How Could He Do That?
Or
Notes From The Fringe
William K. Marek, Ph.D.

It’s a truism, sadly, isn’t it?
We all know of someone who had it all—a great S.O., job, money, health, car....
All the trappings....

And, yet...for some reason, he/she ended it one day....
We ask....

How could he do that?

And what about inmates?
Mustn’t it be worse for them?

Locked up...away from their loved ones....
A “fish”....
Facing a long sentence
Rolled on by their Fall Partners....
Scared of their Cellies....
I used to “be” someone…
My sense-of-self?
An extraordinary, unique, one-of-a-kind guy…
My manliness?
And, yet…here I am…
Prison is so bad…
Suicide might seem like a reasonable option for an inmate…

Oh, wait…the suicide rate for inmates is frequently less than for the streets…year after year….

How to explain that? What about the importance of all those outside influences?

In prison…

It’s hard to get away from that pesky Nature and Nurture, isn’t it?

There must be something dispositive…there must be some combination of outside factors that would make someone suicidal.

You’d think so, wouldn’t you…

This presentation is an essay.

An essay based on Facts, Evidence and Opinions.
My goal? To inform on what I believe to be a Big Picture Idea.

There are a number of concepts…ideas…theories…that share certain features, certain commonalities…

Inmates and core life concepts like Purpose, Meaning, Happiness, Gratitude, Resilience, Personal Responsibility and Wisdom

An Internal Locus of Control.
An emphasis on Belief, Thought, Attitude, Perspective, Point-Of-View.

A big emphasis on Personal Responsibility…but…

Who gets the American Dream?
Does the government have a role in individual achievement of the American Dream? Is the State responsible for fulfilling expectations and false promises? Happiness, receding into the distance?

Until the mid-twentieth century, Americans were served by the ethic of individual responsibility, to determine well-being through personal effort.

The ideal individual was an independent intellect with common sense. Grounded by an innate moral sense, lived by moral principles and habits, exercising adult personal responsibility.

The curriculum in American colleges reflected that ideal until the end of the nineteenth century.

Individual responsibility has been the foundation of human achievement in Western civilization.

Every advance, beginning with the Greeks and Romans, sought individual responsibility.

The Renaissance and the Reformation freed the individual from subordination to any kind of group.

Renaissance humanism reintroduced the classical emphasis on the person as an individual.

The Magna Carta and English common law freed the individual from the sovereign or state.

The dignity and autonomy of the individual became the touchstone of Western and American concepts of liberal democracy, with personal responsibility in freedom and rights.

Progressive ideology soon replaced individual responsibility with the collective responsibility of groups.

We acquired an “other-directed” personality. The principled and purposeful individual was being replaced by the socially constructed individual relying on others to provide meaning for a life.

In the 1960s, academic social science led the change to an entitlement mentality.
Institutionalized and academic opposition to emphasis on personal responsibility for economic well-being.

Freedom from responsibility replaced acceptance of responsibility.

The social construction of self-esteem may have created a Culture of Narcissism.

Universities now stress the empowerment of oppressed people to provide social justice or more egalitarian access to income through state-sponsored redistribution.

Empowerment is not to be earned through individual responsibility but is to be granted as entitlements to oppressed groups through collective responsibility.

Collective responsibility and communal sharing has replaced personal and family responsibility.

What To DO?

An amalgam of Albert Ellis’ Rational Emotive Therapy and Viktor E. Frankl’s Logotherapy.

In the context of RET, logotherapy can be taught to those clients who experience little purpose and meaning in life and believe their personal situations are pushing the limits of human endurance.

In Frankl’s logotherapy, choice is of paramount importance in living a happy, fulfilled life.

External factors such as wealth or poverty, prison or beach, concentration camp or mountain top play a substantially less important role.

RET and logotherapy are fully compatible and complementary because they stress choice, personal responsibility, overcoming adversity and the primacy of belief and thought.

The past has an effect on us all but almost always in a direction that can be chosen.

Inmates may have to be innovative in their attempts to acquire purpose and meaning but is a far easier task than is generally believed.

Clients are to generalize from Frankl’s teachings to their own lives.
Maultsby formulated five Rules that are to be used when investigating the validity, efficacy, rationality and reasonableness of a Belief. I kept Rule One.

I consolidated the last four to Rule Two. Having only Two Rules makes it much easier for clients to remember and implement.

Two Rules of Disputation:

1.) Is the belief based on fact? Is it a fact (A) that she SHOULD'N'T have done what she did? No. It is not a fact that someone shouldn’t attack you without provocation, for example. You cannot control another person, even if you have done nothing to bring it about.

2.) Will the belief give you a Good or Bad Consequence? If not, the belief should be disputed, modified or discarded.

If the Belief fails these Rules, the words used to replace it are Prefer and Rather.

"I would prefer that he not have cut me off on the road but I cannot change another person. I will exhibit internal control (B) and not chase him with my own car (C)."

Or, a grieving person will eventually come to hold these kinds of beliefs:

"I would rather (B) that my wife not have died (A). Unfortunately, she did. I will grieve appropriately (C) for as long as it takes...but I will (painful sigh) eventually move on."

If the belief fails these Rules, it is deemed irrational and counterproductive and is to be replaced with a belief that allows the person to experience a more personally beneficial Consequence.

"What is the worst thing (Consequence) that can happen in this situation?" (Activating Event)

It is frequently therapeutic for a client to understand that it is what she is thinking about the thing (B), rather than the thing itself (A), that is causing her pain.

It puts her back in control and liberates her from the mental weight of past and current Activating Events. She can change her focus from the unchangeable (A) to the changeable (B).

This knowledge frequently provides tremendous symptom relief.
Unfortunately, many people think that it is the A that is causing them pain (C). They know that the past is unchangeable, so they erroneously conclude that past events and present pain are inextricably linked.

However, this reality, this A, may have happened 20 years previously. It exists only in the mind (B), not in time and space, and can no longer bother a person.

A thought may cause pain, however: If a man did not care about some event, would he be in pain? No.

Do cognitive psychologists want clients to not care? No, they want clients to care appropriately. It is absolutely appropriate for someone to be unhappy about some past A.

It will color their existence, certainly, but clients should be taught to not give up their lives to this event.

We should be unhappy every now and then. An appreciation of the good does not come without an appreciation of the bad.

Teach clients to acquire some mental distancing from what has happened: BE unhappy, just don’t become so unhappy that it results in unwanted consequences, like severe depression, getting fired, suicide.

I stipulate Activating Events… that you believe to be Bad…

“If you weren’t unhappy, I’d think you were weird.”

“The problem is not the problem.

The problem is your attitude about the problem.”
Johnny Depp

Captain Jack Sparrow,
Pirates of the Caribbean

Viktor Frankl

Logotherapy

Man is not free from conditions (A), be they biological, psychological or sociological in nature.

But he is, and always remains, free to take a stand (B) toward these conditions (A): he always retains the freedom to choose his attitude (B) towards them.

Man is free to rise above the plane of somatic and psychic determinants of his existence (A). Man can reflect on himself from a distance.

...but man is ultimately self-determining. What he becomes (C) - within the limits of endowment and environment (A) - he has made himself.

In the living laboratories of the concentration camps (A) we watched comrades behaving like swine (C1) while others behaved like saints (C2).

Man has both these potentialities (B) within himself. Which one he actualizes depends on decision (B), not on conditions (A).

It is time that this decision quality (B) of human existence be included in our definition of man.

Our generation has come to know man as he really is: the being that has invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz, and also the being who entered those gas chambers upright (C), the Lord's Prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips (C).
...whether any circumstances (A), be they inner or outer ones, have an influence on a given individual or not, and in which direction this influence takes its way (C) — all that depends on the individual's free choice (B).

The conditions (A) do not determine me, but I determine whether I yield to them or brave them (B).

There is nothing conceivable (A) that would condition a man wholly (C), i.e., without leaving to him the slightest freedom. Man is never fully conditioned (C) in the sense of being determined by any facts or forces (A).

Rather, man is ultimately self-determining. He determines (B) not only his fate (C) but also his own self (C), for man is not only forming and shaping the course of his life (C) but also his very self (C).

[Even though a person may be in a concentration camp (A),] by virtue of that...called the "defiant power of the human spirit (B)," he had the possibility of holding himself above the influence of his environment (A).

[Concentration camp inmates] experienced a moral progression (B & C) — moral, and religious.

But even in a situation (A) in which man is deprived of both creativity and receptivity, he can still fulfill a meaning in his life (C).

It is precisely when facing such a fate (A), when being confronted with a hopeless situation (A), that man is given a last opportunity to fulfill a meaning — to realize even the highest value, to fulfill even the deepest meaning — and that is the meaning of suffering.

...it is my conviction that man should not, indeed cannot, struggle for identity in a direct way;

he rather finds identity to the extent to which he commits himself (B) to something beyond himself, to a course greater than himself.

It seems to me that the present increasing tendency to become addicted to tranquilizing drugs is a sign that contemporary man has been more and more seduced to a belief in the illusion that he can strive for happiness, or for peace of mind.
Existence falters (C) unless it is lived in terms of transcendence toward something beyond itself (C)....Man is responsible for the fulfillment of the specific meaning of his personal life (C).

But he is also responsible before something, or to something, be it society, or humanity, or mankind, or his own conscience.

Life can be made meaningful (C) in a threefold way: first, through what we give to life (in terms of our creative works); second, by what we take from the world (in terms of our experiencing values); and third, through the stand we take (B & C) toward a fate we no longer can change (A) (an incurable disease, an inoperable cancer, or the like.)

...ultimate meaning (B & C) is no longer a matter of intellectual cognition but of existential commitment.

...pleasure (C) is primarily and normally not an aim but an effect, let us say a side effect, of the achievement of a task.

In other words, pleasure establishes itself automatically as soon as one has fulfilled a meaning or realized a value.

RET and logotherapy are compatible treatment philosophies/theories.

Both emphasize the primacy of belief over the Activating Event, or reality of existence. Clients discover that their lives and emotional destinies are under their personal control.

They learn how to think, feel and behave better.

The outward-directed quest for Purpose and Meaning indirectly and powerfully fills the void in a way that direct methods (e.g., drugs, money, possessions) never could.

RET gives clients a personal control conceptualization around which to organize their lives; logotherapy offers a complementary disputation of belief systems that trigger unhappiness.

Both modalities offer clients direction, hope, peace, serenity, purpose and reasonable mental tranquility.

With instruction and cognitive effort, clients can look forward to rewarding internal and external states (B & C) they previously believed to be unobtainable.
An individual’s ability to successfully adapt to life tasks in the face of social disadvantage or other highly adverse conditions.

The ability to bounce back from a negative experience with “competent functioning.”

It can be learned and developed.

A common misconception is that resilient people are free from negative emotions or thoughts and remain optimistic in most or all situations.

They have developed proper coping techniques that allow them to effectively and relatively easily navigate through crises.

Optimistic attitudes and positive emotionality. Counter negative emotions with positive emotions.

A positive adaptation after a stressful or adverse situation.

An integrated adaptation of physical, mental and spiritual aspects in a set of “good” or “bad” circumstances.

Engage life with hope and humor.

Coming out of a situation with “competent functioning.”

Being able to interact with their environments and the processes that promote well-being and protect them from risk factors.
Biological Model:

Neuropeptide Y and 5-Dehydroepiandrosterone: Reduces sympathetic nervous system activation.

Oxytocin systems impact on the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis.

Positive emotions led to improvements in immune system and fewer respiratory diseases, due to an increase in salivary immunoglobulin A.

1.) Make realistic plans and follow through.
2.) Confidence in strength and ability.
3.) Communication and problem-solving skills.
4.) Manage strong impulses and feelings.

Grit: The perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Evidence that it is more valuable than IQ and talent.

Predictors of Resilience:

**Positive, proactive personality**
**Experience and learning**
**Sense of control**
**Flexibility and adaptability**
**Balance and perspective**
**Perceived social support**
**Peer support/group cohesion**

**Capacity to make realistic plans.**
**Self-confidence.**
**Positive self-image.**
**Outgoing, bright**
**Communication skills**
**Manage strong feelings, impulses**
**Community**
**Humor, especially in aging.**
**Women had less? resilience.**

American Psychological Association:

**Maintain good relationships with close family members/friends.**
**Avoid seeing crises as “unbearable.”**
**Accept situations that can’t be changed.**
**Move toward realistic goals.**
**Decisive actions in adverse situations.**
**Look for opportunities of self-discovery after a struggle with loss.**
**Develop self-confidence.**
**Long-term perspective and consider stresses in a broader context.**

**Hopeful outlook, expects good things.**
**Visualizing what is wished.**
**Take care of mind and body, exercising regularly, paying attention to self.**
Can resilience be built or is it a process?

It is ordinary, not extraordinary.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Past:

The dignity and autonomy of the individual was the touchstone of Western and American concepts of liberal democracy. Personal responsibility, not personal rights.

The Now:

Individual responsibility has been replaced by collective responsibility.

If your locus of control is internal, there are multiple psychological benefits.

The converse is also true.

**Take 100% responsibility for your life.**
**Give up all of your excuses.**
**Even though you aren’t responsible for some of the things that happen to you, you’re responsible for what you think, feel and do in response.**
**Take conscious control.**
**You will acquire freedom, trust and respect from others.**
**Fewer negative emotions.**
**Responsibility can’t be split.**

**Complaining:** Just makes things worse than they are, at least mentally.
**Playing The Victim:** Surrenders your control to outside circumstances.
**Recognize your choices.**
**Take the blame.**
**Accept yourself and your circumstances.**
**Stop relying on external validation.**
**Be open to new ideas and beliefs.**
**Forgive yourself and others.**
**You are not responsible for others.**

Flow: The psychology of optimal experience.

Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi

The mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement and enjoyment in the process of the activity.

Complete absorption in what one does and a resulting loss in one’s sense of space/time.
In The Zone

**Intense and focused concentration on the present.**
**Merging of action and awareness.**
**Loss of reflective self-consciousness.**
**Sense of personal control or agency.**
**Distortion of temporal experience.**
**Intrinsically rewarding.**
**Immediate feedback.**
**Feeling that you will succeed.**
**Becoming so engrossed that other needs become negligible.**

Three conditions have to be met:
1.) An activity with clear goals and progress. Adds direction and structure to the task.
2.) Clear and immediate feedback. Adjust performance to maintain the flow state.
3.) Balance between opportunity and capacity.

Those who have experienced Flow:
1.) Completely involved-focused, concentrated.
2.) Ecstasy, being outside everyday reality.
3.) Great inner clarity – Knowing what needs to be done and how well we are doing.
4.) Knowing that the activity is doable, that our skills are adequate to the task.
5.) Serenity – Beyond the boundaries of the ego.
6.) Timelessness – Hours pass like minutes.
7.) Intrinsic motivation – whatever produces flow becomes its own reward.

Purpose and Meaning

Four main experiences that encourage P & M:
1.) Physical and mental well-being: Taking care of body and mind.
2.) Belonging and recognition: Feeling valued and validated.
3.) Personally treasured activities: Family, hobbies, connectedness. You’re in the moment and time flies by.
4.) Spiritual closeness and connectedness.
People who are happy but have little sense of meaning in their lives have the same gene expression pattern as people who are responding to chronic adversity.

The bodies of these happy people are preparing them for bacterial threats by activating the pro-inflammatory response.

Chronic inflammation is associated with major illnesses like heart disease and cancer.

**Genes:** Twin Studies - 48% is inherited.

Faith, family, community and work are the surest path to happiness.

Money makes poor people happier when it fulfills basic needs. Once middle-class money is earned, even a large dose of money won’t make you much happier.

¾ of Americans wouldn’t quit work, even if they hit the lottery. Those with the least education and least prestigious jobs would stay while the rich would take the money and run.

**Carl Jung:**

The least of things with a meaning is worth more in life than the greatest of things without it.

**Bill Marek:**

Don’t live for the weekend.

**Aristotle:** Happiness is a practice, living in a way that fulfills a purpose.

**Franklin D. Roosevelt:** Happiness lies not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort.

Americans who believe they’re successful at work are twice as likely to be very happy overall.
2017
Norway
Denmark
Iceland
Switzerland
Finland

Income, healthy life expectancy, having someone to count on in times of trouble, generosity, freedom and trust (lack of corruption in business and government).

Single biggest source of country-wide misery?: Mental Illness
Much of Africa is struggling.
In 2007, the US ranked 3rd. In 2016, it came in 19th.

For Sale:
"The Science of Happiness": A UC Berkeley program in which you’ll learn science-based principles for a happy, meaningful life. You’ll “zero in on a fundamental finding from positive psychology: That happiness is inextricably linked to having strong social connectedness and contributing to something bigger than yourself - the greater good.”

Gratitude
Fred Stock:
Those sitting in the cheap seats boo the loudest...

As a general rule, inmates are the least grateful people on the planet. If they had to serve five years for every crime they committed, they’d “be in prison a million years.”

However:
“If I didn’t get caught for it, it didn’t happen.”
They’re right: Life ISN’T Fair...

Inmates are:
Warm
Safe
Dry
No Food Insecurity
More rights than you
Medical care on demand
Gratitude is viewed as a prized human propensity in the Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Baha'i and Hindu traditions.

**Jewish Conception of Gratitude**

An essential part of worship and every aspect of life. All things come from God.

---

**Christian conceptions**

Gratitude molds and shapes Christian life. Martin Luther: “The basic Christian attitude and the heart of the gospel.”

Since we were created by a personal God, strongly encouraged to praise and give gratitude to their creator. God is the selfless giver of all good things.

Gratitude enables Christians to share a common bond, shaping all aspects of life.

---

**Islamic conceptions**

The Quran is filled with the idea of gratitude. Islam encourages its followers to be grateful and express thanks to God in all circumstances.

Islamic teaching emphasizes the idea that those who are grateful will be rewarded with more:

“The first who will be summoned to paradise are those who have praised God in every circumstance.”

---

With Catholic nuns and priests, out of 50 emotions, love and gratitude were the most experienced emotion towards God.

In the Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican churches, the most important rite is called the Eucharist:

The name derives from the Greek word eucharistia for thanksgiving.

---

The Pillar of Islam calling for daily prayer encourages believers to pray to God five times a day in order to thank him for his goodness.

The purpose of each of the five daily prayers is not to ask Allah for anything but just to show gratitude.

The pillar of fasting during the month of Ramadan is for the purpose of putting the believer in a state of gratitude.
Three scales to measure individual differences in gratitude, each of which assesses somewhat different conceptions.

The GQ6 measures individual differences in how frequently and intensely people feel gratitude.

The Appreciation Scale measures 8 different aspects of gratitude: appreciation of people, possessions, the present moment, rituals, feeling of awe, social comparisons, existential concerns and behavior which expresses gratitude.

The GRAT assesses gratitude toward other people, the world in general and a lack of resentment for what you do not have.

More Gratitude? Higher levels of subjective well-being, happier, less depressed, less stressed and more satisfied with their lives and social relationships.

Gratitude may serve as a buffer for depression by enhancing the coding and retrievability of positive experiences. Higher levels of control of the environment, personal growth, purpose in life and self acceptance.

More positive ways of coping with difficulties, more likely to seek support from other people, reinterpret, grow from experiences and spend more time planning how to deal with the problem.

Fewer negative coping strategies, less likely to try and avoid or deny the problem, blame themselves or cope through substance use. Sleep better, thinking fewer negative and more positive thoughts.

Strongest links with mental health of any character trait.

A unique relationship with well-being and can explain aspects of well-being that other personality traits cannot. Able to explain Well-Being better than the Big Five and 30 of the most commonly studied personality traits.

Since gratitude leads to well-being, several interventions to increase gratitude.

Different gratitude exercises, such as thinking about a living person for whom you are grateful, writing about someone or writing a letter to someone you are grateful for.

Control Group was asked about their living room. Experimental group had increases in positive emotion, strongest for participants who thought about a person.

Six interventions to improve quality of life: The biggest short-term effects came from a “gratitude visit,” delivering a letter of gratitude. Rise in happiness scores by 10% and a reduction in depression scores, results which lasted up to one month after the visit.

Of the six conditions, the longest lasting effects were associated with “gratitude journals.” Asked to write down three things they were grateful for every day. These participants’ happiness scores also increased and continued to increase each time they were re-tested.

Greatest benefits occurred around six months after treatment began. Many participants continued to keep the journal long after the initial week.

Gratitude Visit:

1.) Think of someone who has done something important and wonderful for you, yet you have not properly thanked.

2.) Reflect on the benefits you received and write a letter expressing your gratitude for all they have done.

3.) Finally, arrange to deliver the letter personally and spend some time with this person talking about what you wrote.
Meta-Analysis, 91 Studies, more than 18,000 participants:

**Clear and significant link between gratitude and behaviors that help society as a whole.**

**Reduces stress, worry and depression, induces giving back.**

In 2015, a New York Times columnist wrote a piece called “The Selfish Side of Gratitude.” She wondered if perhaps Gratitude was “not always appropriate” and referred to grateful people as “chumps.”

She spoke about how Wal Mart had recently given their employees a $1 an hour raise. Their then-CEO was making almost $1 million and lived on a 100-acre farm in Arkansas.

She questioned if Walmart employees “should be grateful” for their raise because they were the richest family in the U.S.

With such a viewpoint, you wonder if she’s happy and/or grateful for having the skills to write opinion pieces for one of the nation’s most prestigious newspapers? If she got a raise, question the wealth of the NY Times owner and refuse it?

I am thankful for laughter, except when milk comes out my nose.

--Woody Allen

The universe was not designed with your comfort in mind, sorry....

Wisdom

“And if I claim to be a wise man, It surely means I do not know…”
Integration of knowledge, experience, and deep understanding.

Incorporates tolerance for the uncertainties of life.

An awareness of how things play out over time, confers a sense of balance.

Acquired only through experience but experience does not automatically confer wisdom.

Two Models of Wisdom

Practical wisdom is assimilative in a Piagetian sense, assimilating new phenomena into an old schema. Accepts conventional interpretations of reality and operates well within them.

Concerned with successful functioning in the social world. It is this kind of wisdom that academic psychology recognizes and studies.

Transcendent wisdom perceives conventional reality as lacking ultimate reality, something humans have created to allow them to survive successfully.

Involves recognition of reality that goes beyond conventional, or social, consensus, material reality.

High ratings of Transcendent Wisdom correlated significantly with Flexibility, Psychological Mindedness and Empathy from the CPI.

Five essential elements to wisdom:

Guidance, Experience, Moral Principles, Time (the time it takes to realize an action was wise) and Compassionate Relationships.

Special kind of real-life process when a person integrates perspectives to form a vision and ends only after the integrated vision brings forth beneficial effects to the acting self and others.

Wisdom came forth most naturally when a person was following a positive, self-defined vision of a good life, fulfilling a life mission.

Epilogue

So how many presentations the last four days celebrated the role of the person...

...OR the role of society and its duty to liberate him from himself?

Anything less would be heartless, cold, compassionless, unempathic and “not reflective of the values of our profession.”
Everyone thinks they’ve got Personal Responsibility, right? It’s not even a question...until it is.

Example: Going to college. Not everyone can go, right? All those Life Strikes piling up against you? Poverty, Family, Criminality, Drugs, Society...A reality/mindset of low expectations and low achievement.

Having a child at age 16?

Maybe they don’t even know that college is an option... There’s no way up and out!??%#

I don’t agree and I KNOW Viktor Frankl wouldn’t either...

Difference in World View, Case Conceptualization and Treatment Philosophy...

A person in American society doesn’t learn about the benefits of college from

Family?
Uncle Bert?
Aunt Bertha?
TV?
Teacher?
Friend?
Billboards?
Career Day?

The kids don’t know you have to go to college to be a teacher?

Of course, they know.

They know that having a child at 16, dropping out of school, etc., would be an impediment.

How dare you demean their absolute right to choose? To fail? To succeed?

Poor in America:

**45 million, 14.5%  
**$23,550, for a family of four  
**$11,490, for one person

Illiteracy in America:

**32 million. 14% can’t read, 16th in Developing Countries

Manual Arts High School, Los Angeles

**According to the principal, 10% of his students are in gangs
Is it true that the most illiberal person on earth is a true conservative?

Winston Churchill:

If you’re not a liberal when you’re young, it shows you have no heart.

If you’re not a conservative when you’re older, it shows you can’t think.

Thanks!