



## Viktor Frankl



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## Viktor Frankl

**Viktor Emil Frankl** (26 March 1905 - 2 September 1997) was an [Austrian neurologist](#) and [psychiatrist](#) as well as a [Holocaust survivor](#). He survived [Theresienstadt](#), [Auschwitz](#), [Kaufering](#) and [Türkheim](#). Frankl was the founder of [logotherapy](#), which is a form of [existential analysis](#), the "Third Viennese School of [Psychotherapy](#)". His best-selling book *Man's Search for Meaning* (published under a different title in 1959: *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*, and originally published in 1946 as *Trotzdem Ja Zum Leben Sagen: Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager*, meaning *Nevertheless, Say "Yes" to Life: A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp*) chronicles his experiences as a [concentration camp](#) inmate, which led him to discover the importance of finding meaning in all forms of existence, even the most brutal ones, and thus, a reason to continue living. Frankl became one of the key figures in [existential therapy](#) and a prominent source of inspiration for [humanistic psychologists](#).

Frankl remains a figure of considerable controversy amongst holocaust analysts, the Jewish community and psychiatrists alike, with [Thomas Szasz](#) and others questioning the levels of Nazi accommodation that the ideology of logotherapy has and Frankl personally willingly pursued; in the time periods before Frankl's internment, when Frankl voluntarily requested to perform unskilled lobotomy [experiments approved by the Nazis](#) on Jews who had attempted suicide to prevent arrest, to the time period of his internment, in what is hinted upon in Frankl's own autobiographical account and later under the investigative light of biographical research. It is for these reasons and a similarly controversial medal ceremony after the war, that none of Frankl's works, have ever been on sale in the bookstore of the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) in Washington D.C.

### Life before 1945

Frankl was born in [Vienna](#) into a [Jewish](#) family of civil servants (*Beamtenfamilie*). His interest in psychology surfaced early. For the final exam (*Matura*) in [Gymnasium](#), he wrote a paper on the psychology of philosophical thinking. After graduation from [Gymnasium](#) in 1923, he studied medicine at the [University of Vienna](#). In practice he specialized in neurology and psychiatry, concentrating on the topics of depression and suicide. His early development was influenced by his contacts with [Sigmund Freud](#) and [Alfred Adler](#), although he would diverge from their teachings.

### Physician, therapist

During part of 1924 he became the president of the *Sozialistische Mittelschüler Österreich*, a [Social Democratic](#) youth movement for high school students throughout Austria.

Between 1928 and 1930, while still a medical student, he organized and offered a special program to counsel high school students free of charge. The program involved the participation of psychologists such as [Charlotte Bühler](#), and it paid special attention to students at the time when they received their report cards. In 1931, not a single Viennese student committed [suicide](#). The success of this program grabbed the attention of the likes of [Wilhelm Reich](#) who invited him to Berlin.

From 1933 to 1937, Frankl completed his residency in neurology and psychiatry at the [Steinhof Psychiatric Hospital](#) in Vienna. He was responsible for the so-called *Selbstmörderpavillon*, or "suicide pavilion". Here, he treated more than 3000 women who had suicidal tendencies. In 1937, he established an independent private practice in neurology and psychiatry at Alser Strasse 32/12 in Vienna.

Beginning with the [Nazi takeover of Austria](#) in 1938, he was prohibited from treating "[Aryan](#)" patients due to his Jewish identity. In 1940 he started working at the [Rothschild Hospital](#), where he headed its neurological department. This hospital was the only one in Vienna to which Jews were still admitted. His medical opinions (including deliberately false diagnoses) saved several patients from being euthanised via the [Nazi euthanasia program](#). In December 1941 he married Tilly Grosser.

### Prisoner, therapist

On 25 September 1942, Frankl, his wife, and his parents were deported to the Nazi [Theresienstadt](#) Ghetto in [Occupied Czechoslovakia](#). This Ghetto which housed many of the Jewish middle class, as a "model community" was set up by the [Schutzstaffel](#) (SS) with the expressed purpose of fooling [Red Cross](#) representatives about the ongoing slave labor the [Holocaust](#) and later, the [Nazi plan to murder all Jews](#). There, within the [Cultural life of the Theresienstadt ghetto](#), Frankl worked as a general practitioner in a clinic and wrote and gave lectures. When his skills in psychiatry were noticed by the Nazis, he was assigned to the psychiatric care ward in Block B IV, establishing a camp service of "psychohygiene" or mental health care. He organized a unit to help camp newcomers to overcome [shock](#) and grief. Later he set up a suicide watch, assisted by [Regina Jonas](#).

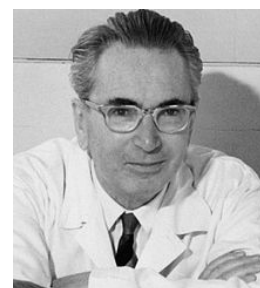
While presented as a humanitarian act on behalf of Frankl in his autobiography, Thomas Szasz and biographer Timothy Pytell have questioned this by revealing the dimension that suicide was particularly and strictly prohibited in the ghetto, with anyone that could expose or betray the ghetto as the very opposite of the intended Nazi propaganda picture of the model community, to the international [Red Cross inspections and reports on Theresienstadt](#), receiving the threat of punishment under the principle of "kinship liability", in this regard Frankl was assisting the Nazi administration of the camp by helping retain the false image of a "model community" and its propagation. It would be years more until those in other countries would become fully aware of the conditions some of the vulnerable inside the Ghetto lived under.

On 29 July 1943, Frankl organized a closed event for the Scientific Society in the Theresienstadt Ghetto, and with the help of the equally controversial [Judenrat](#)/Jewish collaborator [Leo Baeck](#), Frankl offered a series of lectures, including "Sleep and Sleep Disturbances", "Body and Soul", "Medical Care of the Soul", "Psychology of Mountaineering", "How to keep my nerves healthy?", "Medical ministry", "Existential Problems in Psychotherapy", and "Social Psychotherapy". Biographers state that Frankl's father Gabriel, starved to death at Theresienstadt, by Frankl's account he died of pulmonary edema and pneumonia.

On 19 October 1944, Frankl, his wife Tilly, Regina Jonas and many others from the Theresienstadt Ghetto, were transported to the [Auschwitz](#) death camp in [occupied Poland](#), where he was processed. On 25 October, Frankl is listed as arriving in the southern German [Kaufering III](#), of XI [labor camp](#), which held up to 2,000 male prisoners in earthen huts, who upon its opening in June of that year, the prisoners were required to construct a transport route to connect [underground aircraft factories](#), laying the infrastructure for the mass production of the world's first jet-powered [Messerschmitt Me 262 bomber destroyer](#), the Nazi response, to regain vital [air supremacy](#), under the growingly unopposed effectiveness of Allied bombing upon the Nazi armament industry. According to Frankl, his feats of physical initiative at this work camp were such that they did not go unnoticed and he was gifted "premium coupons" in late 1944. According to Frankl's autobiography, when infected with the ubiquitous [typhoid](#), he was allowed leave the work camp and was offered a move to the so-called rest camp of [Türkheim](#), prison records list his departure from Kaufering as 8 March 1945. Frankl states that in Türkheim he was placed in charge of fifty men with typhus, it was here he rose to the position of "senior block warden" and began writing his book anew, until 27 April 1945, when the camp was liberated by American soldiers.

Frankl's mother Elsa and brother Walter were murdered at Auschwitz. Frankl's wife was similarly transported out of Auschwitz and moved to [Bergen-Belsen](#), a facility that housed a considerable number of women and minors, including [Anne Frank](#), where they were forced to work in the shoe recycling labor camp, she would similarly be murdered, from the brutal conditions sometime close to the time of its liberation in 1945. The only survivor of the [Holocaust](#) among Frankl's immediate family was his sister, Stella, who had emigrated from Austria to

### Viktor Frankl



<b>Born</b>	Viktor Emil Frankl 26 March 1905 <a href="#">Vienna, Austria-Hungary</a>
<b>Died</b>	2 September 1997 (aged 92) <a href="#">Vienna, Austria</a>
<b>Resting place</b>	<a href="#">Zentralfriedhof</a>
<b>Nationality</b>	<a href="#">Austrian</a>
<b>Education</b>	Doctorate in Medicine, 1925, Doctorate in Philosophy, 1948
<b>Alma mater</b>	<a href="#">University of Vienna</a>
<b>Occupation</b>	Neurologist, psychiatrist
<b>Known for</b>	<a href="#">Logotherapy</a> <a href="#">Existential analysis</a> Tilly Grosser, m. 1941 Eleonore Katharina Schwindt, m. 1947
<b>Children</b>	Gabriele Frankl-Vesely
<b>Parent(s)</b>	Gabriel Frankl and Elsa Frankl

[Australia](#).

## Life after 1945

Liberated after several months in concentration camps, Frankl returned to [Vienna](#), where he dictated to [stenographer](#)-typists his well known work, "the flood gates had opened", completing the book, by 1946. Frankl then published his world-famous book entitled, *Trotzdem Ja Zum Leben Sagen: Ein Psychologe Erlebt das Konzentrationslager* ("Saying Yes to Life in Spite of Everything: A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp"), known in English by the title *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959 title: *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*). In this book, he described the life of an ordinary [concentration camp](#) inmate from the objective perspective of a psychiatrist. Frankl believed that people are primarily driven by a "striving to find meaning in one's life," and that it is this sense of meaning that enables people to overcome painful experiences.

After enduring the suffering in these camps, Frankl concluded that even in the most absurd, painful, and dehumanized situation, life has potential meaning and that, therefore, even suffering is meaningful. This conclusion served as a basis for his [logotherapy](#) and [existential analysis](#), which Frankl had described before World War II. He said, "*What is to give light must endure burning.*"

Frankl's concentration camp experiences shaped both his therapeutic approach and philosophical outlook, as reflected in his seminal publications.

He often said that even within the narrow boundaries of the concentration camps he found only two races of Men to exist: decent ones and unprincipled ones. These were to be found in all classes, ethnicities, and groups. "Under such conditions, who could blame them for trying to dope themselves?" "These were the men who were employed in the gas chambers and crematoriums, and who knew very well that one day they would have to leave their enforced role of executioner and become victims themselves."

In 1946, he was appointed to run the Vienna Polyclinic of Neurology. He remained there until 1971. In 1947 he married his second wife Eleonore Katharina Schwindt. She was a practicing Catholic and the couple respected each other's religious backgrounds, going to both church and synagogue, and celebrating Christmas and [Hanukah](#). They had one daughter, Gabriele, who went on to become a child psychologist.

In 1948, Frankl earned a Ph.D. in philosophy. His dissertation, *The Unconscious God*, is an examination of the relation of psychology and religion.

In 1955, he was awarded a professorship of neurology and psychiatry at the [University of Vienna](#), and as visiting professor, he resided at [Harvard University](#) (1961), at [Southern Methodist University](#), Dallas (1966), and at [Duquesne University](#), Pittsburgh (1972). He lectured and taught seminars all over the world and received 29 honorary doctoral degrees. Frankl published 39 books, which were translated into as many as 49 languages.

The [American Psychiatric Association](#) awarded Frankl the 1985 [Oskar Pfister Award](#) for important contributions to religion and psychiatry.

Frankl died of heart failure on 2 September 1997. He was survived by his wife Eleonore, one daughter, two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

## Controversy

In *The Missing Pieces of the Puzzle: A Reflection on the Odd Career of Viktor Frankl*, Timothy Pytell of [California State University](#), conveys the numerous discrepancies and omissions in Frankl's "Auschwitz survivor" account and later autobiography, which many of his contemporaries, such as Thomas Szasz, similarly have raised. In Frankl's *Search for meaning* the book devotes approximately half its contents to describing Auschwitz and the psychology of its prisoners, suggesting a long stay at the [death camp](#), however his wording is contradictory and to Pytell, "profoundly deceptive", when rather the impression of staying for months, Frankl was held close to the train, in the "depot prisoner" area of Auschwitz and for no more than a few days, he was neither registered there, nor assigned a number before being sent on to a [subsidiary work camp of Dachau](#), known as [Kaufering III](#), the true setting of much of what is described in his book.

On Frankl's doctrine that one must instill meaning in the events in one's life, that work and suffering to find meaning, will ultimately lead to fulfillment and happiness.

In 1982 the highly cited scholar and holocaust analyst [Lawrence L. Langer](#), who while also critical of Frankl's distortions on the true experience of those at Auschwitz, and Frankl's amoral focus on "meaning" that could just as equally be applied to Nazis "finding meaning in making the world free from Jews", would go on to write "if this [logotherapy] doctrine had been more succinctly worded, the Nazis might have substituted it for the cruel mockery of *Arbeit Macht Frei*"["work sets free", read by those entering Auschwitz]. With, in professor Pytell's view, Langer also penetrating through Frankl's disturbed subtext that Holocaust "survival [was] [a matter of mental health](#)." Noting Frankl's tone as almost self-congratulatory and promotional throughout, that "it comes as no surprise to the reader, as he closes the volume, that the real hero of *Man's Search for Meaning* is not man, but Viktor Frankl" by the continuation of the very same distortions of reality and the fantasy of world-view [meaning-making](#), that were so disturbingly, precisely what had preturbed civilization into the [holocaust](#)-genocide of this era and others, to begin with.

Pytell later would remark on the particularly sharp insight of Langer's reading of Frankl's holocaust testimony, noting that with Langer's criticism published in 1982 before Pytell's biography, the former had thus drawn the controversial parallels, or accommodations in ideology without the knowledge that Victor Frankl was an advocate/"embraced" the key ideas of the [Nazi psychotherapy](#) movement ("will and responsibility") as a form of therapy in the late 1930s. When at that time Frankl would submit a paper and contributed to the [Göring institute](#) in Vienna 1937 and again in early 1938 connecting the logotherapy focus on "world-view" to the "work of some of the leading Nazi psychotherapists", both at a time before [Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany in 1938](#).

The origins of logotherapy, as described by Frankl, were therefore a major issue of continuity that Biographer Pytell argues were potentially problematic for Frankl because he had laid out the main elements of logotherapy while working for/contributing to the Nazi-affiliated Göring Institute. Principally Frankl's 1937 paper, that was published by the institute. This association, as a source of controversy, that logotherapy was palatable to [National Socialism](#) is the reason Pytell suggests, Frankl took two different stances on how the concentration-camp experience affected the course of his psychotherapy theory. Namely, that within the original English edition of Frankl's most well known book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, the suggestion is made and still largely held that logotherapy was itself derived from his camp experience, with the claim as it appears in the original edition, that this form of psychotherapy was "not concocted in the philosopher's armchair nor at the analyst's couch; it took shape in the hard school of air-raid shelters and bomb craters; in concentration camps and prisoner of war camps." Frankl's statements however to this effect would be deleted from later editions, though in the 1963 edition, a similar statement again appeared on the back of the book jacket of *Man's Search for Meaning*.

Frankl over the years would with these widely read statements and others, switch between the claim that logotherapy took shape in the camps to the claim that the camps merely were a testing ground of his already preconceived theories. An uncovering of the matter would occur in 1977 with Frankl revealing on this controversy, though compounding another, stating "People think I came out of Auschwitz with a brand-new psychotherapy. This is not the case."

In the post war years, Frankl's attitude towards not pursuing justice nor assigning [collective guilt](#) to the Austrian people for collaborating with or acquiescing in the face of Nazism, led to "frayed" relationships between Frankl, many Viennese and the larger American Jewish community, such that in 1978 when attempting to give a lecture at the institute of [Adult Jewish Studies](#) in New York, Frankl was confronted with an outburst of boos from the audience and was called a "nazi pig".

In 1988 Frankl would further "stir up sentiment against him" by being photographed next to and in accepting the [Great Silver Medal with Star for Services to the Republic of Austria](#) as a holocaust survivor, from [President Waldheim](#), a controversial president of Austria who concurrent with the medal ceremony, was gripped by revelations that he had lied about his WWII military record and was under investigation for complicity in Nazi War crimes. Frankl's acceptance of the medal was viewed by a large segment of the international Jewish community as a betrayal and by a disparate group of commentators, that its timing was politically motivated, an attempt to rehabilitate Waldheim's reputation on the world stage.

None of Frankl's obituaries mention the unqualified and unskilled brain [lobotomy](#) and [trepanation](#) medical [experiments approved by the Nazis](#) that Frankl performed on Jews who had committed suicide with an overdose of sedatives, in resistance to their impending arrest, imprisonment and enforced labour in the concentration camp system. Operating without any training as a surgeon, Frankl would publish some of the details on his experiments, the methods of insertion of his chosen amphetamine drugs into the brains of these individuals, resulting in at times an alleged partial resuscitation, in 1942, prior to his own internment at [Theresienstadt ghetto](#) in September later in that year. Historian [Günter Bischof](#) of Harvard University, suggests Frankl's voluntary request to perform lobotomy experiments could be seen as a way to "[ingratiate](#)" himself amongst the Nazis, as the latter were not appreciative of suicide being on arrest records.

## Legacy

Frankl's [logotherapy](#) and [existential analysis](#) is considered the third Viennese School of Psychotherapy, among the broad category that comprises [existentialists](#). For [Irvin Yalom](#), Frankl, "who has devoted his career to a study of an existential approach to therapy, has apparently concluded that the lack of meaning is *the* paramount existential stress. To him, existential neurosis is synonymous with a crisis of meaninglessness".

He has coined the term [noogenic neurosis](#), and illustrated it with the example of *Sunday neurosis*. It refers to a form of anxiety resulting from an awareness in some people of the emptiness of their lives once the working week is over. Some complain of a void and a vague discontent. This arises from an existential vacuum, or feeling of meaninglessness, which is a common phenomenon and is characterised by the subjective state of boredom, apathy, and emptiness. One feels cynical, lacks direction, and questions the point of most of life's activities.

People without a meaning in their life are exposed to aggression, depression and addiction.

Viktor Frankl once recommended that the [Statue of Liberty](#) on the [East Coast of the United States](#) be complemented by a [Statue of Responsibility](#) on the [West Coast](#):



Grave of Viktor Frankl in Vienna

Freedom, however, is not the last word. Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. Freedom is both the positive and the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is responsibility. In fact, freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibility. That is why I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.

## Decorations and awards

- 1956: Promotion Award for Public Education of the [Ministry of Education](#), Austria
- 1962: [Cardinal Innitzer](#) Prize, Austria
- 1969: [Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art, 1st class](#)
- 1976: Prize of the Danubia Foundation
- 1980: Honorary Ring of Vienna, Austria
- 1981: [Austrian Decoration for Science and Art](#)
- 1985: [Oskar Pfister Award](#), USA
- 1986: Honorary doctorate from the [University of Vienna](#), Austria, and Honorary member of the association [Bürgervereinigung Landsberg im 20. Jahrhundert](#)
- 1988: [Great Silver Medal with Star for Services to the Republic of Austria](#)
- 1995: Hans Prinzhorn Medal
- 1995: [Honorary Citizen of the City of Vienna](#)
- 1995: [Great Gold Medal with Star for Services to the Republic of Austria](#)
- 1995: Grand Decoration of the Austrian Chamber of Physicians
- [Grand Merit Cross with Star of the Federal Republic of Germany](#) (*Großes Verdienstkreuz mit Stern*)

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His books in English are:

- *Man's Search for Meaning. An Introduction to Logotherapy*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 2006. [ISBN 978-0-8070-1427-1](#) (Originally published in 1946)
- *The Doctor and the Soul*, (originally titled *Ärztliche Seelsorge*), Random House, 1955.
- *On the Theory and Therapy of Mental Disorders. An Introduction to Logotherapy and Existential Analysis*, Translated by James M. DuBois. Brunner-Routledge, London-New York, 2004. [ISBN 0-415-95029-5](#)
- *Psychotherapy and Existentialism. Selected Papers on Logotherapy*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1967. [ISBN 0-671-20056-9](#)
- *The Will to Meaning. Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy*, [New American Library](#), New York, 1988 [ISBN 0-452-01034-9](#)
- *The Unheard Cry for Meaning. Psychotherapy and Humanism*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2011 [ISBN 978-1-4516-6438-6](#)
- *Viktor Frankl Recollections: An Autobiography.*; Basic Books, Cambridge, MA 2000. [ISBN 978-0-7382-0355-3](#).
- *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning.* (A revised and extended edition of *The Unconscious God*, with a Foreword by Swanee Hunt). Perseus Book Publishing, New York, 1997; [ISBN 0-306-45620-6](#). Paperback edition: Perseus Book Group; New York, July 2000; [ISBN 0-7382-0354-8](#).

## See also

- [Aaron Antonovsky](#)
- [Existential analysis](#)
- [List of logotherapy institutes](#) named after Frankl
- [Meaning-making](#)

## References

- ↑  Viktor Emil Frankl (11 August 2000). *Viktor Frankl Recollections: An Autobiography*. Basic Books. [ISBN 978-0-7382-0355-3](#).
- ↑  *abcd#fghij* Haddon Klingberg (16 October 2001). *When life calls out to us: the love and lifework of Viktor and Elyl Frankl*. Doubleday. [ISBN 978-0-385-50036-4](#).
- ↑  *abcd#fgh* Anna Redsand (18 December 2006). *Viktor Frankl: A Life Worth Living*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. [ISBN 978-0-618-72343-0](#).
- ↑ [Lawrence Langer, Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), p.24. [End Page 107]
- ↑ Szasz, T.S. (2003). The secular cure of souls: "Analysis" or dialogue? *Existential Analysis*, 14: 203-212 (July).
- ↑ "Frankl also admitted that the "primary surgeon Reich had refused to undertake the surgeries." When, in order to avoid deportation to concentration camps, patients had overdosed on sleeping pills and subsequently had been given up for dead by other doctors, Frankl felt justified in attempting relatively novel brain surgery techniques. First, "some injections intravenously ... and if this didn't work I gave them injections into the brain ... into the Cisterna Magna. And if that did not work I made a trepanation, opened the skull..."

## External links

- Timothy Pytell (2015) *Viktor Frankl's Search for Meaning*, [Berghahn Books](#).
- [Viktor and I, the Film 2011](#)
- [Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna](#)
- [Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy](#)
- [Viktor Frankl, The Will to Meaning - extract](#) (1962)
- [Viktor Frankl at Find a Grave](#)
- [Who Was Viktor Frankl? by Dr. Henry Abramson](#)

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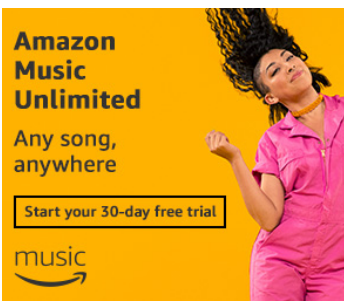


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- Coldplay
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- Ed Sheeran
- Gorillaz
- Jay-Z

Viktor Emil Frankl (26 March 1905 – 2 September 1997) was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist as well as a Holocaust survivor, surviving Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, Kaufering and Mauthausen. Frankl was the founder of logotherapy, the will to meaning and is most notable for the best-selling book *Man's Search for Meaning*, an account within the concentration camp hierarchy, where in various camps he practiced, 'concluded' and several times quotes, the validity of means, for Nietzschean survival. After Viktor E. Frankl was professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Vienna Medical School until his death in 1997. He was the founder of what has come to be called the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy (after Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual psychology)--the school of logotherapy. Born in 1905, Dr. Frankl received the degrees of Doctor of Medicine and Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Vienna. During World War II he spent three years at Mauthausen: Viktor Emil Frankl is born in Vienna as the second of three children. His mother, Elsa Frankl, nee Lion, hails from Prague, his father Gabriel Frankl, Director in the Ministry of Social Service, comes from Southern Moravia. 1914-1918. During the first World War the family experiences bitter deprivation; sometimes the children go begging to farmers. 1915-1923. In his high school years Frankl eagerly reads the "Nature Philosophers" and attends public lectures on Applied Psychology. He comes into contact with Psychoanalysis. 1921.