

Read. You're Getting Very Unsleazy

By RICHARD A. SHWEDER

VIKTOR FRANKL, Nazi concentration camp inmate No. 119,104, died last week in Vienna believing that "decisions, not conditions" are what mental health is about and that you do not get better by seeing yourself as a victim. In his seminal 1946 book "Man's Search for Meaning," he offered to the world a psychiatric theory emphasizing self-determination and personal responsibility in dealing with emotional suffering. The book, which spawned "logotherapy" and the creation of the "third school" of Viennese psychotherapy (after Freud and Adler), is now in its 73d edition and has been translated into 24 languages.

Yet his views continue to be something of a heresy among many psychotherapists in the United States, where the causes of distress are still thought to reside outside the control and will of the sufferer, whether he or she is being treated by counseling alone or in conjunction



Reuters

Viktor Frankl, champion of the will.

with prescription drugs.

Dr. Frankl astonished the world by reporting that the human spirit had found ways to attain dignity even in the slime of Auschwitz. He argued that the sort of person a Jewish prisoner became — degraded or honorable — was "the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp conditions alone." According to Dr. Frankl, each person is capable of rising above wretched circumstances, responsible for discerning some redemptive significance or "logos" in his or her life.

Many American clinicians find Dr. Frankl's belief in the power of self-determination difficult to accept. Various more nihilistic outlooks, emphasizing environmental or biological factors in suffering, continue to exert enormous influence. When troubled Americans consult a therapist to "recover memories" from child-

hood, they tend to see themselves as victims; or they may see their problem as chemical, hormonal or genetic, or as a result of some other random causal process for which they are not responsible.

This contrasts with therapeutic practice elsewhere. When troubled Hindus in India, for example, consult an oracular specialist to learn of events in their earlier incarnations, they invariably discover some personal fault, which they can remediate through sacrifices in their current lives. Dr. Frankl actually adopted that pre-modern idea as "the categorical imperative for logotherapy." "Live as if you were living already for the second time," he says, "and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act

now!

"It seems to me that there is nothing that would stimulate a man's sense of responsibility more than this maxim, which invites him to imagine that the present is past and, second, that the past may yet be changed and amended."

It is quite possi-

ble that Frankl-style logotherapies will grow in popularity in the United States with its renewed emphasis on personal responsibility. After all, the fact that identical twins who grow up in identical family environments can be different from each other suggests that there is more to human behavior than just heredity and environment. Americans' readiness to embrace such therapies may be tested when, for example, some rape victims are encouraged to regain a sense of control over their world by accepting some responsibility for the trauma. ("I should never have gone down that unlit street alone.")

In a world in which many people see themselves as spiritual but not religious, Dr. Frankl's ideas beckon. He wrote: "What is demanded of man is not, as some existential philosophers teach, to endure the meaninglessness of life, but rather to bear his incapacity to grasp its unconditional meaningfulness in rational terms. Logos is deeper than logic."

It was a good thing that they did not distribute Prozac to prisoner No. 119,104.

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