



Communication in logotherapy as an example of phenomenological approach in cognition of another human being

Komunikacja w logoterapii jako przykład fenomenologicznego podejścia w poznaniu drugiego człowieka¹

<https://doi.org/10.34766/fetr.v50i2.1078>

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to outline the issue of communication in logotherapy based on existential communication, the foundation of which is phenomenological cognition of another human being. The basic assumptions of logotherapy have been presented in the context of the issue of the location of psychotherapy in relation to the question of its essence, and at the same time the basic catalyst for therapeutic change – the techniques developed on the basis of empirical evidence, or a therapeutic relationship. The next part of the article outlines the form of existential communication according to Karl Jaspers in the context of phenomenological cognition of another human being. On the background of logotherapy, the meeting of Me and You, full of authentic acceptance and devoid of ready-made interpretative patterns, allows us to discover the freedom “to”, which provides a space for authentic selection and implementation of values, taking responsibility for one’s own existence, and consequently – experiencing the meaning of life.

Keywords: logotherapy, meaning of life, values, existential communication, phenomenology

Abstrakt: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zarysowanie problematyki komunikacji w logoterapii na gruncie komunikacji egzystencjalnej, której fundamentem jest fenomenologiczne nastawienie w poznawaniu drugiego człowieka. Podstawowe założenia logoterapii przedstawione zostały w kontekście problematyki umiejscowienia psychoterapii wobec pytania o jej istotę, a zarazem zasadniczy katalizator zmiany terapeutycznej – techniki wypracowane w oparciu o dowody empiryczne czy też relacja terapeutyczna. W kolejnej części artykułu zarysowany został kształt komunikacji egzystencjalnej wg Karla Jaspersa w kontekście fenomenologicznego poznania drugiego człowieka. Na gruncie logoterapii pełne autentycznej akceptacji i pozbawione gotowych wzorców interpretacyjnych spotkanie Ja i Ty pozwala odkryć wolność “ku”, będącą przestrzenią autentycznego wybierania i urzeczywistniania wartości, przyjmowania odpowiedzialności za własną egzystencję, a co za tym idzie – doświadczania sensu.

Słowa kluczowe: logoterapia, sens życia, wartości, komunikacja egzystencjalna, fenomenologia

Introduction

One of the most fundamental questions of modern psychotherapy is the question of understanding it as an art or as a technique. With the emergence of the concept of EBP (evidence-based psychotherapy) in the 1990s (Chrzastowski, 2019), certain standards

were set, directing the knowledge that this field operates away from pseudoscientific concepts supported by individual intuition and experience of the therapist to empirically verified theorems and the construction of procedures and techniques with measurable

1 Artykuł w języku polskim: <https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/2022-2Sipowicz.pdf>

effectiveness (Cook, Schwartz, Kaslow, 2017). Thus, attention was directed to the question of what really treats the patient in the course of therapy. According to many contemporary authors, the person of the therapist and the therapeutic relationship are the basic healing factor regardless of the therapy trend (Norcross, 2010; Wachtel 2012). However, excessive perception of psychotherapy as a kind of art may result in the slipping towards the area of quackery, where empirical knowledge is eliminated.

According to Viktor E. Frankl (2019), the creator of the basic assumptions of logotherapy, psychotherapy is both an art and a technique, and each extreme is a pure artifact, as a phenomenon that is inherently mutually exclusive in practice. The continuum of therapeutic situations opening between the extremes offers an abundance of diverse possibilities, among which both the existential encounter between two humans, which is the therapeutic relationship and each technique and method in a specific situational context have their value. As stated by Frankl (2017), psychotherapy understood as art is closest to an authentic existential encounter, and therefore “existential communication” as understood by Karl Jaspers (1998, 2009).

Frankl’s logotherapy, also referred to as meaning-centered psychotherapy, uses a rich repertoire of techniques which are specific to it – including, among others, paradoxical intention, dereflection, modification of attitudes, logodrama, mountain-range exercise, guided autobiography, etc. (Marshall, Marshall, 2012; Dhezelic, Ghanoum, 2015)–for which communication is the primary medium (Lukas, 1998; Lukas, 1999). However, communication in logotherapy is not limited to language communication. It is an interpersonal phenomenon whose power lies in extracting man from the existential emptiness through the search for meanings and values. The techniques used in logotherapy do not set a rigid framework of management, nor do they assume precise implementation of the “recipe” for therapy – they are used in a fluid way to give a course to the process of communication, the essence of which is the phenomenological cognition of another person.

The aim of this paper is to outline the logotherapy process in the context of a phenomenologically oriented encounter, which is the broadly understood communication between the patient and the therapist.

1. Therapeutic relationship in the aspect of the basic assumptions of logotherapy

The process of communication is always embedded in the specificity of the relationship that connects people communicating with each other (Wachtel, 2012). Basically, all psychotherapy currents unanimously see the therapeutic relationship as a necessary (although insufficient) condition for the emergence of the psychotherapy process (Aleksandrowicz, 2000) and one of the most important healing factors (Czabała, 2006). The difference lies in defining the form of this therapeutic compound and its role in the process of change. Referring to the previously described discrepancy between psychotherapy understood as an art or a technique, it should be emphasized that in some approaches these relations are in themselves a fundamental carrier of psychotherapeutic assistance, while therapeutic techniques are considered only as a pretext for establishing and maintaining communication between the patient and the psychotherapist. At the other extreme, the opinion that a technique developed on the basis of scientific evidence is effective regardless of the person of the therapist and the bond between the therapist and the patient can be found (Trzebińska, 2005).

Against the background of the presented considerations, logotherapy appears as a somewhat eclectic concept. It is based, on the one hand, on phenomenologically oriented being with another person, and on the other hand, on moving within not so much the specific techniques as the practical implications of Frankl’s philosophy and anthropology. The relationship itself would thus prove insufficient to achieve a change, but the philosophical and anthropological material (logotherapy) and the techniques used by logotherapy also cannot do without an existential meeting between the therapist and the patient, emphasizing the subjectivity and dignity of man. In logotherapy, science and wisdom are nothing without a bit of humanity (Frankl, 2018). As emphasized by Frankl (2017), logotherapy is both an art and a technique – a dynamic point on a continuum whose current location is the result of many individual factors. Frankl’s psychotherapy is

much more than “therapeutic engineering” aimed at a specific change – it is based on the rapprochement of two human beings, each of whom represents own sense of existence (Leontiev, 2016).

Certainly, the personality of the therapist and the therapeutic relationship established with its help is the foundation in the process of logotherapy. Thus, the question can be raised what is the form and specificity of logotherapeutic communication.

Looking at the Polish and world logotherapeutic literature, it can be noticed that it abounds primarily in philosophical and anthropological inquiries. There are few publications on techniques specific to this trend, and the procedures for their application are general assumptions and inspirations guiding communication rather than specific guidelines. This ratio is a perfect illustration of the essence of the logotherapeutic process, which can be understood as “healing through meaning” (Fabry, 1968). The issue of the relationship between the logotherapist and the patient, and proper communication is usually not emphasized. However, it emerges indirectly through the analysis of the basic assumptions of logotherapy – precisely in the philosophical and anthropological aspects. It is difficult to imagine psychotherapy not rooted in the proper theory of man (Frankl, 2018), however, for logotherapy, this foundation is in a special way the essence of the process itself. As indicated by M.S. Dezelic and G. Ghanoum (2015), logotherapy is not only psychotherapy, but also philosophy of life and anthropology of man. The therapeutic process is therefore a kind of immersion in the image of man and the world proposed by the logotherapy.

Logotherapy (Latin *logos* – meaning), also referred to as meaning-focused psychotherapy, is characterized by a specific vision of the perception of man and his place in the world, and in particular is interested in the issue of metamotivation of human existence – it oscillates around the question of the meaning of life and the possibility of experiencing happiness in the face of the turns of fate (Lukas, 1998). Logotherapy is based on three fundamental concepts: free will, the will of meaning, and the meaning of life (Frankl, 2019).

In Frankl’s view, freedom is an antidote to the determinism of the psychophysical dimension of existence. This freedom is not omnipotence in the sense

of independence from any conditions (biological, psychological or social), but the freedom to choose responsibility for one’s own attitude towards these conditions (Leontiev, 2016). The man reaches true humanity by rising into the dimension of freedom, which is possible through self-transcendence. (Frankl, 2017). This phenomenon reflects the man’s ability to transcend himself in the psychophysical dimension and to achieve the noetic (spiritual) dimension, thus adopting an attitude towards himself – his mental and somatic possibilities and difficulties, including symptoms of diseases and disorders and his own suffering. The noetic dimension of existence is a space for developing our own character and taking responsibility for who we become. The man reaches the noetic realm, “whenever he reflects on himself or, if necessary, when he rejects himself, makes an object of himself or questions himself, he shows that he has an awareness of himself, or that he has a conscience” (Frankl, 2018, p. 30). It is in the noetic dimension of existence that man feels the desire for meaning and has the freedom to find and fulfill it.

The will of meaning is a response to the statement of G.F. Allport (1960), according to which at every moment the human mind is constantly guided by some intention. According to Frankl (2017), the overriding motivation of human existence is the desire for meaning – both in the universal dimension (the meaning of life, supersense) and in the partial dimension (the meaning of individual situations). Meaning is always an implied meaning, and although it is hidden in the situations and circumstances of life in an immanent and objective way, the discovery of it by the man takes place through subjective interpretation and search burdened with many errors. The logotherapist is therefore not a depository of any absolute truth, and he seeks meanings, making mistakes and correcting relative truths on an equal footing with the patient (Frankl, 1984). The man fulfills his meanings through the implementation of values, which can be realized as follows:

1. By acting and shaping the world,
2. By living and experiencing the world,
3. By enduring fate, and in particular suffering (Frankl, 2019).

The essence of logotherapy is therefore discovering meanings, implementation of values, and as a result, experiencing the meaningfulness of individual life circumstances and one's own existence in general, while the role of a logotherapist involves accompanying the patient in this process in a special way and co-creating him. But what does this accompaniment and co-creation mean? As mentioned earlier, publications in the field of logotherapy do not directly provide an answer to this question. The solutions to this problem should be sought implicitly.

2. Logotherapy as a phenomenological cognition of the noetic dimension of existence

Phenomenology, understood as an optics of perception devoid of supposition, turns out to be the key issue for the question posed earlier. In the logotherapeutic context, it will be learning about existence beyond the interpretative patterns and explanations offered by, for example, psychodynamic or socioeconomic hypotheses. The man is perceived as a dignified subject with freedom achieved through transcendence in the noetic dimension and readiness to assume responsibility for his existence. Phenomenological optics frees the man from being a helpless object – a victim of biological, psychological and social conditions, or clashing drives. (Frankl, 2018).

The phenomenological view of man in logotherapy refers directly to existential communication and is, in a way, its crowning achievement. It should be acknowledged that communication can be understood at different levels, and from the perspective of psychotherapy it includes both the exchange of information and the relational aspect. K. Jaspers (1998) gives communication a special meaning, understanding it as an obverse of loneliness, and, above all, the

highest form of being oneself and experiencing fully one's own identity by being together. As stated by M. Żelazny (2011), the man in the existential dimension can reveal himself both to himself and to the world only in dialogue with another human being.

According to Jaspers (2009), the dimensions of communication include the Dasein² area (being here), and therefore empirical existence and the existential area. The man decides about himself within the possibilities (potentiality) inscribed in Dasein (i.e. the specificity of his existence). Existence cannot be directly explored, but it can be illuminated and thus bring out of darkness what man is. One of the possible ways of such clarification is communication, which is discovering the humanity of the partner and one's own by being in a relationship. Jaspers (1998, 2009) emphasizes that a human being can only be in a community, and "I" always exist in relation to "You". It is the act of rapprochement with another human being that constitutes existential existence and at the same time allows to experience it. The man can become himself authentically only thanks to another person, because being with others precedes being himself. It is not that one can exist initially as an isolated person and then enter into interpersonal relationships. Only the act of drawing closer to someone else makes it possible for the man to say "I am" about himself.

The man is made up of many interpenetrating dimensions, so there are many levels of communication. Empirical being here (Dasein) seeks to meet immediate needs – therefore, communication at this level is an exchange of information necessary for survival. According to Jaspers (1991), the man's only goals in the Dasein dimension are his own happiness, survival and multiplication. Interaction at the empirical level turns out to be insufficient as one becomes aware that everything known from the perspective of psychology, biology, chemistry, physics, etc. has already resounded.

2 M. Żelazny (2011) proposes to translate Dasein in K. Jaspers' view as "being here". This expression includes knowability (cognitive accessibility) and temporal character. Thus, Dasein expresses the man existing here and now, in a specific situational context, knowable using the methodology of biological, psychological and social sciences.

Communication at the Dasein level can be similarly compared on the basis of Frankl's dimensional ontology³ (2018) to a relationship with another human being only on the physical and mental level, neglecting the noetic dimension. The essence of humanity, in fact, goes "beyond all that man can know about himself" (Jaspers, 1998, p. 43). The authentic meeting of Me and You is possible thanks to man's ability to self-transcend, and thus to transcend his psychophysicality (analogous to Dasein) in order to see at the noetic level the other person and the universe of meanings existing for that person.

Existential communication understood in this way is an expression of phenomenological cognition of another human being. Being the foundation of a logotherapeutic meeting, it does not place the patient in the role of an object, shaped according to a pattern defining mental health. It is based on full acceptance and openness to the existence of the patient, a perception that questions one's own beliefs and suggestions. Logotherapy is much more than psychological engineering, because it is based on the rapprochement of two human beings, either of them representing their own sense of existence. (Frankl, 2018).

The essence of logotherapy is "healing through meaning" (Fabry, 1968), and therefore the search for particular meanings, senses, and supersensibility through the recognition and implementation of values. The role of the logotherapist is to accompany the patient in this process by affirmation of his dignity and subjectivity. A seemingly trivial and almost obvious statement reveals actually the foundations of logotherapeutic interactions. As stated by J. Fabry (1981, p. 11), "As long as we treat human beings as animals that can be trained, and machines that can be manipulated, we make them into animals and machines". On the other hand, if we make them aware of the fullness of their humanity manifested in the noetic dimension of existence, we support them in achieving this humanity.

The logotherapist discovers together with the patient the often unconscious freedom "to". Freedom inherent in the noetic dimension of existence allows us to go beyond the conditions and limitations of psychophysical existence, which "push" man to automatic answers to the questions posed by life. This freedom is a space for authentic choice and implementation of values, taking responsibility for one's own existence, and thus experiencing meaning.

Logotherapy, however, is far from a moralistic approach (Popielski, 2018). The therapist approaches the patient with ontological humility and acceptance, recognizing his right to shape his life according to his own conscience. This conscience is a key concept and is understood on the basis of logotherapy as an intuitive ability to find the meaning of specific situations. A living and tender conscience is an axiological compass that protects against experiencing existential emptiness. A logotherapist cannot impose on the patient his system of values and the meanings he perceives. His role is to give the patient the opportunity to listen to the voice of his own conscience.

The question of the axiological diversity and relativism that emerge in this way arises. If existential communication and phenomenological cognition presume listening to the man at the noetic level with full acceptance, is that associated with a kind of axiological permissiveness and chaos, and thus sterility?

It should be understood that the man does not create his own meaning, but only discovers the meaning hidden in what happens to him. In every situation there is only one true meaning, the existence of which is permanent and objective. However, this discovery has the flavor of intuitive explorations and interpretations, and is therefore burdened with error (Frankl, 2018). It follows that both the patient and the logotherapist can never be sure of the truth of the meanings to which they are devoted.

The logotherapist does not instruct the patient, but only sensitizes his conscience, also pointing to the freedom and responsibility hidden in the dignity of

3 In order to bring closer the understanding of man in the biological (lowest), psychic and noetic (highest) dimensions, Frankl (1984, 2017, 2018) introduces a dimensional ontology, which is a kind of geometric metaphor illustrating the complexity of human existence as a biological, psychic and noetic being at the same time. The first law of dimensional ontology indicates that the projection of one object on other, lower dimensions results in discrepancies. The second law, in turn, states that the projections of various objects into one lower dimension result in an isomorphism.

being human. He accompanies the discovery, clarification and implementation of values – what can be lived and experienced, created and given of oneself. He points out that existential choice is always possible, even in the form of adopting an attitude towards the inevitable, supporting the patient in consciously taking responsibility for who he is. The logotherapist rejects all interpretative patterns and looks at the patient in a way full of acceptance, seeing him as a unique human being with inherent dignity. He represents phenomenological curiosity in the face of an existential encounter with another human being and with the noetic dimension of his personality. For from communication at the existential level “(...) the brightest moments flow out, and their richness makes up the importance of life” (Jaspers, 2009, p. 221).

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Conclusion

Phenomenological cognition of another human being is the basic foundation of logotherapy, because it is a pure perception that directly aims at the true humanity of the human being. The rapprochement of the therapist and the patient through existential communication exposes the noetic dimension of existence and allows to perceive the patient's freedom, responsibility and conscience beyond biopsychosocial conditions.