy literature, &amp; wide reading of scientific philosophical literature</p>		<p>with particularised assumptions on ontology, epistemology, human nature &amp; motivation.</p> <p>3. Schematic representations of logotherapy &amp; the four meta-level theories. Figures 12–16.</p> <p>4. Figure 10: the three-dimensional view of man.</p>
<b>V. Revealing field assumptions I: 5.</b>	<p>1. Identifying three meta-level approaches of motivational dynamics based on Frankl</p> <p>2. Dialectical interrogation of five paradoxes of meaningful work suggested by Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. (2019) in <i>Journal of Management Studies Special Issue on Meaningful Work</i>.</p>	<p>RQ: How can integrating logotherapy advance theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience &amp; research on meaningful work?</p>	<p>1. Revealing a meta-level of internal motivation &amp; proposing key differences between the three approaches proposed by Frankl. Table 2.</p> <p>2. Exposing key differences in field assumptions between logotherapy &amp; meaningful work: Table 3.</p> <p>3. Theoretical rationale for promoting meaningful work &amp; psychology as hybrid sciences.</p> <p>4. Meta-level future research agenda for meaningful work (&amp; meaningful life).</p>
<b>VI. Revealing field assumptions II: 6.1.</b>	<p>1. Dialectical interrogation of sociological roots of meaningfulness based on Burrell &amp; Morgan (2019/1979) &amp; Berger &amp; Luckmann (1991/1966).</p> <p>2. Dialectical interrogation of meaningfulness as a motivational phenomenon based on Reker &amp; Wong (1988, 2012) &amp; Rosso et al. (2010).</p>	<p>SQ4: What are the implicit assumptions about meaningfulness in organisational science?</p>	<p>1. Meaningfulness as a social phenomenon in organisational science. Figure 17.</p> <p>2. Meta-level assumptions on meanings &amp; meaningfulness in organisational research (6.1.2).</p> <p>3. Organisational science (meaningful work) &amp; psychology (meaningful life) connect meaningfulness to human motivation &amp; values, yet vaguely &amp; also depending on the kinds of phenomena (social or psychic) they inherently study (6.1.3).</p>
<b>VII: Advancing theorising: 6.2–6.4.</b>	<p>1. Philosophical inquiry to clarify concepts &amp; assumptions about the phenomenon &amp; experience of meaningfulness at the meta-theoretical level.</p>	<p>RQ: How can integrating logotherapy advance theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience &amp; research on meaningful work?</p>	<p>1. Three conceptual meaning contexts: subjective, collective &amp; value-context. Figure 18.</p> <p>2. Value-based typology of meaningfulness. Figure 19.</p> <p>3. Value-based conceptual framework of existential experience of meaningfulness as a phenomenological state. Figure 21.</p>

The theoretical contributions of this dissertation in Table 4 relate to the (1) research subject, (2) domain theory, (3) method theory, (4) organisational studies, and (5) psychology as follows:

- (1). Contributions related to meaningfulness**, as covered in Sections 6.2–6.4 consist of developing
  - three conceptual meaning contexts: the subjective, collective, and the value-context (Figure 18)
  - a value-based typology of meaningfulness (Figure 19)
  - a conceptual framework of existential experience of meaningfulness (Figure 21)
- (2). Contributions related to meaningful work**, as covered in Chapter 5, consist of
  - exposing key differences in field assumptions between the research areas of meaningful work and logotherapy (Table 3)
  - theoretical rationale for promoting meaningful work and psychology as hybrid sciences, that is, appreciating empirical and philosophical methods in studying human beings and human behaviour (5.3)
  - proposing a meta-level future research agenda for meaningful work (5.3)
- (3). Contributions related to logotherapy**, as covered in Chapter 4 and Section 3.2.2 consist of developing
  - a meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy (Figure 16; Section 4.6)
  - a meta-level theory of human nature (Figure 12; Section 4.2)
  - a meta-level theory of meaning and values (Figure 13; Section 4.3)
  - a meta-level theory of knowledge (Figure 14; Section 4.4)
  - a meta-level theory of motivation (Figure 15; Section 4.5)
  - illustrating Frankl's three-dimensional view of human nature (Figure 10; Section 4.2.1)
  - future research suggestions for the research area of logotherapy (3.2.2)
- (4). Contributions related to organisational studies**, as covered in Section 6.1 consist of
  - illustrating meaningfulness as a social phenomenon (Figure 17; Section 6.1.2)
  - exposing field assumptions of meanings and meaningfulness in organisational research (6.1.2)
- (5). Contributions related to psychology**, as covered in Section 5.3, consist of
  - revealing a meta-level of human motivational dynamics based on Frankl
  - proposing key characteristics of the meta-motivational approaches of need satisfaction, self-actualisation, and meaning fulfilment (Table 2).

Notably, theoretical contributions in organisational studies and psychology also concern ‘meaningful work’, as it is the focal research area on meaningfulness in organisational science, and, as a research topic, meaningfulness is inevitably related to psychological science.

For meaningful work scholars and organisational researchers, the meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy integrated in this dissertation emerges as a new ‘way of seeing’ meaningfulness, human motivation, and human behaviour. Due to the dissimilar paradigmatic assumptions, logotherapy and meaningful work capture different facets of the phenomenon and experience of meaningfulness. It is argued that different ways of seeing are needed to understand inherently human phenomena, such as meaningfulness. Hines (1988, p. 258) highlighted, that “a way of seeing is also ‘a way of not seeing’” and, to see in a new way, breaching the old one is necessary. Through dialectical interrogation, this dissertation has challenged the prevailing ways of seeing the phenomenon and experience of meaningfulness. Yet, through philosophical inquiry and phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis, it has also begun to develop an alternative way of seeing based on logotherapy, especially the argument that relationships of meaning are simultaneously relationships of value (Chapter 6).

Overall, this dissertation offers ideas and future research avenues, especially for those scholars interested in the existential facet of meaningfulness. As an individual-level theory, logotherapy does not directly take a stand on what work or business, in general, is valuable from the perspective of society, the economy, or the planet. The logotherapeutic perspective thus complements research on meaningful work and demonstrates the usefulness of different paradigmatic approaches in seeking a deeper understanding of the existential experience of meaningfulness and human conduct in organisations and beyond.

## 7.2 Methodological contributions

The methodological contributions of this dissertation consist of (A) the adopted meta-level research approach to theorising and theory elaboration (see 2.1 and 2.3), and (B) the schematic representations of the axiomatic thought systems of logotherapy and the four meta-level theories. In meta-level theoretical research, the objects of study are abstract. The exploration focuses on the underlying assumptions, conceptual frameworks, basic concepts, and their nature; in other words, the philosophical foundation of the topic of meaningfulness (DuBois 1993, p. 54; Kukkola 2018, p. 45; Tsoukas et al. 2024, pp. 1229, 1232, 1235, 1238; Turunen 1995, pp. 121–122). Through problematisation methodology, dialectical interrogation, and philosophical inquiry, as well as phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis, this dissertation draws attention to the vagueness or lack of investigation of

the “second-set” or meta-level of assumptions in current research on meaningfulness (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, pp. 58–59). Accordingly, the theoretical contributions of this dissertation (Table 4) focus on meta-level theorising rather than in generating hypotheses or propositions to be tested by empirical research, for example. This type of basic research is rare in the field of organisational science (Kallio & Palomäki 2020, pp. 138, 142). Indeed, the author found no theoretical or conceptual papers in academic publications that employed a meta-level approach, as in this dissertation, which naturally does not mean there are none. The point is that the adopted meta-level research approach was gradually discovered during the doctoral studies, as the methodology chapter (2.5) describes. Overall, basic research aimed at theoretical outcomes<sup>74</sup> is essential for both scientific progress and practice, as Section 2.1 highlights.

Similarly, (B) schematic representations or, more broadly, visualisations of paradigmatic or meta-theoretical stances or assumptions, are rare. Rather than holistically illustrating a specific organisational, sociological, or psychological meta-level framework – e.g. social constructionism, Schütz’s phenomenology of the social world, cognitive psychology, Freud’s psychoanalysis, Heidegger’s fundamental ontology<sup>75</sup> – it is more common for different paradigms to be compared in words through chosen characteristic features, most often in a tabular form (e.g. Guba & Lincoln 1994; Morgan & Smircich 1980), or to be described using a selected or developed typology (e.g. Burrell & Morgan 2019/1979; Haslam 2013). This dissertation argues that meta-level schematic representations or visual descriptions of axiomatic systems of thought are important for theorising and theory elaboration, as they have heuristic and expressive power.

When visualisation is used heuristically, that is, as a tool for thinking<sup>76</sup>, the writing process and the formation of the schematic representation settle into a dialogical relationship, through which each gradually finds a reasoned interpretation more thorough than a mere verbal description. Consequently, the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon or paradigmatic framework under consideration deepens and becomes more precise.

The expressive power of the visualisation, in turn, contributes to the comprehensibility of the meta-level theoretical stances or frameworks, as they promote knowledge of the connections between basic concepts and their nomological network, not only of individual concepts (MacInnis 2011, p. 141; see 2.3). In this dissertation, the black box at the top of Figure 9 (Section 4.1), which

<sup>74</sup> <https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:tiede>

<sup>75</sup> To the best of the author’s knowledge, no holistic visualisation or schematic representation of these paradigmatic approaches currently exists.

<sup>76</sup> <https://tieteentermipankki.fi/wiki/Filosofia:heuristiikka>

depicts the meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy through four theories and arrows between them, serves as a simple schematic representation. The later, more complex schematic representation of logotherapy, illustrated in Figure 16 (Section 4.6), is based on Figure 9. Further examples of schematic representations include the four meta-level theories (Figures 12–15), the logothereotic three-dimensional view of human nature (Figure 10), and the phenomenological basic structure of the existential experience of meaningfulness (Figure 21). All depict the relationships among basic concepts, making the related text more accessible to the reader. As such, visualisations, schematic representations, or figures bring to light the network of assumptions underpinning in a meta-theoretical stance and provide a clearer basis for counterarguments. They are effective because they illustrate what part(s) of reality each paradigm encompasses and what it excludes. This helps researchers not only understand different paradigms but also to better judge the potential generalisability of findings and conclusions. To illustrate the internal consistency (in the sense of the inner logic within a theoretical structure or framework, distinct from internal consistency in quantitative empirical research, for example) of different research approaches or theoretical stances, and to increase their comprehensibility, this dissertation recommends visualising them through schematic representations.

The meta-level research approach of this dissertation stems from the method theory used, that is, logotherapy. As a meta-level framework, logotherapy brings to the surface the second-set or taken-for-granted assumptions (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, pp. 58–59) in the domain theory, that is, meaningful work. This dissertation shows that regarding the phenomenon and experience of meaningfulness, these meta-level assumptions are significant. To elaborate, it makes a difference, whether the researchers approach meaningfulness primarily as a social phenomenon as in organisational science, as a psychic phenomenon as in the ‘meaning in life’ literature (King & Hicks 2021), or as a noetic phenomenon as in the research area of logotherapy. Even if meta-level assumptions behind postulations (i.e. explicit assumptions) (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, p. 58) are not stated, meaningful work, meaningful life, and logotherapy scholars should at least identify their impact on their research design and interpretation of findings. For example, most of the challenges associated with using logothereotic concepts in the research areas of ‘meaningful work’ and ‘meaningful life’ stem from a loss of understanding of the meta-level assumptions, on which logotherapy is based. Ignoring these meta-level assumptions has consequences, as Wong, versed in Frankl’s works, illustrates. According to him, the widely used Meaning In Life Questionnaire (MLQ) (Steger et al. 2006) “measures meaning as an abstract concept without considering the context of what constitutes presence of meaning and what kind of search for meaning is being measured” (2014, p. 154). Regarding the latter, Wong continues in the Franklian spirit, “[i]t makes a big difference whether people are searching for

something self-transcending or whether they are searching for pleasure and success as their life goals” (ibid.).

The importance of meta-level assumptions about meaningfulness lies in the fact that, fundamentally, meaningfulness is a human phenomenon. It thus necessarily incorporates a view of human nature and takes a position on a worldview, defined as “an overall view of what the world is like and what is man’s position and task in it” (Harva 1980, p. 9). With multidimensional views of man and reality, Frankl strived to depict the lifeworld as man encounters it, and to apply this ‘dimensional anthropology and ontology’ to practice in treatment situations and beyond. Research on meaningful work has made tremendous progress over the past 15 years. Simultaneously, hitherto the questions about the ontological and epistemological assumptions of meaningfulness or the human mode of being have remained more or less unaddressed. However, these philosophical facets are intrinsically part of an individual’s subjective experience and judgement of meaningfulness and need to be considered in meaningfulness research, at the very least when analysing research findings.

### 7.3 The existential nature of meaningfulness

This dissertation has explored meaningfulness as an existential experience, by focusing on the subjective experience of what matters in life, including work, from a first-person perspective. The introductory chapter stated that the characteristic feature of the existential experience of meaningfulness is that, while it is intertwined with all dimensions of being, it especially requires understanding of the normative sphere, that is, the realm of values and ethics. Based on logotherapy, the key theory elaboration argument of this dissertation regarding the value-ethical sphere is to examine meaning relationships (intentionality) simultaneously as value relationships. Then, instead of reflecting on the meaningfulness of something based on subjective and collective meaning contexts (i.e. cognitive networks), it is reflected and *experienced* in a value-context (6.2.). The proposed value-context of meanings is further elaborated on by developing the value-based typology of meaningfulness that distinguishes the four value bases on which the subjective experience of meaningfulness can be based (Figure 19), as well as proposing the conceptual framework of the existential experience of meaningfulness as an inner phenomenological state based on intentionality (Figure 21). Hence, this dissertation proposes the basic concepts and their relationships, the nomological network (MacInnis 2011, p. 141), of the existential experience of meaningfulness in a value-context. This is fundamental for structuring and understanding the existential nature of meaningfulness and for establishing the basis for empirical research on the

‘experience of meaningfulness’ (Tsoukas et al. 2024, p. 1234), the lack of which this dissertation has been arguing.

In addition to the above-described (1) intertwining of all modes of being and (2) emphasis on the sphere of values and ethics, this dissertation argues that the defining features of the existential experience of meaningfulness are (3) the individual’s conscious relationship to values (value-orientation), (4) value-apprehension, and (5) the view of human being as a moral subject capable of making value judgements that require the individual to take a conscious stand on what is important, valuable, and right. Thus, in the existential experience of meaningfulness, value judgement builds on one’s orientation toward truthfulness. As Section 6.4 depicts, value judgement combines a priori intuitive knowledge of values with a posteriori knowledge based on reason about interpreting the content of experience. From a scientific perspective, as Sections 4.4 and 4.6 reflect, the above raises two questions: Does value-ethical, pre-moral, or moral knowledge exist, and, if so, what is it based on?

According to Frankl, value-ethical knowledge is within the reach of the human conscience, which he calls a meaning-organ (4.4.2). The nature of this value-ethical or axiological knowledge is personal, intuitive and cannot be based solely on reasoning, empirical facts, or existing norms, rules, customs, and theories. Building on logotherapy, one’s relationship with values is experiential; values are felt and lived. Through intuition and bodily sensations, intentional emotions (4.4.2) provide the individual knowledge about what ought to be (Frankl 2018a, p. 28). Besides Frankl, based on Dewey, James, Turunen, Heintzelman, and King, Section 4.4.2 argued that humans are seemingly equipped to detect this ‘ought to be’, ‘rightness’, or ‘truthfulness’. Although the ontological-epistemological foundations of this feeling of rightness or truthfulness can be debated, the intuitive feeling itself is commonplace and people recognise it (Clavien & FitzGerald 2018, p. 1). This ordinariness also means that the theoretical basis of the intuitive feeling is strong and provides grounds for generalisability (Turunen 1995, p. 243). To illustrate, in practice, appealing to the *conscience* in important decision-making situations or determining the right course of action is common:

- a) Former Austrian Environmental Minister Leonore Gewessler justified her vote, leading to the adoption of the EU Restoration Regulation in June 2024, as follows: “Today’s decision is a victory for nature. My *conscience* tells me unmistakably [that] when the healthy and happy life of future generations is at stake, courageous decisions are needed”. In this respect, Gewessler voted against the Austrian government’s position, and her vote was decisive for

the adoption of the Restoration Regulation<sup>77</sup>. She voted in favour of the Regulation, even though it could have resulted in her dismissal, a lawsuit, or the collapse of the entire governing coalition in Austria.

- b) World-renowned pianist András Schiff, 71, announced in an interview with The New York Times in March 2025 that he has canceled his scheduled performances in the United States due to the actions of Trump and his administration. In an interview with the Finnish newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat<sup>78</sup>, he justifies his decision as follows:

It would be naive to think that this would change anything. But I'm doing this for my *conscience*. I do what I feel inside. I don't want to think later that I could have done something, but I didn't. ... And most people do nothing. They just say it's not so bad now, let's wait for better times, and it won't affect me anyway. What kind of attitude is that?

- c) Article I of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948<sup>79</sup>) states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and *conscience* and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."
- d) The Physician's Pledge adopted by the World Medical Association in 1948 (Declaration of Geneva) and last updated in 2017 states: "I WILL PRACTISE [sic] my profession with *conscience* and dignity and in accordance with good medical practice" (item 8 of 14)<sup>80</sup>.

In organisational science and meaningfulness research, except for logotherapy, the term 'conscience' is infrequent, arguably because of its religious connotations. Rather, for example, the management and leadership literature prefers the social cognitive conception of 'moral identity' (e.g. Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum & Kuenzi 2013, pp. 152–153), some meaningful work scholars borrow the sociologist Sennett's term 'moral anchor' (Bailey, Lips-Wiersma et al. 2019, p. 483), positive psychologists refer to the 'authentic inner compass' (AIC) (Russo-Netzer & Shoshani 2020), and the sociologist Giddens speaks of a 'practical consciousness' (1986). Instead, Csikszentmihályi uses the term 'autonomous conscience' in the 3<sup>rd</sup> step of his complex meaning system to describe someone who no longer blindly conforms, but is reflective (2010, p. 317). Within management studies, Neubert

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/rogue-austria-environment-minister-leonore-gewessler-burns-bridges-save-eu-nature-restoration-law/>.

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/art-2000011156113.html>; In print Tiikkaja, 15.4.25, B2–3; <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/19/arts/music/andras-schiff-trump-boycott.html>

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-geneva/>

(2019, pp. 257, 259) has called for epistemological reflexivity in relation to the scholarship's view of human nature, for instance:

Consciousness with a *conscience* allows for rational action and inherent responsibility for that action, whereas a strictly materialistic view of persons attributes all actions to material forces and, by logical deduction, disavows personal responsibility (Moreland, 2009) (*ibid.*, p. 257; italics by the author).

In logotherapy, morality, responsibility, and meaningfulness are human phenomena. As such, they relate to experiencing, perceiving, valuing, and an individual's position or understanding of what is valuable and ethical (value-apprehension). Sumantra Ghoshal (2005, p. 79) employs the term mental phenomena and brings forth that ethical and moral considerations have been excluded from management theories because of the effort of making business a science that imitates physical sciences. According to Ghoshal, this involves a belief in causal determinism and the exclusion of human intentionality, choice, and common sense. Fundamentally, omitting the ethical sphere has led to the "dehumanization" of management practice. (*ibid.*, p. 79, 85). Likewise, in the 1920s, Frankl drew attention to dehumanization in the context of psychology. In fact, in developing logotherapy, his main goal was humanising psychology (Frankl 2024, p. 13).

For Frankl, man's humanness is captured by the dimension of noetic phenomena (ontological), the noological mode of being (anthropological), and being responsible, which refers to deciding how to answer the questions life presents (Frankl 2010/1964, p. 119; Figure 15). In providing the answer, individuals need their conscience, which guides moral reflection and decision-making. As a framework based on phenomenological ethics, instead of the more familiar normative approaches of virtue ethics, deontological ethics, and consequentialist theories (Peucker 2008, p. 307), logotherapy is argued to open management scholars to new insights and complement the extant theorisings of ethical decision-making, such as Jones' (1991) concept of 'moral intensity'. Naturally, the logothoretic view of phenomenological ethics challenges, for example, the pragmatist view of ethics. Surie and Ashley (2008, p. 238) describe that "[P]ragmatism in ethics extends an action-oriented problem-solving approach to the moral arena by rejecting epistemological assumptions about the nature of truth, objectivity and rationality, and emphasizing practice over theory". Along these lines, pragmatism seemingly treats ethics as a cognitive social phenomenon, focusing on consequences in social and natural reality. Thus, it ignores the importance of inner, conscious, and critical value-ethical striving for human beings themselves and their existential experience of what matters in life.

Meaningful living and working are increasingly important for modern people. At the same time, more and more people, especially young, are anxious, even

desperate, not only about their own future, but the future of our planet. Logotherapy emphasises that the value standards underlying human action determine the quality of the actions, thereby setting the criteria for them (Lukas & Schönfeld 2019, p. 29). It also highlights the quality of an individual's value-apprehension and its relationship to one's value-ethical growth process. As mentioned in Section 4.5, to decide, act accordingly, and stand behind one's actions forms a stable triad whose byproduct is a peace of mind. Studying these topics and the 'meaning fulfilment' process (4.5.2) empirically could serve organisational scholars in their effort to make organisations better places for humans, society, and nature.

To conclude, by highlighting the conscience and value-ethical knowledge, this dissertation supports the idea that ultimately knowledge and knowing, as well as meaningfulness and the existential experience of meaningfulness, are related to truth (Bell 2004, p. 205; Turunen 1995, p. 19). In Frankl's theorising, truth is an objective value that can be oriented towards but not be achieved definitively or completely (Frankl 1953, p. 12; Turunen 1995, p. 200). In his 1953 article *Logos and Existence in Psychotherapy*, Frankl encapsulates what the truth-orientation means in treating illnesses (1953, p. 12):

... man is lead not so much out of a disease as toward a truth. For the sake of truth, however, the patient will have to be dragged through the entire range of his existential problems (instead of ignoring them), in full realization of the possibility that a rude awakening from his metaphysical irresponsibility and the uncovering of his manifold spiritual [noological] conflicts may lead the patient to a temporary increase of tension, i.e., to a painful experience. Suffering of this kind must be taken in stride and accepted. For it has been quite some time now that we have stopped to consider restoration of the patient's capacity for work and enjoyment as the only aim of psychotherapy. It is our conviction that psychotherapy has also the task of making the individual capable of enduring pain. This the new psychotherapy [logotherapy] will have to accomplish whenever an individual is confronted with necessary suffering, such as that caused by unalterable fate (e.g., an incurable disease), or whenever a crisis of existential maturation develops.

This dissertation argues that, as an existential experience, meaningfulness is essentially about truth and the human striving for truthfulness: what matters is an individual's conscious choice of striving for truthfulness in work and life. This (naïve aspiration) is also the key to meaningful living, where the feeling of rightness or truthfulness serves as our inner compass for the "right" decision or action. If organisational researchers aim to humanise management and leadership theory, the human conscience, an experiential relationship to values, and the feeling of rightness deserve their attention in the future.

## 7.4 Practical implications, limitations, and interestingness

Human existence is not just being but contains various endeavours in which an individual may succeed or fail. Being able to evaluate one's aspirations or life as if it were an object allows the individual to pose the question of what is the difference between meaningful life and life, or between meaningful work and work? And further, how ought one live one's life to live it well? (Vuori 2012). To provide a starting point for a personal journey towards existentially meaningful living and working, the following presents this dissertation's practical implications condensed into five key calls for action for work-life professionals, managers, and leaders:

1. Understand and, if necessary, be prepared to update your view of human nature, because through it, you see yourself, others, and your place in the world.
2. Ask yourself what is valuable and on what basis, as it is connected to what you consider meaningful.
3. Dare to strive for truthfulness in decision-making, as it will guide you to the core of the problem and the best solution for all parties involved.
4. Understand the difference between what you must, what you can, and what you ought to do.
5. Recognise firsthand that peace of mind stems from harmony between being and meaning, that is, between deciding responsibly guided by the conscience, acting accordingly, and standing behind your actions.

Many established organisation and motivation scholars acknowledge the importance and influence of the view of human nature (e.g. Allport 1992/1959; Burrell & Morgan 1979; Drucker 2007; Maslow 1962 cited in Drucker 2007, p. 14; Morgan & Smirchich 1980). For example, in his seminal book *The Human Side of Enterprise*, Douglas McGregor, Maslow's student, wrote that "[B]ehind every managerial decision or action are assumptions about human nature and human behavior" (1960, p. 33). This dissertation brings forth that the view of human nature each of us (wittingly or unwittingly) holds necessarily involves foundational beliefs, that is, meta-level philosophical assumptions. In more practical terms, our view of human nature is connected to what we think we are capable of, how we think people work together, what we think motivates them, our relationship with nature, and how we encounter and treat others, be they acquaintances or strangers. In short, our view of human nature is the window through which we view ourselves, others, and the world (Katainen 2020).

The second call for action connects that which we consider meaningful to our value-apprehension (6.4). In practical terms, value-apprehension means we are aware of what is valuable to us, that we can justify this based on criteria other than subjective preferences or social and cultural values, and that, when making value judgements, we connect intuitive knowledge and reasoning in the sense of critical-normative interpretation. Importantly, as an unintentional but desired byproduct of an intention-based orientation towards something universally valuable or intersubjectively (prescriptively) agreed as valuable, one simultaneously increases the (common) good in the world instead of primarily pursuing one's own interest.

The third call for action builds on the idea that those “who are aware of their own capacity to decide will take responsibility for what they decide in freedom” (Lukas 2020a, p. 260), as Section 4.5 states, and which Section 7.3 illustrated with examples. This requires moral courage and an alert conscience – understood as a meaning-organ, an inner or moral compass – and a dialogical relationship with it.

The fourth call for action refers to the different dynamics of need-satisfaction, self-actualisation, and meaning-fulfilment, that is, the three complementary meta-level approaches to human motivation (5.1 and 5.3). Originally, Frankl named them the ‘must’, the ‘can’, and the ‘ought’, respectively. From the logotherapy perspective, our motivation contains elements from all three approaches. Yet, especially in the Western world, we keep ourselves busy focusing on satisfying invented and real needs, as well as detecting and utilising our strengths, potentials, and abilities. But for what? An important, yet currently neglected aspect of human motivation is the value-ethical dimension, which concerns the question, ‘What does life ask of me?’ (ought), as opposed to the questions ‘What do I need or want?’ (must) or ‘What am I capable of?’ (can) (Table 2; Section 5.3). In your work, if you have an intuitive feeling that you are in the *right* place, doing the *right* things, and being allowed to do them in the *right* way, then you are dealing with the value-ethical realm of motivation. Likewise, if you experience value conflicts or ethical stress at work (Katainen 2020, p. 44; 2013, p. 15), these are also related to the value-ethical, i.e., the ought-dimension of our motivation.

The fifth call for action speaks for itself.

Furthermore, the practical implications of this dissertation include applying the theoretical contributions to teaching and business training. In particular, the intention is to create a foundation for teaching meaningfulness in universities and to include reflection on meaningfulness in business management trainings. Likewise, logotherapy education benefits from the theoretical contributions of this book. Based on this dissertation, the author will also write a Finnish-language nonfiction book about meaningfulness that includes practical examples and can be used in teaching.

## Limitations

The main limitations of this dissertation are that it indicates or identifies but does not present a thorough analysis of the existing misunderstandings of ‘logotherapy’, the criticisms directed at it, or the strengths and limitations of ‘logotherapy’ as a meta-level framework. These fall outside the scope of this dissertation, which focuses not on ‘logotherapy’ or ‘logotherapy’ per se, but instead, in using the integrated meta-theoretical framework as a method theory. In other words, logotherapy is used as a theoretical lens to advance theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience and research on meaningful work. Rather than criticism, this dissertation looks forward and integrates the a priori axiomatic system of thought, or meta-level theoretical foundation of Frankl’s thinking in such a form that it is easier for other scholars to understand it and realise its comprehensiveness. The author is aware that Frankl as a person and logotherapy as a doctrine have been criticised in academia. However, Frankl has also inspired many scholars and practitioners. Based on reading scientific publications in the research areas of ‘meaningful work’ and ‘meaningful life’ during this dissertation, most of the logotherapy criticism does not hit its target, as it is based on lack of understanding of the original concepts or theorising, the related meta-level assumptions, or simply, ignorance (e.g. King & Hicks 2021, p. 563; Steger 2019, p. 209, 214). Therefore, instead of highlighting shortcomings, this dissertation has compiled a meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy, on the basis of which a critical evaluation can be made going forward, and whose refinement, criticism, and development by researchers are welcome.

Since this dissertation focuses on theorising and addresses a broad topic, the content remains on a highly abstract level, which may appear as an “opaque writing style” (Tsoukas et al 2024, p. 1240), especially for those for whom Frankl’s logotherapy is new. The proposed meta-level theoretical framework may also be considered too complex. Although this dissertation aims for clarity in writing style, as well as for simplicity in integrating logotherapy and the schematic representations, it admits that the goal is partly impossible. As Dubois and Gadde, quoting Weick put it (2014, p. 1241), “complex phenomena necessitate complex theories”. Humans and behaviour are complex phenomena. In accordance, Frankl’s theorising of these phenomena is also complex, especially giving his striving for a holistic view. Thus, the schematic representations that illustrate the textual description of logotherapy, play an important role in the contributions of this dissertation. When reflecting on the simplicity-complexity aspect of the integrated meta-level theoretical framework of logotherapy, the author has also kept in mind DuBois’s (1993, p. 60) insistence

that all of the really existing dimensions of the human person [are to] be given precedence over the desire for theoretical simplicity, a desire which ultimately leads to a less scientific approach to reality, i.e. an approach which produces less scientia, or knowledge of reality.

Conversely, precisely because of the simplicity-complexity aspect, some of Frankl's theorisings have not been utilised in this dissertation. For example, Frankl's terminology about 'person', 'personality', and 'character', which, as Lukas highlights, "almost reverses their normal meanings" (2020a, p. 60). Specifically,

'Character' refers to the aspects of personality which can be attributed to genes, to upbringing, to natural disposition. 'Personality' ... is what a [spiritual] person has made of these elements, it is the completely unique quality of personhood [becoming] that has been shaped by that person's own choices. (ibid.).

Throughout the logotherapy's integration process, the ambitious goal has been to convey what Frankl originally said, not the author's interpretation of it. Yet, a natural limitation of this dissertation is that it offers a single reasoned and condensed interpretation of what Frankl meant (Puusa & Juuti 2020, p. 114). It is to be remembered that a theoretical piece is necessarily an interpretation (Kallio 2004, p. 47). By nature, in the social sciences, such as organisational studies and psychology, "knowledge is accepted rather than known to be correct", and "theories cannot be proven correct in the same sense as those in the exact sciences" (Kallio & Palomäki 2020, p. 138). How well this dissertation has succeeded in conveying Frankl's ideas and in advancing theorising on meaningfulness as an existential experience is left to other scholars to evaluate. Overall, this dissertation leaves ample room for future theoretical elaboration and critical assessment, including the proposed meta-level theoretical framework, the four meta-level theories and their constituents, and the value-based typology of meaningfulness.

Finally, it is worth stating that Frankl's works also contain outdated ideas or expressions. While acknowledging that Frankl was obviously bounded by the social and historical situation of his time, his insights and theorising about being human, human responsibility, and meaning fulfilment are not outdated; on the contrary, they still offer an alternative and timely way of seeing and understanding meaningfulness.

## Interestingness

So, how to evaluate the overall research contribution of this dissertation? One simple criterion basis that organisational scholars have relied on for decades is sociologist Murray Davis's proposal on the social impact of theories, that is, the 'Sociology of

the Interesting' (1971, p. 309). Alvesson and Sandberg (2013, pp. 67–68) suggest that Davis's work can be used to evaluate problematisation methodology, specifically, how likely it is that an alternative assumption ground – in this dissertation, the alternative theoretical stance of logotherapy – will generate interesting theory or theorising:

*That's obvious!* If the set of alternative assumptions to a large extent confirms the assumptions held by target audiences – what they already assume to be the case about the subject matter – many will regard it as obvious.

*That's absurd!* If, however, the alternative assumption ground denies all the assumptions held by targeted audiences, it is likely that it will be regarded as unbelievable. ...

*That's interesting!* This is the ideal response. ... the experience of 'this is interesting' occurs when the alternative assumption ground accepts some and denies some of the assumptions held by the targeted audiences. (ibid.).

This dissertation has two primary and two secondary target audiences. The primary audience consists of meaningful work and logotherapy scholars. The secondary audience involves organisational researchers and meaningfulness scholars. From a disciplinary viewpoint, the latter target group is heterogeneous, including researchers from the humanities to medicine, from psychology to sociology. Based on conference presentations, meaningful work scholars find this book's theorising outcomes interesting, and the meta-level framework of logotherapy complex. As for logotherapy scholars, the opposite is true. Organisational scholars, in general, find some familiar interface with parts relating to meaningful work research, whereas logotherapy appears as a complex, new way of seeing. Despite the complexity, it must be noted that among organisational researchers, those interested in the philosophy of science or familiar with the philosophical-phenomenological approach, both the meta-level framework of logotherapy and the theorising outcomes of this dissertation have aroused interest. To the more heterogeneous group of meaningfulness researchers, the theoretical and methodological contributions of this dissertation have not yet been presented at any event. (Alvesson & Sandberg 2013, pp. 68–69).

Besides the above acceptance by the target audience, Alvesson and Sandberg (2013, p. 68) suggest that the degree of interestingness of research contribution is connected to the number of assumptions challenged. Then, 'interesting' contribution relates to some, 'obvious' to none, and 'absurd' to many challenged assumptions (ibid.). Based on the quantity of challenged assumptions, this dissertation falls into the category of 'absurd'. However, the author argues that the degree of interestingness of the alternative theoretical stance cannot be based solely on the quantity of the challenged assumptions: the quality of the assumptions, the content

of the new theorising outcomes, and whether the alternative view provides a complementary or substitute perspective in relation to the home theoretical stance must also matter. In this dissertation, the alternative view of logotherapy is complementary; through it, we gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and experience of meaningfulness.

Tsoukas and Chia (2011, p. 4) remark that new or alternative ways of seeing should be approached with both openness and criticality. The author hopes that both logotherapy and this dissertation's theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions receive such reception in academia – even if it requires some intellectual effort. After all, is that not the essence of academic work?

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- 1.6. Beyond Self-Actualization & Self-Expression, pp. 93–105. Reprinted from the *Journal of Existential Psychiatry*, 1, pp. 5–20, 1960.
  - 1.7. The Philosophical Foundations of Logotherapy, pp. 107–120. Reprinted from Strauss, E. (Ed.), *Phenomenology: Pure and Applied*. Pittsburgh: Dusquene University Press, 1964.
  - 2.1. Logotherapy & Existentialism, pp. 121–130. Reprinted from *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice*, (4)3, pp. 138–142, 1967.
  - 2.2. Philosophical Basis of Psychotherapy, pp. 131–135. Reprinted from *Philosophy Today*, 5, pp. 59–64, 1961.
  - 2.3. The Pluralism of Sciences and the Unity of Man, pp. 137–155. *Lecture* given on June 30, 1966, Colombia University.

- 2.4. Determinism & Humanism, pp. 157–170. Reprinted from *Humanitas: Journal of the Institute of Man*, (7)1, pp. 23–36, 1971.
- 2.5. Time and Responsibility, pp. 171–176. Reprinted from *Existential Psychiatry*, 1, pp. 361–366, 1966.
- 3.2. Religion & Existential Psychotherapy, pp. 193–202. Information on the original publication is missing.
- 3.5. Collective Neuroses of the Present Day, pp. 221–234. Reprinted from *Universitas* (English Edition) 4, pp. 301–315, 1961.
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- Chapter II: Existential Dynamics and Neurotic Escapism, pp. 19–35.
- Chapter IV: Logotherapy and Existence, pp. 53–58
- Chapter V: Dynamics and Values, pp. 59–69
- Chapter VIII: Group Psychotherapeutic Experiences in a Concentration Camp, pp. 95–105
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