



Logoprophylaxis in the face of the crisis of adolescence¹

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Abstract: This study addresses the problem of the adolescent crisis from the perspective of logoprophylaxis, i.e. preventive actions referring to logotherapy and existential analysis of V. E. Frankl. The concept of this Viennese researcher and physician, due to its anchoring in philosophy and due to Frankl's own traumatic experiences, is nowadays applied to the understanding of various phenomena of human life or crises of contemporary culture. The authors – referring to logotherapy – argue that adolescence generally has a crisis course and that this is a phenomenon characteristic of every family system and upbringing environment, but that this crisis is also related to the social potential of values and ideals expressed, for example, through religion or culture. This poses a challenge for educators, pedagogues or psychologists working with young people, as many educational problems and disorders are linked to the crisis nature of adolescence and thus to the social ways in which values are transmitted. An understanding of crisis in logotherapy terms is discussed, with a particular focus on the role of existential frustration. The authors argue that adolescent crisis can also be understood as a kind of existential crisis. Thus, a crisis relating to problems concerning life goals, value conflicts, choices made, or experiencing the meaning of life. It has been reasoned that logoprophylaxis provides a good conceptual apparatus for understanding this type of crisis and can make use of one of the main protective factors against the adverse course of an adolescent crisis – a sense of meaning. The application of logoprophylaxis to problems of adolescence has been demonstrated, as a developmental period associated with the search for worldview resolution and the definition of personal values. The strategy of providing existentially meaningful experiences was presented as an example of logoprophylactic strategies. The article also argues that logoprophylactic measures can support the process of upbringing, since a crisis in the life of an adolescent is usually associated with problematic experiences of the meaning of life and disorientation in the sphere of values.

Keywords: Adolescent crisis, logoprophylaxis, logotherapy, existential frustration, existentially meaningful experience.

Introduction

The age of adolescence has a crisis character and this phenomenon is characteristic of every family system and educational environment. The adolescent at this time aspires to be an adult and the identifications he or she achieved in childhood play an increasingly smaller role in his or her development (Erikson, 2004; Jankowska, 2017; Witkowski, 2015). This poses a challenge for educators, pedagogues or psychologists working with young people. Most of the typical parenting problems such as reluctance to learn, avoidance of school, rebellion towards parents, disobedience, may be symptoms of a crisis in an adolescent (Elliot, Place, 2010). Such a crisis may be both developmental-related

to the natural processes of gaining autonomy and building one's own identity, as well as situational – resulting from a reaction to a difficult situation in the family system or school (Szczukiewicz, 2015).

Natural developmental processes can give rise to many internal conflicts and difficult situations in relationships with adults at this age. At times this will clearly interfere with the adolescent's functioning and the fulfilment of developmental tasks. In this article, the crisis nature of adolescence is assessed from the perspective of Viktor E. Frankl's existential analysis and logotherapy. For this developmental period is inextricably linked to the search for a worldview resolution and the definition of personal values. It is

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also sometimes rebellious and violent in character, and at the same time the crisis in the life of an adolescent is usually connected with problematic experiences of the meaning of life and disorientation in the sphere of values. Therefore, consideration of experiencing a crisis and helping a young person in crisis requires reference to the concept of the meaning of life and consideration of the phenomenon of so-called existential frustration (Frankl, 1998, 2010).

Viktor Frankl's concept can be useful for understanding the crisis of adolescence because of the broad perspective its author takes towards individual and social problems. Existential analysis and logotherapy looks at individual difficulties not only through the prism of psychopathology and psychotherapy, but also from the perspective of philosophical anthropology and the „spirit of the times”. For, among other things, this broad reflection on the contemporary human condition, logotherapy is so highly regarded internationally (cf. Costello, 2019; Guttman, 2008; Maddox, 2002). New publications on its application to mental health disorders in the broadest sense are also constantly emerging (Lukas, Schönfeld, 2021). Thus, the adolescent crisis seen from the perspective of logotherapy is not a phenomenon that can simply be looked at through the lens of developmental psychology, but is a reflection of important socio-cultural processes that underlie the choices made by young people.

Preventive measures referring to the concept of V. E. Frankl and aimed at problems of this type of aetiology, have been referred to as logoprohylaxis (Solecki, 2022). Logoprohylaxis is based on a multidimensional, integral and personalistic vision of the human being and opposes the various reductionisms present in the human sciences (e.g. psychologism or nihilism). The human person is not determined by drives, but oriented towards meaning, possesses an inalienable dignity, and can only understand himself or herself from the level of transcendence (Frankl, 2017). The most important factor in the logoprohylactic approach is the sense of meaning in life, which protects a person from phenomena such as depression, suicidal thoughts, self-destructive behaviour, addictions or existential emptiness (Kmicik-Jusięga, 2022; Solecki, Hreciński, 2022).

1. Typology of crises and the crisis of adolescence

The terminology for crisis phenomena is very diverse. There are terms related to the concept of crisis such as psychological trauma, traumatic experience, post-traumatic stress, traumatic stress, trauma, traumatic event, emotional crisis, psychological crisis, critical life event, personality crisis, existential crisis, normative crisis, developmental crisis, identity crisis (Bronowski et al., 2019; Jacyniak, Płużek, 1998; Kubacka-Jasiecka, 2010, 2016; Oleś, 1992; Szczukiewicz, 1998). Some of the terms mentioned are close in nature, but some differ significantly in their scope of application. In the following, some of the terms mentioned will be taken into account with the assumption that, in general, the issue of mental crises can be organised by adopting a division into their two basic categories: developmental crises and traumatic crises (Szczukiewicz, 2015).

Developmental crises (natural, normative) are crises associated with developmental periods, especially with breakthroughs occurring in development. Their occurrence can be predicted, especially as to the time of occurrence and the nature or character of the crisis. Developmental crises are associated with developmental processes, i.e. e.g. transformations in the system of needs, value processes, etc. As a rule, the crisis shows a strong polarity or polarity, which is associated with a possible positive or negative resolution. One of the best-known developmental crises is the identity crisis typical of adolescence (Erikson, 1997; Szczukiewicz, 1998).

Trauma crises (situational crises, traumatic events, critical life events) occur randomly and rather unexpectedly and include so-called difficult situations. As a rule, they are impossible to foresee and prepare for, survive or apply appropriate countermeasures to (e.g. death of a loved one, serious illness, disability, loss of property, divorce). During trauma crises, the individual's normal activities and social interactions are disrupted or even completely interrupted. There are very strong negative emotions associated with the inability to reduce the traumatic situation

to routine ways of behaving or habitual ways of adapting. Such situations, as far as the problems of schoolchildren are concerned, lead to so-called adaptation disorders, which are the most common diagnostic diagnosis in adolescence. They very often concern problems related to a new stage of learning, high demands in a new school environment or rapid changes in the family system (e.g. divorce) (Szczukiewicz, 2015).

It is often assumed that psychological crises have a bivalent, dual nature – on the one hand, they contain a risk, the possibility of pathologising the individual, and on the other hand, they bring an opportunity for further development and growth, and thus a positive passage of the crisis (Kubacka-Jasiecka, 2016). The positive potential of a crisis (the emergence of positive effects as a result of overcoming it) is much greater in developmental crises. The strength and extent of the impact of situational crises on health and mental functioning vary widely, but they generally pose a greater risk than developmental crises. What trauma crises and developmental crises have in common is that they require an increased adaptive effort on the part of the individual. In both cases, we can speak of a disruption of the previous life line, although, as a rule, traumatic events have a more disruptive effect on its course. Moreover, in both cases we will also be able to speak, for example, of threats to internal integration, major changes in life space and sense of personal identity (Erikson, 1997; Kubacka-Jasiecka, 2016).

In the light of the above observations, the crisis of adolescence, as related to developmental processes, is primarily normative and developmental, i.e. it represents a developmental norm and contains positive potential. The resolution of such a crisis opens up new possibilities for the young person and leads to greater maturity. However, it is important to bear in mind adolescent mental crises that are not developmental in nature but are related to difficult life situations, psychological trauma or illness. Such crises form the basis for the diagnosis of mental health disorders (e.g. adaptive disorders) and require a different type of help than developmental crises (Elliot, Place 2010; Szczukiewicz, 2015).

2. Crisis from the perspective of logotherapy V.E. Frankl

Logotherapy provides a theoretical basis and concepts to better understand the nature of crisis experiences in adolescence. Terms such as ‚meaning of life’, ‚existential frustration’ and ‚existential emptiness’ are among the most characteristic of this strand. The importance of the meaning of life for maturity and mental health was recognised very early in psychology, thanks to Alfred Adler, a Viennese physician and psychotherapist and personality theorist, the founder of individual psychology (Adler, 1986; Campbell, Hall, Lindzey, 2023). However, it was not until the emergence of the existential-humanist trend in psychology and especially Viktor E. Frankl’s logotherapy that the concept of the meaning of life was developed and treated as a leading idea for therapeutic activities (cf. Frankl, 1978, 1998, 2010).

Viktor Frankl, a Viennese neurologist and psychiatrist and psychotherapist, was the founder of the third Viennese school of psychotherapy, after Z. Freud and A. Adler (Szykuła, 2022). This thinker was inspired in his youth by Adler’s views and existential psychotherapy, but soon developed his own coherent theory of human functioning and psychotherapy referred to as existential analysis and logotherapy. Frankl distinguished between ‚existential analysis’ as the theoretical basis, the anthropological foundation for his thinking, and ‚logotherapy’ as the psychotherapeutic approach he derived from existential analysis (Szykuła, 2022). As a mental shortcut, Frankl himself and his students often apply the term ‚logotherapy’ collectively to both philosophical anthropology and the school of psychotherapy itself. The name ‚logotherapy’ is a combination of the Greek words *logos* (word, meaning, explanation) and *therapeo* (I care, I treat, I care) and is meant to express the essence of this school of psychotherapy as: caring for the meaning and explanation of life and healing by helping people find meaning (Frankl, 1998, 2010).

In his conception, V.E. Frankl referred to the specifically human properties of existence and emphasised the multidimensionality of human existence. This is why he paid so much attention to the spiritual sphere, the experiencing of values and the discovery of the meaning of life (cf. 1998). He emphasised that

determinism exists in the somatic and psychological dimensions of our existence, but that the spiritual dimension is characterised by freedom. This freedom determines man's capacity to overcome his own limitations – referred to by Frankl as the capacity for self-transcendence (cf. 1978). „The striving for meaning” constitutes for this researcher a fundamental property of human existence, just as for Freud the „striving for pleasure” and for Adler the „striving for power”. At the same time, the discovery of the meaning of one's existence always means, at least in part, for man to go beyond his own self and beyond his biological and psychological needs. „Human being indeed always transcends itself, always points to a certain sense. In this sense, man's being is not about pleasure or power, but neither is it about self-realisation. Rather, he is concerned with the fulfilment of meaning. In logotherapy we speak here of the *will to meaning*” (Frankl, 1978, p. 80).

To understand the nature of the adolescent crisis, the concepts of emptiness and existential frustration are important. It was the founder of logotherapy who introduced these concepts into psychology (Frankl, 1978, 2010). He believed that if a person's striving for meaning is somehow thwarted or this type of striving is pushed out of consciousness (e.g. as a result of a process of displacement when one is too absorbed in the pursuit of pleasure), one can speak of a state of frustration of the will to meaning. This term is used in logotherapy to describe the inability to satisfy the need for the meaning of life, which implies a kind of existential emptiness. Such a state pathologises human functioning and leads to neurosis, which, due to its genesis, Frankl called noogenic neurosis (*Gr nous* – mind, spirit). A sense of meaning in life is therefore not only a signal of a person's existential condition, but takes on significance as an indicator of mental health. Existential frustration arises when a person loses a sense of the meaning of his or her existence and cannot discover and realise it. Existential frustration occurs in situations of overload, lack, demands, obligations and stress (Frankl, 2010). Symptoms of boredom, dissatisfaction, emptiness and a sense of meaninglessness then appear. Consequently, the individual begins to look for other ways to fill the perceived emptiness. These include

seeking entertainment and fun, immersing oneself in a whirlwind of responsibilities, and behaviour that leads to addictions.

A situation of existential emptiness, and therefore frustration, can be an important component of adolescence, as this developmental period is marked by many acts of self-awareness on the part of the young person – especially the search for worldview resolutions and the definition of personal values (Szczykiewicz, 2015). Frankl himself wrote that it is „the privilege of youth not to assume in advance that there is a fixed meaning to life, but to challenge it boldly” (Frankl, 1978, p.169). However, Frankl notes in the same place that young people, with this courage, lack patience. He stresses that in order to find meaning sooner or later, it is necessary to wait, to be patient. And this is precisely what people should do, and not take their own lives or seek oblivion in various types of stimulants or drugs (Frankl, 1978). The impatient search for a solution, the search for meaning, by shortcuts, sometimes stems from what Frankl calls the pursuit of pleasure and which he contrasts with the pursuit of meaning. He recognises that in moments of existential frustration, when the pursuit of meaning is blocked and meaning is no longer realised, the pursuit of pleasure prevails. It gives man the illusion of meaningfulness, serves to drown out his life's unfulfilment, and man's unconscious hides this unfulfilment from his conscience. In neurotic people, the original striving – the striving for meaning – is transformed into a direct striving for happiness, for pleasure. It becomes so that joy and happiness are the goal of man's exerted intention, the purpose of his life, and this is what is pathological. Because these states should be a side effect of the meaning given to life, rather than meaning itself (Frankl, 1978).

3. Logoprohylaxis as the provision of existentially meaningful experiences

In view of the above findings, the adolescent crisis can also be understood as a kind of existential crisis. Existential crises are not only typical of adolescence. They can occur at any period of life. They refer to conflicts and anxieties accompanying problems that

are significant for the quality of existence, especially the spiritual dimension of our lives (Szczukiewicz, 2015). They relate to life goals, value conflicts, choices made, taking responsibility, experiencing the meaning of life. They are associated with a sense of irreversible change, loss of time or life opportunities and existential frustration. They are accompanied by questions such as: *why live? how to live now? what's next for me? what's the point?* An existential crisis results from a person's confrontation with the basic hardships of human existence, such as human mortality, loneliness, the search for the meaning of life, making irrevocable choices, etc. The specificity of adolescence makes the search for the meaning of one's own existence and reflection on the values for which „life is worth living” a progressively more pronounced developmental regularity for the young person (cf. Chłopkiewicz, 1987; Obuchowska, 2000; Szymański, 2000; Wojciechowska, 2018). The older the adolescent, the more worldview references and the definition of one's own hierarchy of values are embedded in his or her development. These are closely linked to the search for psychological autonomy and the formation of an individual identity.

Logoprophyllaxis – starting from the assumptions of logotherapy – provides behavioural strategies to overcome existential frustration. One strategy is to create so-called existentially meaningful experiences for young people. In existential analysis and logotherapy, this refers to the state when a person experiences his or her existence most strongly and experiences the very essence of his or her own existence most powerfully (cf. Szczukiewicz 2011). It refers to the experience of typically human attributes of existence, such as, for example, subjectivity, self-awareness, tragedy, freedom or responsibility. Existentially meaningful experience can be understood as such an experience of something, someone and oneself that allows a person to define and project their own existence. Existentially meaningful experience is most often a low-reflective but profound experience of meaning in a specific situation. Through this kind of experience, a young person can give meaning to his or her existence and function in a world that „makes sense”.

The educator or preventionist will arrange the group activity and direct the discussion to take into account two important tendencies in young people: the need for good experiences and the first worldview interests. The idea is that the pupil will link important human values in his or her own life with an experience of meaning and a sense of significance. The adolescent is then able to reflect on what it means to have a ‚meaningful life’ and may feel that he or she has a chance to have such a life. A good existentially meaningful experience involves not only experiencing the meaning of life, but also the ability to prioritise values. Through an existentially meaningful experience, hedonistic values can be subordinated to higher values. The search for such experiences can be linked to a situation or event arranged in the course of preventive work. An already existing situation can be used or a new situation can be created. The young person can, for example, become involved as a volunteer in a nursing home or day care centre, or they can organise a school Caritas circle or get involved in collecting things for victims of war or refugees. The prophylactic meaning of such situations as ‚existentially meaningful’ will be brought out by an adult moderating the situation, e.g. through an exchange of thoughts and feelings between people who have undertaken some kind of helping activity. To this end, the logopreventor will pose philosophically-tinged questions aimed at reflecting on the meaning of the activities undertaken. It would be particularly valuable to apply this logoprophyllactic strategy to programmed prevention activities. School prevention programmes can provide a basis for this type of strategy (Poleszak, 2004). However, this requires well-considered activities, especially those supported by a diagnosis of problems and needs in a specific environment and axiological reflection of the implementers. An example of the implementation of such solutions is the first logoprophyllaxis programme in Poland, ‚Live with meaning’ (Gubala, 2022). It aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills to cope with developmental and situational crises, so that young people look at difficult situations as challenges and opportunities to change their existing attitudes or behaviours. In addition, the programme aims to trigger reflection in young people about their spiritual and moral potential.

4. The importance of logoprophyllaxis for education – a pedagogy of meaning

Activities that create existentially meaningful experiences not only have a preventive potential, but are part of broadly understood upbringing processes. This is because they support the upbringing functions of adults responsible for the upbringing and development of young people. This is in line with the understanding of prevention as specialised and professional activities supporting upbringing (Gaś, 2006; Grzelak et al., 2015). Logoprophyllactic strategies can furthermore have a compensatory function towards the upbringing tasks of adults. This is the case when some adults, called upon in the first instance to give the child a chance for „meaning-making” activity, are not always able to provide such experiences, sensations and reflections, either because they themselves no longer care about them (absorbed, for example, in the pursuit of success) or because they outright renounce their opportunities (e.g. justifying this with a model of liberal upbringing).

From the perspective of logoprophyllaxis, it is easy to understand that a young person is searching for his or her own path in life, but this does not only refer to the choice of profession or to fulfilling social roles. It is also about being open to seeking and defining the values that order human life. At this time, the ideological potential of society appeals to the young. Ideological commitment can vary greatly, depending, for example, on the environment and intellectual level of the adolescent boy or girl. Life philosophies built on the values available in society will sometimes be of a very simple nature, e.g. the ideology of punks or skinheads or a certain genre of music, at other times they may express the full depth of philosophical and religious search. If the social potential for values and ideals is too weak or the generational transmission of values fails, youth worldviews will be very simple and superficial (Erikson, 1997).

Reflecting from the perspective of logoprophyllaxis, it can be concluded that, unfortunately, the „ideological potential of society” is increasingly underrepresented by significant figures and authorities, drawing on timeless and universal values. Instead, we are rather

confronted with a „pop-culture ideology”, i.e. a mass ideological product, giving young people the illusion of communing with real values, which is in fact rather a media „commodity”. If young people’s life ideas are built, for example, only around the music a particular group listens to, or a few slogans that they try to apply to all situations in life (e.g.: „freedom of choice”, „laid-back”, „tolerance”, „being yourself”), we can worry that the generational continuity of values is being seriously violated (Szczukiewicz, 2019). The more difficult it is for young people to assimilate positive cultural role models, the more disturbed personal relationships are in various areas of social life (e.g. family, school, local community) (Wojcieszek, 2005).

Being aware of the above dependencies and typical developmental regularities of adolescence, logoprophyllaxis postulates actions from the perspective of a „pedagogy of meaning” (Solecki, 2022). Such pedagogy makes one of the main goals of educational and psycho-preventive activities the use of the potential of values existing in social and individual life, in order to enable the young person to experience the meaning of life. At the same time, it is based on anthropological foundations that provide a non-reductionist vision of the human being, especially those defined by the logotherapy of V. Frankl or personalist philosophy (cf. Kraśniewska, 2021, 2022). The pedagogy of meaning postulates that those responsible for upbringing and development should create space for young people to experience meaning and for ‚meaning-making’ activity. It is teachers and educators who, with their attitude, skills and personality, create the right conditions at school for the full development of adolescents (Gaś, 2006). Therefore, school educational-preventive programmes should give young people a chance to encounter the social potential of values, and thus should enable them to experience the meaning of life and mitigate the crisis nature of adolescence.

Conclusions

The view of the adolescent crisis presented in this article from the perspective of logoprophyllaxis allows some concluding remarks to be made. The authors

believe that Viktor Frankl's existential analysis and logotherapy helps to formulate a preventive response to the phenomenon of existential frustration, which may be an important component of the adolescent crisis. Arguments are presented that logoprophy-laxis – understood as prevention based on the theory and practice of logotherapy – has the potential to make a significant contribution to countering the disadvantages of adolescence. The proposed logoprophyllactic strategy of providing existentially meaningful experiences can inspire professionals involved in supporting adolescent development to create appropriate situations and build prevention programmes. Existentially meaningful experiences can support the personal development of students and pupils, responding to the developmental needs of

adolescence – the search for meaning and one's place in life, the definition of personal identity. It should be emphasised that the possibility of creating situations that enable existentially meaningful experiences depends not only on the inventiveness and creativity of the educator, but also on his or her qualities as a person (including personal reflection on meaning and values). Axiological reflection should therefore precede the design of preventive actions based on the creation of such experiences. Logoprophyllaxis aims to support young people in building a mature world of values and the realisation of their existential needs, desires, dreams and life goals, the responsible use of freedom, perceiving the meaning of life and happiness understood as the result of doing good and realising values that have a meaning-making potential.

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