

FROM PSYCHOPATHOLOGY TO PNEUMOPATHOLOGY

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Pathology is the study and diagnosis of disease. Psychopathology is the study, generally from within psychiatry and psychoanalysis, of mental disorder. Psychiatrists are particularly interested in descriptive psychopathology, that is to say, with describing the symptoms and syndromes of mental illness (i.e., phenomenology). This is evidenced in the diagnostic system of both the *DSM* and *ICD*.



It is the aim of this paper – my third meta-clinical one for *The International Forum for Logotherapy* – to give an account of ‘pneumopathology’ in relation to Frankl’s philosophical anthropology; to clarify and detail the distinctions between ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’, which are often confused in relation to this discussion; and to urge the retention of classical logotherapy which resists any subtle or seductive attempt, however well-intentioned, to become a hagiotherapy (healing through that which is holy; from the Greek *hagios* meaning ‘holy’).

Pneumopathology was a term coined by Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854), the German philosopher, who introduced it into the philosophical lexicon, though it has to be said it is neither widely known nor used. A notable exception to this neglect is Eric Voegelin (1901-1985), another German philosopher, who borrows and employs the term to designate the spiritual disease, as he sees it, of Gnosticism.

Psyche is ‘soul’. *Pneuma* is the ancient Greek word for ‘breath’ (*ruach* in Hebrew) and, in a religious context, for *spirit*, which is how it is commonly employed in Judaic and Christian usage, in the Septuagint and Greek New Testament. Spirit (or *animus* in Latin) operates within the body and realizes itself through the body. The spirit is, in essence, freedom. So man is responsible at every moment. That is why Frankl can correctly and with conviction state that freedom and responsibility constitute man as spiritual being.

Pneumopathology refers, then, to the realm of phenomena which has been described, by Voegelin, as “a disease of the spirit” though this is not Frankl’s understanding – a point I will return to shortly. However, there are close parallels in the theorizing of these two exceptional twentieth-century thinkers.

In an essay dating from 1966 entitled, “The German University and the Order of German Society: A Reconsideration of the Nazi Era” published in *Published Essays 1966-1985*, Voegelin cites the example of Lady Macbeth in

the context of his brief citation of Schelling's term. A man has summoned the doctor to observe Lady Macbeth's strange nocturnal behavior (she tries to scrub away the spots and sins of the past) in the last act of Shakespeare's tragedy:

Doctor. What is it she does now? Look how she rubs her hands.

Gentleman: It is an accustomed action with her to seem thus washing her hands.

[*Diagnosis of the*] **Doctor:** Foul whisperings are abroad; unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles. Infected minds to their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets. More need she the divine [the priest] than the physician. Good God, forgive us all!

Spirit, in this Voegelinian philosophical perspective, designates the openness of human beings to the divine Ground of their existence; estrangement from the spirit designates the closure and revolt against the Ground. It is the human spirit that partakes of the divine. Humans thus rise to their divine destiny as the *imago Dei*. Nazi Germany produced a society whose spirit was sick, according to Voegelin, in its proliferation of evil – “evil is a pneumopathological condition of consciousness” in Voegelin's words.²
^{p.35} It was an example of pneumopathological closure to the divine Ground, which signifies from the Voegelinian perspective, more of a derailment and disease, a spiritual disorder, than a disorientation.

It may be the disorder of an age or of men. Humans are of the same substance though non-identified with divine reality, according to Voegelin, in contradistinction to the theorizing of a Marx or Nietzsche. It is noetic consciousness that discerns this and participates in what Voegelin labels “the Flow of divine Presence”. Pneumopathology refers to the creation of second realities, to reductionistic fallacies, to illusions of immortality. The major symptom of existential alienation is the refusal to recognize reality. Chrysippus, the Stoic, speaks of the *agnoia ptoiodes* (scary ignorance) of the moderns that leads them away from the light (as in Plato's Allegory of the Cave), and Cicero characterizes as a disease of the mind, the rejection of reason, while Voegelin, in his Platonic philosophizing, conceptualizes it as the disorder in soul (*psyche*) and society (*polis*).

I contend that philosophical therapy needs to be cognizant of such a condition. It has clinical consequences for practicing logotherapists. Moreover, it is Frankl alone who traces the implications of these abstractions and incorporates them into his classification of mental disorders. Indeed, logotherapy is a cure through ‘reason’ (understood in the classical sense).

So where does this fit in relation to Frankl's existential emphasis on the noetic in terms of his tri-dimensional ontology and philosophical anthropology? *Nous* is Greek for ‘thought’ or ‘understanding’; it is that which differentiates humans from (other) animals, who also have *psyche* or ‘soul’, meaning ‘life’. Soul animates body. For Frankl, it refers to what is uniquely human. *Nous*, thus, is (immaterial) intellect (also intellectual intuition); it is

'mind' or 'reason'. It is thus akin to *logos*. The human person, in a Classical Greek and Christian trichotomy, may be viewed in three dimensions: somatic, psychic, and noetic; but while all humans have *nous*, believers assert we are *pneuma* or spirit too. And as the noetic has also been translated as 'spiritual' in English there has been some semantic and conceptual confusion, at least for English-speaking readers of Frankl. *Pneuma* refers to spirit (*Geist*) or spiritual soul (*Seele*) from within a religious context. Soul is the principle of life just as spirit is the source of life. Man is in his entirety body, psyche and spirit.

Pneumatology is the study of spiritual beings and spiritual phenomena, especially the interactions between humans and God. We may speak, therefore, of the human trinity – somatic, psychic, and noetic – which is created in the image of the divine Trinity. But this is *not* a fourth dimension, as some Christian logotherapists have asserted. *Pneuma*, or the pneumatic dimension, which is the presence of the Holy Spirit (*Heiliger Geist*) in every human being created in the image of God (i.e., the indwelling of the Three Persons in the soul), *binds and holds the three dimensions together, grounds them*. It is not another dimension.

Now classical logotherapy correctly avoids confusion with this overtly religious connotation, and Frankl was at pains to separate them. 'Spiritual' is employed by Frankl without religious reference. Moreover, there is no such thing as *Christian logotherapy*. There is simply logotherapy and its practitioners will be Christian or Jew or Moslem or atheist, etc. So, logotherapy must avoid the pitfall of becoming hagiotherapy, the relatively new discipline, spearheaded by Tomislav Ivančić, a Croatian priest, who drew heavily on logotherapy in his 2010 book, *Diagnosing the Soul and Hagiotherapy*. Hagiotherapy not only draws on a person's spiritual strength (as in logotherapy) but also on God's Spirit and prayer is brought into the consulting room. This is overtly theistic/religious.

Frankl differentiates them thus: (logo)therapy involves helping souls while religion is about saving souls. There is an unconscious religious sense – a spiritual/rational unconscious, but there is also a difference we need to keep demarcated between religion and (logo)therapy. Logotherapy starts and stems from the spiritual, as Frankl repeats in a number of his works, but he holds the tension between them in balance; he doesn't collapse or confuse these two dimensions. He doesn't commit a category mistake. In *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, Frankl writes:

Religion provides man with more than psychotherapy ever could There are some authors who propose that psychotherapy relinquish its autonomy as a science and its independence from religion in favor of seeing its function as that of an *ancilla theologiae*. As is well known, for centuries philosophy was allotted the role of such an *ancilla theologiae*, i.e., a handmaid in the service of theology. However, just as the dignity of man is based on his freedom

... so the dignity of a science is based on that unconditional freedom that guarantees its independent search for truth ...whoever tries to make psychotherapy into an *ancilla theologiae* ... not only robs it of the dignity of an autonomous science but also takes away the potential value it might have for religion psychotherapy has to refrain from setting any preconceived goals along religious lines'.^{1, p.80-81}

The human psyche is religious by nature but that evidence, paradoxically, can only come from a therapy that by its nature is not religiously oriented. Logotherapy is such a secular science. Religion, or the spiritual sphere, is the proper concern of humanity in the search for *ultimate* meaning. Therein, the difference.

To make an additional point alluded to earlier: It is true that the noetic and the pneumatic dimensions cannot become sick *in themselves* but the search for meaning and God may become frustrated or blocked and originate illness on the other levels. That is what Voegelin probably means by 'pneumopathology', though it has to be said that Frankl is more precise in this regard. Voegelin's term "disease of the spirit" is misleading and may give the wrong impression. For, as Frankl rightly and repeatedly says, the spirit as *such* can never be sick. The frustration of meaning may lead to a noögenic neurosis just as frustration on the spiritual level of existence may lead to what I am calling a pneumatogenic neurosis. But the neurosis is the result of access to the pneumatic being blocked or being ignored, etc. The pneumatic dimension can't cause or be the reason for any illness. However, conversely, if positive influences occur at the level of *pneuma* it will, in turn, influence the somatic, psychic, and noetic dimensions as well. The point here is that this explicitly spiritual dimension may be attested to theoretically or existentially by the theistic logotherapist but it can't explicitly enter into clinical practice. I am, thus, pleading for the classical tradition of logotherapy and existential analysis against some attempts to conflate these distinctions which Frankl was at pains to demarcate.

Frankl asserts: "A higher dimension, by definition, is a more *inclusive* one. The lower dimension is included in the higher one; it is subsumed in it and encompassed by it. Thus, biology is overarched by psychology, psychology by noölogy, and noölogy by theology."^{1, p.16} Theology is, thus, the queen of the sciences as its 'object' is God – our final end. Yes, but logotherapy is *not* theology. In *The Will to Meaning* and *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* Frankl asserts that there is a dimensional barrier between the human and divine worlds, as well as between the spiritual and the instinctual in contrast to the fluid border between consciousness and the unconscious.^{1, p.32,156}

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References

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