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The Relevance of Frankl's Logotherapy for Today and the Future: Religion and "Man's Search for Meaning"

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Abstract: Viktor Frankl attributes significant importance to religion in relation to the human quest for meaning. According to Frankl, religion maintains its existence and continues offering guidance in the search for meaning irrespective of worldly conditions or developments. Since the 19th century, secularism—initially adopted particularly by Western nations but influential globally—has significantly limited the presence of religion in public life. Although the predictions of positivist scientists did not materialize and science has not "overthrown" religion, the number of religious individuals is rapidly declining in the contemporary era, while atheism is increasing. Nevertheless, research indicates that religions still serve as powerful guides in believers' search for meaning. Moreover, globally, the most religious segments of the population tend to be the poorest and, as Frankl suggests, religion enables people to attribute meaning to their patience and endurance in the face of adversity. It is discussed by the academia that in the future world, humanity might transcend biological limitations, reaching an advanced form of existence ("trans-humanism"), and eventually even surpassing the biological form of Homo Sapiens into a digitally based life form described as the "post-human" stage. This study argues that unless humanity reaches this stage, people's quest for meaning will continue independently of technological advancements, religions will persist in guiding these searches, and Frankl's views will most likely remain valid.

Keywords: logotherapy; "trans-humanism"; atheism; post-modernism; secularism

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1. Introduction

Although it is quite difficult to provide a concise, definitive, and universally accepted definition of religion (Idinopulos 1998), Christian Smith defines religions as "sets of beliefs, symbols, and practices about the reality of super-empirical orders that make claims to organize and guide human life" (Smith 2003, cited in Schilbrack 2013, p. 313). While this definition is appropriate for the conceptualisation of religion adopted in this study, it remains incomplete. In addition to Smith's formulation, this study also understands religion—drawing on Viktor Frankl (1984)'s perspective—as a guide to meaning-making that transcends the individual and offers orientation towards a higher order of existence. Frankl made significant contributions to both psychiatry and existentialist philosophy by developing logotherapy, which is based on the premise that the primary motivation binding human beings to life is the search for meaning (Pytell 2001). As will be examined in detail in this study, Frankl demonstrates that the search for meaning is a state of self-transcending dedication and asserts that while secular purposes can also guide this search, religion serves as a meaning-seeking guide with a permanence independent of worldly conditions and developments (Frankl 1984).

In the 19th century, under the influence of the positivist tradition, disciplines such as natural sciences and certain philosophical approaches sought to exclude religion by deeming it "unreal"; however, this perspective changed in the 20th century. The expectations of positivists were not fulfilled; science did not overthrow religions, and religions continued to exist as important moral and existential guides (Geraci 2005). This study discusses the existential significance attributed to religion in Frankl's logotherapy—specifically, its role in guiding the human search for meaning—and examines the extent to which this remains relevant today and in the future. Furthermore, it explores the implications of Frankl's logotherapy in the context of "trans-humanist"[1] technological advancements and the potential "post-human" stage, which lie at the heart of debates concerning the future. As will be examined in detail in this study, today, just as in the 19th century, there are views suggesting that scientific and technological advancements will undermine religious doctrines or, at the very least, render existing religions obsolete, leading to the emergence of new ones.

This study argues that, regardless of whether existing religions endure amid technological advancements or new religions emerge, the human search for meaning in the Franklian sense will persist in the face of "trans-humanist" technological progression. Furthermore, it suggests that religion may continue to serve as a significant guide in the "man's search for meaning" and that the logotherapeutic role Frankl attributed to religion could remain relevant in the future. However, in the potential "post-human" stage,[2] as the concepts of humanity, religion, and the search for meaning (as well as the humanly existence itself) may differ significantly from known frameworks, the extent to which Frankl's logotherapy principles will remain relevant in such an age remains uncertain at present. The methodology of this study is based on both empirical data and qualitative interpretations. The research and discussion are conducted based on the 1984 edition of Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, which includes the third section titled "The Case for a Tragic Optimism", added by the author in 1984.

2. On the Various Conceptions of Religion

According to Émile Durkheim (1915), religion is a system composed of beliefs and practices, and it is fundamentally social rather than individual. Max Weber (1963), on the other hand, regards religion as the individual's attempt to answer existential questions such as why the world is not a just place or why life is worth living. Erich Fromm (1950) argues that religion not only provides answers to questions about the meaning of life, but may also represent a higher purpose to which the individual can devote themselves. In order to distinguish the social and individual dimensions of religion, it is useful to consider the distinction between "religion" and "religiosity". While religion refers to an institutionalized system of belief, religiosity pertains to individual experiences, emotions, and senses of belonging. In other words, religiosity is constituted by the individual's relationship with the various dimensions of religion—ideological, ritualistic, consequential, and so forth. In other words, whereas religion constitutes an external, institutional, and collective framework, religiosity pertains to an individual's internalized, personal, and experiential engagement with the sacred (Glock and Stark 1965; Huber and Huber 2012). In this context, Peter Berger (1999) contends that secularization has weakened the institutional authority of religions, yet has not prevented individuals from continuing to be religious in their private spheres. Moreover, he argues that religiosity may evolve independently of religious institutions. Thus, while religion represents a socially organized system with established doctrines and rules, religiosity reflects the meaning the individual attributes to religion in their personal life.

When engaging in discussions on concepts such as religion and religiosity, one must also consider the notion of "natural religion". This concept posits that ontological knowledge about God can be attained not through revelation, but through observation and reason. However, David Hume, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, first published in 1779, argues that God cannot be comprehended through the observation of nature. Furthermore, the existence of injustices in nature undermines attempts to justify God's goodness through rational explanations. Hume also maintains that the human intellect is inherently limited and incapable of understanding the divine, thus approaching both the idea of natural religion and revelation with scepticism. Accordingly, he suggests that religion functions as a means of explanation in the face of inexplicable natural phenomena, and as a source of consolation in the face of human fears (Hume 1990). In contrast to "natural religion", "historical/traditional religion" is based on the belief that understanding God requires reliance on revelation. Religions that possess a founding figure (prophet), a sacred text, institutional structures, rituals, and their own legal systems enable their adherents to construct a cultural identity through a sense of historical continuity between the past and the present (Neusner 1975).

The neo-Kantian thinker Hermann Cohen, who focused extensively on religious themes, particularly Judaism, asserts that Judaism is not merely a system of belief, but also an ethical system grounded in reason—a "religion of reason". According to Cohen, God is the immutable guarantor of moral law, and human beings arrive at morality through the use of reason. Therefore, ethics and religion (God) are not in contradiction; on the contrary, the true source of religion is reason itself. Cohen further emphasizes the socially engaged dimensions of Judaism, such as its advocacy of justice, support for the poor and the oppressed, and its universal orientation towards the benefit of humanity as a whole. He interprets the laws of Judaism not as legal statutes in the conventional sense, but rather as moral imperatives, arguing that Halakhah is not merely a ritualistic code but a guide to moral development. In this regard, he distinguishes Judaism from Christianity, which centres on salvation through grace, and instead presents Judaism as a "religion of law" that imposes concrete ethical responsibilities upon individuals in the context of worldly life (Cohen 1972).

Cohen approaches the terms "religion of reason" and "religion of law" as two defining features of Judaism—features that are not mutually contradictory but rather complementary. Technically speaking, the "religion of reason" implies that human beings can discover what is morally right through rational reflection, whereas the "religion of law" suggests that the rational inquiry into the commandments of Judaism leads one, once again, to moral truth (see also Zank 2004). It may be argued that Cohen's Kantian attempt to explain the unity of religion and morality through reason finds a historical parallel in the work of the twelfth-century Aristotelian Muslim philosopher Averroes (Ibn Rushd). Averroes maintained that reason and revelation are not in conflict, as both constitute distinct expressions of the same truth. Al-Ghazali, by contrast, vehemently opposed this position, asserting that reason is inherently limited and therefore potentially misleading, and that revelation must be prioritized as the only infallible guide (Wohlman and Burrell 2009). Within this framework emerges an alternative understanding that Leo Strauss designates as the "religion of revelation". This conception of religion, sceptical of reason and philosophy, insists that truth can be attained only through divine revelation (Strauss 1987). Another conception that does not treat reason as the sole guide to religious truth is that of "romantic religion". This approach rejects strict rationalism by affirming the legitimacy of imagination and spirituality in the search for truth. Accordingly, the experience or "feeling" of the divine (or of religious truth) is considered prior to its rational comprehension (Reilly 1971).

Frankl (1984) treats religion in a manner distinct from all the aforementioned frameworks. For Frankl, the significance of religion lies in its place within the inner world of the individual. Frankl conceptualizes religion not as something confined to institutional structures or ritualistic practices, but as a guiding framework capable of offering ultimate responses to the human quest for meaning. Religiosity, in his view, constitutes an intrinsically personal and inward phenomenon—an existential commitment to a higher, transcendent sense of purpose. As previously noted, this approach bears an existential philosophical character in which the human being constructs the meaning of their own life. In *The Unconscious God: Psychotherapy and Theology*, Frankl argues that even when individuals are unaware of it, they may possess spiritual inclinations, and that spirituality may sometimes manifest at the level of the unconscious. For him, even atheists may possess a "religious unconscious". Beginning from the premise that the human being is essentially a creature in search of self-transcendence, Frankl demonstrates that repressed spirituality and/or religiosity may emerge in moments of suffering, trauma, or loss (Frankl 1975). Thus, Frankl is primarily concerned not with the relationship between religion and reason, moral law, revelation, or historical tradition, but with the existential meaning religion holds for the individual. Thus, Frankl focuses not on religions as institutional systems, but rather on the meaning individuals attribute to religion—that is, on religiosity. In other words, what primarily matters for Frankl is not how religions regulate earthly or afterlife existence, but rather what they contribute to the individual's search for meaning. This is precisely what is of significance for the present study as well.

3. Frankl, Religion, and the "Search for Meaning"

Taking into account the perspectives of psychologists and scholars on religion prior to Frankl, it is evident that William James, much like Frankl would later do, approached religion not through institutional doctrines but through the lens of individual religious experience. He examined the relationship between religion and human well-being from a pragmatic standpoint, asserting that if religious belief has a positive impact on the individual, it can be considered functional from the perspective of mental health. In this context, James distinguished between an optimistic, life-affirming form of religiosity and a guilt-oriented conception of religion that renders the individual perpetually indebted and burdened with a sense of guilt (James 1902). Rudolf Otto argued that it is impossible to separate religion from personal experiences, and for this reason, it cannot be understood merely by reducing it to ethics, metaphysics, or psychology (Otto 1958). As will be discussed in more detail in the later sections of the study, Frankl shares a similar perspective on this issue and is more concerned with how religion is understood and lived by individuals, rather than what religion is. Mircea Eliade, on the other hand, claims that religious beliefs are a result of human nature and defines the human species as "homo religious" (Eliade 1959). Frankl's approach partially overlaps with Eliade's, as Frankl argues that every human has a sort of religious orientation in the unconscious (see Frankl 1975).

Frankl, a Holocaust survivor who was held captive for around three years in concentration camps, including Auschwitz (Bushkin et al. 2021), is regarded as one of the most significant psychiatrists and scholars of the past century. Rejecting both Sigmund Freud's assertion that human actions are fundamentally driven by the pursuit of pleasure and Alfred Adler's claim that individuals are motivated primarily by a quest for power, Frankl instead posited that human beings are, above all, seekers of meaning (Devoe 2012). Influenced—or perhaps more accurately, shaped—by his harrowing experiences under captivity, Frankl developed logotherapy,[3] a therapeutic approach that demonstrates how even in the most dire and hopeless circumstances, individuals can find meaning in their existence and hold on to life. Drawing from his time in captivity, Frankl (1984, pp. 20–24) provides

a stark account not only of the Nazis' cruelty toward prisoners but also of the prisoners' own ruthlessness toward one another (particularly the attitudes of Capos toward other prisoners) in their desperate struggle for survival. He argues that suffering is an inevitable part of life, yet by accepting their pain and confronting their "own cross", individuals can make their suffering meaningful (Frankl 1984, pp. 86–90). Frankl further highlights that both love and humour can serve as powerful forces in enduring hardship, and he provides a deeply poignant and tragic example of how losing faith in the future can lead to complete psychological collapse. He recounts the case of a prisoner who, after seeing in his dream that he would be freed on March 30, lost all will to live when this did not come to pass and subsequently died (Frankl 1984, pp. 94–97). Even in the merciless conditions of the concentration camp, Frankl observed that those who found solace in the dream of reuniting with their loved ones or in their religious faith were able to summon remarkable strength (Frankl 1984, p. 104). Frankl describes how the expectation of happiness following suffering can itself be considered a form of meaning-seeking, yet he also underscores the paradox of suffering—when the anticipated fulfilment of one's hopes does not materialize, it often leads to even deeper suffering. He argues that enduring hardships for the sake of loved ones can provide extraordinary resilience, yet he also acknowledges the painful reality that one can lose those they cherish. In contrast, religion remains constant, independent of circumstances and external conditions, making it one of the most powerful forms of meaning-seeking (Frankl 1984, pp. 113–16). Frankl, from this perspective, significantly diverges from Jean-Paul Sartre (1948, 1956), who argues that individuals must construct their own existential meaning but advocates for purging this meaning of religious approaches, claiming that religion restricts human freedom.

Frankl argues that, whether religious or not, individuals can bring meaning to their life through a transcendent belief and dedication to a cause greater than themselves. He claims that life finds meaning not in the pursuit of success and/or happiness but only through such dedication. According to Frankl, "success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself" (Frankl 1984, p. 17). Frankl further emphasizes the prevalence of an existential vacuum among 20th-century individuals, highlighting the deeply human tendency to ascribe meaning to suffering. One particularly striking example from his time in captivity illustrates this point vividly: one day, he was randomly given a pair of trousers that had previously belonged to a prisoner who had been sent to the gas chambers. Inside the pocket, he discovered a piece of paper bearing the words of Shema Yisrael,[4] a profoundly sacred Jewish prayer (Frankl 1984, pp. 128–38). By sharing this experience, Frankl illustrates that while the search for meaning tied to the hope of survival may eventually prove insufficient, religion offers a form of meaning-seeking that remains relevant even in the face of the harshest conditions. However, it must be emphasized that while he considers religion to possess a permanence independent of circumstances and experiences—making it a largely unique source of meaning—it is not the sole guide in humanity's search for meaning. Secular ideals, such as engaging in purposeful endeavours for others, society, or humanity at large, can also serve as meaningful pathways in this pursuit. For instance, Frankl observed this phenomenon in his work with patients suffering from what he termed "unemployment neurosis"—a state of depression resulting from joblessness.[5] He recommended that these individuals take on voluntary roles in public libraries, adult education programmes, or youth organizations, and he later documented that many of them experienced a gradual disappearance of their depressive symptoms. From these observations, Frankl concluded that, even in a secular sense, the feeling of having a meaningful purpose to live serves as a significant motivational force that sustains individuals in times of hardship (Frankl 1984, pp. 164–66). In another work, Frankl underscores the importance of analyzing how the

client makes sense of their own existence within the context of psychotherapy. He argues that it is through the spiritual dimension—characterized by free will and the search for meaning—that the individual can truly attain selfhood (Frankl 1959).

Frankl maintains that religions are "salvific" in nature, offering the promise of spiritual and eternal salvation, whereas psychotherapy is essential for the preservation of mental health. According to Frankl, every human being—including even the most irreligious—possesses an inherent potential for orientation toward God. Even when this potential is repressed, it may manifest itself, for instance, in dreams. In this regard, religion and psychotherapy are not interchangeable; rather, they may serve as complementary to one another (García-Alandete 2024). In contrast, Sigmund Freud argued that human behaviour is driven by unconscious instincts such as sexuality and aggression, and that religious beliefs are merely "neurotic illusions" born of helplessness and guilt in the face of these primal urges. Freud, for example, described God as an idealized replica of the "authoritarian father figure" to whom the child submits during early development (Freud 1964, 1970, 2012). Frankl, however, firmly opposed this view. He regarded God not as a projection of psychological dependency but as intimately linked to the human capacity for transcendence. In Frankl's understanding, religion is an expression of the search for meaning and of an inner orientation—an existential manifestation of the human being's innate need for transcendence (Frankl 1969).

Another prominent figure with whom Viktor Frankl held significant differences in opinion regarding religion and the concept of God was Carl Gustav Jung. Swiss scientist Jung (1938) attributed the origins of religion to the collective unconscious, shaped by inherited archetypes. In his view, the presence of religion among both primitive tribes and modern societies could be explained by this shared, universal psychic structure. Frankl (1954), however, rejected this perspective, emphasizing instead that religious orientation does not emerge from a collective unconscious but rather from the individual's personal, inner world. According to Frankl, not everyone shares the same understanding of religion or religiosity. On the contrary, an individual's search for meaning and experience of faith is deeply personal, intrinsically internal, and uniquely shaped.

Religions themselves already call on believers to be patient and endure difficult times. For instance, in Christianity, Luke 21:19 states, "by your endurance you will gain your lives" (Hebblethwaite 1985, p. 146). In Islam, Surah Al-Baqarah 177 advises Muslims to remain patient in times of war, illness, and hardship (Valentine et al. 2025, p. 57). Likewise, Psalms 37:7 calls upon Jews to "wait patiently for the Lord in the face of evil" (Botha 2007, p. 543).[6] In Buddhism, which is not an Abrahamic faith, the path to Nirvana, the ultimate liberation of the soul from suffering, requires disciplining the self through patience in the face of pain, suffering, and anger (Harris 2018). Karl Marx, one of the foremost proponents of materialist philosophy, also acknowledges that one of the important missions of religions is to provide meaning to worldly life and endurance through its challenges. For instance, Marx notes in the Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right that religion is "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions" (Marx 1997, p. 250). Elsewhere, he provides examples from ancient civilizations and asserts that ancient religions vanished because their states had disappeared. Thus, the states did not disappear as a result of the disappearance of their religions (Marx 1997, pp. 114–15). In The Manifesto of the Communist Party, Marx and Friedrich Engels claim that all religions were created by societies experiencing class conflicts, and unless a classless society is established, religions will continue to exist (Marx and Engels 2009, p. 72). It must be stated that Karl Marx was not a scholar of religion, and his claim that history progresses in a linear direction—along with the related idea that religion would eventually disappear as the socio-economic conditions sustaining it are

eliminated—was subject to criticism by Walter Benjamin. According to Benjamin, history does not always move in the direction of "progress"; humanity at times clearly regresses. "Progress", in his view, is merely a myth fabricated by ruling classes to obscure the suffering of the oppressed. In this context, Marx's assumption that "as humanity advances, religion will vanish" is highly problematic from Benjamin's perspective (Benjamin 1968).

Despite the rise in positivism and secularism in the 19th century, religions have endured as significant guides in humanity's search for meaning throughout the 20th century (Taylor 2007). Their role in shaping individuals' pursuit of meaning, socio-cultural life, and even, in some countries, the political sphere has continued into the first quarter of the 21st century. Today, secularism and atheism are prominent in Western nations and East Asia. However, according to empirical data, 62% of the global population still identifies themselves as "religious". Moreover, as will be examined in detail in this study, religiosity is noticeably higher among the poor struggling with economic difficulties compared to the wealthy worldwide. Even so, it certainly cannot be ignored that atheism is steadily increasing across the global population. (Win-Gallup International 2013; GIA 2023). While the presence of individuals abandoning various religious beliefs in favour of meaning-seeking frameworks such as "Spiritual But Not Religious" (SBNR) is another undeniable development, Frankl's views—supported by data indicating that religion still continues to be a vital and lasting guide in humanity's search for meaning—remain relevant. If the "post-human" stage, which would transform humans from Homo Sapiens as we know them into a new species, were to materialize, it would be extremely difficult to predict in advance the paradigm within which the search for meaning or religions would take shape. Nevertheless, in a potential "trans-humanist" process rapidly progressing towards the "post-human" stage, it is likely that humanity may seek refuge in the pursuit of meaning as a form of resistance against the automation it seeks to be integrated into.

4. Religion and Frankl's Ideas in the Contemporary Era

During the 18th and 19th centuries, positivist thought dominated the scientific paradigm, strengthening its influence through the Enlightenment tradition. Positivism was a scientific approach that advocated for the attainment of knowledge through the framework of observation, experimentation, and empiricism, rejected metaphysics, applied the methods of natural sciences to the social sciences, and sought to reach an objective truth that remains independent of human perception. In this context, religions were regarded as "superstitions" lacking scientific validity. For instance, one of the leading figures of positivism, Auguste Comte, asserted that science was the sole means of guiding humanity toward universal truths and that it would inevitably "surpass" religion (Wernick 1999, p. 238). However, the outcomes of scientific progress did not unfold as positivists had anticipated, and science did not "surpass" religion. The academia has been significantly engaged in seeking dialogue between science and religion since the mid-20th century (Geraci 2005). With advancements such as quantum physics in the 20th century, the possibility of divine intervention in the universe gained greater consideration among scientists. Moreover, various "domains of uncertainty" in the universe—areas where science has proven insufficient in providing clear answers—created an intellectual space in which religion and science could coexist (Polkinghorne 1998). Despite the remarkable progress achieved in the 21st century, science, whose mission is to illuminate humanity, has not replaced religion. Science possesses the capacity to explain numerous aspects of human existence and the universe, whereas religion serves to imbue human life and the cosmos with meaning. Consequently, the notion that science and religion are complementary in addressing humanity's existential needs has been gaining increasing strength (Raman 2004; Noda 2018). While Freud, one of the foremost scientists of the 19th century, claimed that religion was an illusion

(Sochaczewski 2017, p. 254), there are studies indicating that religious beliefs serve as a protective factor against undesirable conditions such as depression, substance use, anxiety disorders, and suicide—all of which are, in some way, related to the meaning of life—while also contributing to individuals' psychological well-being. (Levin 2010, p. 107). In this regard, recent developments concerning the relationship between religion, human health, and science align with the views of Frankl. Frankl (1984) posited that attributing either a religious or a secular meaning to one's life constitutes a healthy psychological attitude and refrained from dismissing religious motivations as "unscientific". Furthermore, he clearly argued that religion constitutes a source of meaning that is far more enduring than loved ones, ambitions for success, or events that bring happiness—one that remains independent of the circumstances of our lives.

The rise in secularism in the 19th century changed the political landscape of states, particularly in Western nations, but it hardly eliminated the global need for religion in the private sphere. Max Weber, at the beginning of the 20th century, argued that the decline of religious authorities and regulations in state governance was an inevitable consequence of democratization and human progress. However, the secularization process in question also fostered conditions in which individuals could freely choose and practice their religious beliefs (Weber 1958). According to Charles Taylor, secularization in modern societies (since the 18th century) has significantly diminished the influence of religion in political and public spheres. Nonetheless, religion still continues to serve individuals in their personal and internal quests for meaning. For instance, religion still endows patience in the face of material suffering and evil with existential significance. Religious individuals, in accepting the suffering and misfortunes they endure, often turn to theological perspectives that frame such hardships as essential for comprehending happiness and goodness (Taylor 2007, pp. 680–81). Taylor's view that religion assists in imbuing patience with meaning in the face of suffering aligns with Frankl's observations in Auschwitz, demonstrating that even in a "secular age", religion remains a crucial factor in humanity's search for meaning. Jürgen Habermas demonstrates that secularism has not eradicated religions, as people still regard religion as an important source of meaning and a moral guide. He further argues that strict secularist approaches aimed at completely excluding religions from the public sphere are not compatible with democratic norms. Therefore, he advocates for the principle of peaceful coexistence between secularism and religions within a democratic framework (Habermas 2006). Highlighting how modernity has eroded traditions and moral values that humanity upheld for centuries, Zygmunt Bauman argues that, although religion has been pushed into the private sphere as a result of various societal transformations, it has nonetheless retained its critical role in providing meaning to human life. Moreover, Bauman emphasizes that this role has become even more significant at the individual level in the 21st century, as humanity has lost much of its capacity for collective thinking and action—a condition that has made it increasingly difficult for individuals to define their existence as part of a larger group (Bauman 2000).

One of the key concepts that must be examined in order to understand the guiding mission that Frankl attributes to religion in the search for meaning and the place of religion in contemporary societies is "post-secularism". Among the scholars who have contributed to the development of this concept, Jürgen Habermas highlights that in the 21st century, both in Western nations and across the rest of the world, politically motivated religious movements have gained strength, religious movements have become more visible in social life through various charitable activities, and academia has shown increasing interest in religion—both as a guide in the search for meaning (as described by Frankl), and as an amalgam of social cohesion. For this reason, Habermas argues that just as dialogue between religion and science has developed out of necessity, dialogue between secularism

and religion is also inevitable (Habermas 2008). Similarly, José Casanova demonstrates that secularism is primarily a phenomenon rooted in the West, since religion and politics have not been separated in much of the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia to the same extent as in Western societies (Casanova 1994). On the other hand, Talal Asad argues that secularism is a Western construct that was imposed on Muslim societies during the colonial era and that it served as an artificial instrument to westernize the rest of the world as an extension of colonialist policies. According to Asad, since all religious cultures are inherently different from one another, Western-style secularism has not produced the expected effects universally (Asad 2003). Therefore, although secularism has, to some extent, reduced the visibility of religion in the public sphere and separated politics from religious foundations in many countries around the world, religion's mission of guiding individuals in their search for meaning continues (Berger 1999; Stark 2015). Examining the status of religion in 21st-century Europe, Grace Davie acknowledges the decline in church attendance but observes that individuals still choose to conduct life-cycle rituals most intimately tied to the question of life's meaning—such as birth, marriage, and death—within the church. Additionally, she also argues that European secularism does not represent a universal model, as restrictions on religion's visibility in the public sphere have not been implemented as intensively elsewhere (Davie 2002). Similarly, Hans Raun Iversen notes that, while political institutions in Western nations were built upon secular foundations in the early 21st century, the vast majority of people across the globe remained religious. Furthermore, he argues that countries in the Global South, which generally have lower levels of economic development, have secularized to a far lesser extent than those in the Global North (Iversen 2004, p. 28). Jonathan Fox presents a similar perspective, asserting that secularism is stronger in economically developed countries (Fox 2006).

An examination of data from studies conducted by WIN-Gallup International and the Gallup International Association (GIA), which measure the proportion of individuals self-identifying as "religious" within national populations worldwide, reveals findings supporting the prevalent claim in the literature that Western nations have increasingly distanced themselves from religion due to secularization. However, there is no evidence to suggest that efforts by religious groups to reassert themselves in the public and political spheres—transcending the well-established practices of secularism—have led to an overall increase in religiosity on a global scale. On the contrary, the notion that humanity is gradually becoming less religious on a worldwide level is an undeniable reality. According to these studies, in 2005, 73% of the U.S. population identified as "religious", but this figure declined to 60% in 2012 and remained at the same level in 2022. In Cameroon, the proportion of religious individuals decreased from 86% in 2005 to 82% in 2012, followed by a modest increase to 83% in 2022. In Argentina, 80% of the population identified as religious in 2005, but this proportion fell to 72% in 2012 and further declined to 55% in 2022. Similarly, in Germany, the percentage of religious individuals was 60% in 2005, dropped to 51% in 2012, and declined even further to 34% in 2022. The number of countries where the proportion of religious individuals has consistently increased is relatively small, with Pakistan being one of the notable exceptions. In 2005, religious individuals constituted 78% of the population in Pakistan; this figure rose to 84% in 2012 and further increased to 95% in 2022. On a global scale, religious individuals accounted for 77% of the world's population in 2005, but this proportion declined to 68% in 2012 and further dropped to 62% in 2022. In parallel to this, atheists accounted for 4% of the world's population in 2005, rising to 7% in 2012, and reaching 10% by 2022 (Win-Gallup International 2013; GIA 2023). The role of age is also significant in the global decline of individuals identifying as "religious". According to a 2018 study by the Pew Research Center (PRC), a well-documented global trend indicates that younger generations are noticeably less likely to affiliate themselves

with a religion compared to older generations (PRC 2018). This can be considered one of the factors explaining the decreasing proportion of the religious population worldwide.

Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart argue that technological advancements and innovation produce individuals whose outlook on life is highly rational. Furthermore, they contend that prosperity and security—whether in the form of social welfare or physical safety—eliminate individuals' need for religious pursuits. According to the authors, factors such as poverty, lack of security and stability, and societal chaos contribute to an increase in religiosity (Norris and Inglehart 2011). Norris and Inglehart's arguments are also supported by recent data. For instance, GIA's 2022 survey indicates that atheism ranked first among the wealthiest segments of society, with a prevalence of 13%, whereas it ranked last among the poorest segments, with a rate of 8%. According to the same study, the proportion of individuals who identify as "religious" stands at 88% in South Asia and 89% in Sub-Saharan Africa, both of which have some of the lowest economic standards globally. In contrast, in regions with significantly higher living standards, the rate drops to 50% in North America and 43% in the European Union (GIA 2023). If living under harsh economic conditions can be considered a form of suffering, then these findings align with Frankl's logotherapy. Frankl's psychotherapeutic approach acknowledged that belief in God (or, more broadly, religious faith) has a positive effect on an individual's capacity to endure difficult times (Frankl 1984, p. 100). Accordingly, the fact that poorer individuals tend to be more religious—meaning that they turn to religion in their search for meaning and resilience in the face of hardship—is consistent with Frankl's framework and is highly comprehensible within this perspective.[7] Moreover, strongly aligned with Frankl's views, research indicates that religious individuals are significantly more likely than atheists to perceive life as meaningful; however, there is no significant difference between atheists and religious individuals regarding the extent to which they search for meaning in life. That is to say, both religious and atheist individuals engage in a search for meaning, but religious individuals hold a slight advantage in this pursuit (Horning et al. 2011; Nelson et al. 2021).

The obligation to adhere to religious rules is known to sometimes cause devout individuals to feel a sense of pressure. At the same time, religion is also recognized for its positive effects on coping with stress and making sense of difficult life circumstances. The General Social Survey, conducted in the United States between 1972 and 1996, demonstrates that regular participation in religious services enhances individuals' happiness (Davis and Smith 1996). Under the influence of secularization and modern life, individuals have developed alternative avenues in their search for meaning, such as dedicating themselves to their professions, engaging in artistic pursuits, or focusing on personal development. Nevertheless, religion remains one of the most powerful frameworks through which many people continue to seek meaning in contemporary society (King and Hicks 2021). Furthermore, several studies have identified the positive effects of religion on human health. Religious beliefs have been shown to reduce stress and depression. Additionally, religious rituals and spiritual practices such as meditation enhance individuals' psychological resilience in the face of adversity and have also been found to exert positive effects on the immune system. Beyond providing individuals with a sense of purpose, religious beliefs have been empirically demonstrated to have a supportive role in medical treatment processes (Koenig 2012, p. 1). A study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey revealed that religious individuals were better able to cope with loneliness[8] (Yıldırım et al. 2021, p. 2371). These findings align with Frankl (1984)'s logotherapy, reinforcing the notion that religion continues to play a role in contemporary society by providing meaning to human life, enhancing resilience in difficult times, and contributing to physical well-being.

Thinkers who characterize our era as the "post-modern age" argue that grand narratives—particularly the fundamental political and scientific concepts of the Enlight-

enment, such as liberalism and rationalism—as well as ideologies that seek to provide comprehensive solutions to humanity's problems, have lost their validity. While some "post-modernists" regard religions as obsolete grand narratives, others confine their critique to Enlightenment values, thereby exempting religions from this broader "post-modern" deconstruction (Sweetman 2005). "Post-modernism", in contrast to the Enlightenment tradition, rejects the notion of a single, universal truth. In this context, it relegates religions—much like other dimensions of "truth"—to the realm of individual experience, attributing to them subjective and fluid meanings that vary from person to person[9] (Zarkasyi 2024). Contemporary technological opportunities enable religion to reach a larger audience in a cost-free, effortless, and rapid manner. With today's technology, social media enables religious content to rapidly reach millions (Al-Zaman 2022, p. 1). Nevertheless, the technology of our era also facilitates the instrumentalization of religion in "post-truth" politics. For instance, political rivals tend to generate disinformation regarding each other's stance on religion and discredit each other by rapidly mobilizing masses through social media (Alimi 2019, p. 207). Both "post-modernist" thinkers and "post-truth" demagogues recognize that religion holds the kind of significance in humanity's search for meaning that Frankl (1984) described. While some "post-modernists" declare that "grand narratives are dead", they distinguish religion from the Enlightenment tradition, thereby affirming the religion's continued significance. Nonetheless, although religion has been exploited for political purposes throughout history (Gauchet 2021), the "post-truth" demagogues of today, by taking advantage of contemporary technological possibilities, are able to manipulate it more rapidly and dangerously than ever before.

In our era, the tendency of individuals to distance themselves from traditional religions and seek the meaning of life through inner and spiritual journeys—commonly referred to as SBNR beliefs—is becoming widespread. Within the perception of SBNR individuals, the concept of "God" is understood as a form of cosmic energy rather than as a personal deity, as commonly conceived in religious consciousness. Research indicates that a significant proportion of these individuals were previously affiliated with a religious group but later distanced themselves from it. Rather than adopting the predefined meaning systems offered by traditional religions, they seek to construct their own existential framework based on personal meaning-making processes—evoking, to some extent, Sartrean existentialism (Johnson et al. 2018). However, it is known that atheists direct their search for meaning toward areas such as community and belonging, nature, productivity, and self-discovery (Speed et al. 2018). Secular meaning-making processes, insofar as they successfully prevent existential crises, are considered acceptable and beneficial to individuals from Frankl (1984)'s perspective. Frankl had already demonstrated that voluntarily helping others prevents depression, revealing that individuals feel better and lead a more meaningful life when they transcend their own selfish boundaries. Therefore, it is not contradictory to Frankl's views that atheists fulfil their search for meaning through activities beneficial to society.[10] However, it should be emphasized that Frankl highlights situations in which the will to succeed does not always yield the desired results, where great expectations imbued with meaning sometimes remain unfulfilled, and where individuals lose their loved ones whom they had hoped to reunite with. For this reason, in Frankl's logotherapy, the significance of religion lies in its ability to remain permanent under all circumstances, independent of worldly conditions and outcomes.

One of the most popular SBNR activities of our time is yoga. While yoga is generally perceived in the West as a beneficial physical exercise, in the East, it is understood as a much more comprehensive guide to the human search for meaning. Moreover, empirical studies have demonstrated that yoga contributes to spiritual development. It is widely regarded as a pursuit of spirituality that is distinct from and independent of institutionalized religions

(Csala et al. 2021). Additionally, research indicates that in Western societies, a significant number of individuals initially take up yoga for physical motivations but later continue their practice for spiritual reasons (Ivtzan and Jegatheeswaran 2015). Furthermore, both yoga and Christianity embody a pursuit of human transcendence. While yoga aims to assist individuals in overcoming selfish desires and the ego, Christianity calls upon individuals to transcend the self in service to God and others (Malkovsky 2017). Empirical studies indicate that among individuals who adhere to SBNR belief systems, the personal choice to distance themselves from religious institutions is a predominant factor. For some SBNR individuals, the significance of this choice may lie in their attempt to provide a non-religious explanation for their search for meaning in life. Particularly in Western societies, this decision may, for certain SBNR individuals, represent a dimension of disengagement from supernatural beliefs and a stage in the process of secularization. Among SBNR individuals, there is a widespread belief in the existence of a sacred essence within the inner world of human beings. These individuals tend to seek the sacred not in external entities but within themselves. Consequently, they endeavour to find "meaning" not in the doctrines and authorities of traditional religions but through their own spiritual experiences (Marshall and Olson 2018). Nevertheless, as pointed out, significant evidence supports that despite secularism, atheism, and SBNR pursuits of meaning, religion continues to guide a vast majority of humanity in their quest for meaning, that poorer populations tend to be more religious compared to other social groups, that religion served as a crucial refuge for meaning-seeking during the pandemic, and that religion still acts as a protective factor against suicide, anxiety disorders, and depression in contemporary society. Thus, it can be stated that the logotherapeutic significance Frankl attributed to religion remains valid today.

5. The Future Relevance of Frankl's Views: "Trans-Humanism", "Post-Humanism", and Religion

The concept of "trans-humanism", which revolves around projects such as biotechnology, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, mind cloning, and mind uploading, has already become a subject of debate concerning both humanity's quest for meaning and the future of religions. Some perspectives argue that, with the "trans-humanist" progress, an advanced human being would overcome diseases, biological limitations, and even death through tremendous technological advancements. Among the objectives of "trans-humanism" is the enhancement of individuals through advanced technological and biotechnological capabilities, as well as the creation of a world in which the quality of life is extraordinarily improved. On the other hand, there are also viewpoints that argue that artificial intelligence and similar technological advancements will one day bring about the "post-human" stage by ending the biological life form of humans as we know it today and pushing them into a form of digitalized existence (Sandberg 2015). On the other hand, the idea of "transcending" certain human limitations is a shared goal of both "trans-humanism" and religions. While transcendence in religions is generally understood as occurring within a supernatural and divine realm, "trans-humanism" aims to overcome the limitations of the human mind and body through science and technology. In the future, various conflicts between "trans-humanism" and religions may arise, but certain reconciliations are also conceivable. For instance, some religious practices—provided that the corresponding religious doctrines allow for it—could be updated in alignment with "trans-humanism" through virtual worship or AI-assisted religious guidance. In the case of Islam and Christianity, while some authorities argue that such technological transformations integrated into human life constitute an "intervention in creation", others are more inclined to accept them as "divine blessings that facilitate human life", provided they do not violate specific religious

or moral norms. (Hopkins 2005; Mercer et al. 2021; Tanton 2025). If the "trans-humanist" process is discussed from a Franklian perspective, technology, for Frankl, may serve as a tool that provides humans with a materially more comfortable life, but it cannot serve as a purpose that gives life meaning. For instance, Frankl states, "The people have enough to live by but nothing to live for, they have the means but no meaning" (Frankl 1984, p. 165). Therefore, the belief that technological progress will eliminate the search for meaning or the need for religion does not align with Frankl's views.

According to one perspective, the "trans-humanist" technology—particularly through mind-cloning and the realization of a form of digital immortality—will lead to the collapse of traditional religious beliefs concerning the afterlife. However, an alternative view contends that whether mind cloning can genuinely be regarded as ensuring the continuity of the soul or self-awareness remains highly contentious, and such developments do not necessarily entail the dissolution of afterlife beliefs (Huberman 2018). In this context, different perspectives are put forward regarding the presence of religions in the highly technological life of the future. In one point of view, a lifestyle in which humans can transcend their biological limitations through technology does not inherently necessitate the end of religious/spiritual pursuits. Therefore, the complete disappearance of existing religions in the future is hardly inevitable. It also remains possible that established religions may persist by integrating advanced technologies into worship practices and spiritual guidance (Mercer et al. 2021). Based on another point of view, however, new reasoning and decision-making systems will emerge, wherein humanity is likely to be made part of a belief system centred not on God but on data generated by artificial intelligence—a phenomenon known as "Dataism". It is also conceivable that individuals might become fragments of a vast, digitalized collective consciousness, leading to the diminution of individual identity and the reconfiguration of meaning-seeking. It is noteworthy that these new paradigms, which are feared to emerge as a result of the excessive influence of technology and artificial intelligence on human consciousness, have highly controversial dimensions not only from a religious perspective but also from a moral standpoint—particularly due to the possibility of transforming the human species from its known Homo Sapiens existence into an entirely different form (Harari 2017; Larsen 2023). Whether immortality is achieved through mind cloning or not, and whether such an existence can truly be called "immortality" or not, for Frankl, "a human being is a finite thing, and his freedom is restricted. It is not freedom from conditions, but it is freedom to take a stand toward the conditions" (Frankl 1984, p. 153). Therefore, since a way of life in which human beings lack free will cannot be considered a "human way of life", and since the search for meaning ceases where free will ends, from a Franklian perspective, "digital immortality" would merely constitute a form devoid of the search for meaning.

The views suggesting that the "immortality" achieved through the transfer of human consciousness to artificial intelligence would not necessarily undermine beliefs in the afterlife have been previously expressed in this study. Even if this form of "immortality" does not lead to the outright rejection of traditional religious doctrines, it may still compel religions to reinterpret their narratives on the afterlife. Additionally, it is within the realm of possibility that future technological advancements may enable augmented reality-based simulations of "contact with God". Therefore, while humanity's search for meaning and spirituality is expected to persist alongside "trans-humanist" transformations, new narratives and interpretations may emerge in which religion and advanced technology become increasingly intertwined. Even if existing religions disappear or adapt to new interpretations, religion in a broader sense may continue to serve as a guiding force in humanity's quest for meaning. Thus, the possibility of religion losing its role as a guiding force in the search for meaning is not primarily related to "trans-humanism" but rather to

the potential "post-human" stage. There are concerns that if this stage is reached, humanity may lose its spiritual autonomy and may no longer be able to construct its own search for meaning—or even be considered "human" at all (Hellsten 2012; Lemasters 2024; Hans and Theophil 2024). As previously stated in the study, these concerns are, to some extent, based on sensitivities that could sustain the free-willed and meaning-seeking way of life that Frankl attributes to human beings.

As artificial intelligence and "trans-humanism" gain strength alongside technological advancements, various awareness initiatives, supported by institutions including the Vatican, have emerged to protect humanity's spiritual and moral values. Epistemological concerns regarding religion have intensified, particularly as modernity has long been encapsulated by the motto "God is dead", while "post-modernism" is increasingly feared to culminate in the proclamation that "humanity is dead". "Trans-humanism" promises humanity a biotechnological evolution capable of overcoming diseases, suffering, ageing, and even death. However, the ethical dimensions of this trajectory are highly controversial (Al-Kassimi 2023). Within the broader discourse on the "trans-humanist" future, however, the persistence of humanity's search for meaning and the role of religion—whether in its traditional forms or through emerging alternatives—remains a prevailing assumption. Regardless of the extent to which human existence becomes intertwined with technology, it is widely anticipated that the search for meaning will endure, with either existing religions or newly emerging meaning-making systems continuing to serve as its guiding framework (Pastor and Cuadrado 2014). Frankl (1984) conceptualizes the human being as an entity inherently engaged in a search for meaning throughout life. In this regard, as previously stated, the prevailing consensus in the literature suggests that regardless of whether transhumanism leads to the adaptation of existing religions to new technological realities or results in their replacement by entirely new spiritual frameworks, the search for meaning will persist as long as humans remain in their current Homo Sapiens form, accompanied by various religious beliefs—whether existing ones or newly emerging ones. In this context, as long as humans continue to be a species that acts with free will, it is reasonable to suggest that Frankl's views may continue to constitute a meaningful framework for understanding the human search for meaning. However, should humanity transition into the "post-human" stage—where many of its defining characteristics are fundamentally altered—the search for meaning itself may come to an end. At that point, it would be highly debatable whether the beings replacing humans could still be referred to as "human" at all. Ultimately, regardless of the technological advancements at its disposal, as long as Homo Sapiens does not fully integrate itself into technology to the extent of evolving into an entirely new species, its existential search for meaning—as well as its reliance on religion as a guiding force—is likely to remain a fundamental aspect of earthly life, fully aligned with Frankl's approach.

6. Conclusions

This study discussed Frankl's logotherapy in terms of its contemporary relevance as well as its potential validity in the future. It was noted that Frankl remained open to secular pathways of seeking meaning and did not exclusively advocate meaning derived from religious beliefs. Nevertheless, emphasis was placed on Frankl's perspective of religion as a lasting guide in the search for meaning, primarily due to its intrinsic capacity to exist independently of worldly conditions and developments. It has been demonstrated that religion continues to guide a substantial portion of the global population in the first quarter of the current millennium, despite secularism, steadily declining religiosity, rising atheism, and the recent popularity of SBNR forms of meaning-making. Particularly, it was highlighted that poorer segments of societies worldwide tend to exhibit greater religiosity

compared to middle-class or affluent groups. This finding aligns with Frankl's assertion regarding religion's utility in providing meaning and endurance under adverse conditions. Additionally, empirical research was cited, emphasizing religion's significance as a vital source of resilience and meaning for individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, it was established that modern social media has accelerated religions' ability to reach people. However, the misuse of these platforms by various demagogues to manipulate individuals for political ends was also acknowledged. More significantly, scientific studies were underscored, confirming that religion, as Frankl anticipated, provides meaning to human existence and serves as a robust protective factor against depression, anxiety disorders, substance use, and suicide.

The study further illustrated the potential for religion to continue guiding individuals in their search for meaning, even amid the rapid rise in "trans-humanist" technological advancements. It discussed opposing perspectives regarding mind cloning: one suggesting that technological immortality could necessitate a reinterpretation of traditional religious teachings on the afterlife, and the other asserting that the existence provided by mind cloning would fail to maintain authentic continuity of consciousness and soul. Regardless of technological advancement and the future trajectories of current religions, the prevailing view is that humanity's inclination to ground its quest for meaning in religious principles—whether traditional or emerging—will likely persist. On the other hand, the study also engaged with speculative perspectives suggesting that, should humanity enter a phase characterized as "post-human", the very nature of Homo Sapiens may be altered, potentially rendering the search for meaning—at least as it is currently understood—obsolete. Nevertheless, unless this speculative "potential stage" materializes, it is reasonable to assume that the human search for meaning may continue in forms resembling those of the present, that religion may remain a source of guidance for individuals within this search, and that Frankl's perspective on the matter could continue to constitute a meaningful interpretive framework in the future. Although religiosity is declining worldwide, it is an empirically supported fact that religion continues to provide important answers to believers' search for meaning in life.

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Notes

[1] In this study, the term "trans-humanism" is used to refer to a process of advancement in which humans overcome their biological limitations through technological (and biotechnological) progress while still continuing to exist as the Homo Sapiens species we know. The stage in which humans evolve from being Homo Sapiens into a digital or machine form is referred to as the "post-human" stage. For detailed information on these definitions, see Sandberg (2015).

[2] The meaning used here is related to "post-humanism" in the sense of the human species evolving into another species as a result of "trans-humanist" technological evolution. It does not refer to "post-humanist" thought, which critically approaches anthropocentric thinking and avoids granting humans hierarchical superiority over nature and other beings. For the differences between the two, see Roden (2010).

[3] For more detailed information on logotheraphy, see Frankl (1969).

[4] Shema Yisrael is one of the central prayers of Judaism. It is one of the first prayers learned by Jewish children and is recited twice a day. It emphasizes the oneness of God. It has the mission of reminding individuals of God's commandments and their

importance in daily life. Additionally, it reminds Jews of their commitment to their nation and serves as an important symbol of Jewish identity. Jews typically recite this prayer before death to declare their faith one last time. See Baun and Tanamal (2024).

[5] For the relationship between existentialism, nihilism, and depression, see Frankl (1978).

[6] In Christianity and Islam, the belief that showing patience in the face of worldly hardships is a requirement of a test oriented toward the afterlife holds a central place, whereas no such belief lies at the core of Judaism. For details, see Rotenberg (2008).

[7] The survey in question also found that, among the 61 countries it examined, the poorest segments ranked highest in terms of religiosity, with 66% identifying as "religious", while the wealthiest segments ranked lowest, with 56% identifying as "religious (GIA 2023)". It is worth noting that, according to Frankl (1984), the material conditions that strengthen religious pursuit of meaning are not limited to poverty. Individuals who are tired of monotonous routines or dissatisfied with materialism, even if they are wealthy, may also feel the need for a search for meaning and turn to religion for guidance.

[8] According to Émile Durkheim, who examines social cohesion, religion strengthens the sense of belonging, connecting individuals to society and making the social structure more stable (Durkheim 1915).

[9] It should be emphasized that the humanistic–existentialist approach, of which Frankl is also a representative, presents strong antitheses to both the Enlightenment and "post-modernism". For details, see Mitchell (2020) and McLafferty and Levinson (2024).

[10] Furthermore, according to Frankl, a person's help to others is also related to the moral and religious dimensions of the concept of the "self". See Frankl (1969, 1975, 1984).

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