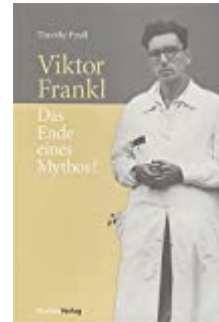


**Timothy Pytell.** *Viktor Frankl: Das Ende eines Mythos?* Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2005. 212 pp. EUR 19.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-7065-1911-3.



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**Published on** H-German (February, 2006)

## When a Discipline Goes into Exile: Rethinking Intellectual Biographies

Pytell's volume is a reworked and truncated version of his 1999 New York University dissertation, *The Man Who Would Be King: Viktor Frankl's Struggle for Meaning*, completed under the supervision of Jerrold Seigel. Pytell, an assistant professor of History at California State University San Bernardino, here offers a sophisticated and nuanced intellectual biography of the psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1905-97), founder of the so-called Third Vienna School of Psychotherapy, world-famous "father" of logotherapy, and noted commentator on the Holocaust experience—a reputation based on his 1940-42 Viennese research on Austrian Jews who tried to commit suicide rather than be deported to the camps.

The dissertation version of the project took on U.S. receptions of Frankl, who is still largely remembered positively. This version, with a heavily revised first chapter and conclusion, focuses on the implications of Frankl's bibliography within the context of postwar Austrian identity politics—a fine decision for a German-language publication. I hope that the remaining material will still find publication in English, because it completes the story of emigration and international rehabilitation in ways

that illuminate not only Frankl's story, but perhaps also assumptions in the United States about any number of its illustrious immigrants after the Second World War.

Pytell takes his new title seriously: he interrogates the myth of Frankl's achievements and career, placing both the man and his published works solidly into their original contexts. Most critically, he recovers the points of decision presented to this working psychiatrist as an employee of "official Austria," both in advance of and after the Nazi era.

Frankl's decision points were first and foremost professional and theoretical. Pytell tells a convincing story of Frankl's professional engagement with the psychoanalytic and psychiatric theories and institutions of his era, starting with his early career in 1920s and 1930s Vienna and his early engagement with Freud, moving to his rejection of that work in his turn to existentialism, and ending at his achievement of his hallmark synthesis, a theory of the psyche that acknowledges death, suffering and guilt as central to human experience. Readers will find an extremely useful and readable introduction to the institutional/practical configurations of psychiatry in Vienna

with Frankl's work threaded carefully through it.

Anson Rabinbach's introduction summarizes Frankl's professional decision points as a gnawing problem for historians of the discipline: this therapist's career arc. How, he asks, can Pytell's Frankl, who lost his wife and parents in the camps, who himself survived Auschwitz, and who ended his career as an internationally known psychiatrist and a Jewish intellectual with international cult status, be the same Frankl who worked with the Göring Institute before the *Anschluß*, who worked during the war in the Rothschild Hospital performing surgical brain experiments on his Jewish suicide patients, and who, near the end of his life, flirted with Kurt Waldheim and Jörg Haider's FPÖ? Frankl is not the only prominent scientist whose career looks almost incomprehensible today, but Pytell has done his readers the service of clarifying the origins of one exemplary problem.

Pytell starts his story with Frankl's still-positive reputation at his death, carefully reconstructing the existentialist science with which his most familiar work is associated. He then splits Frankl's career into phases, respecting Frankl's own autobiographical accounts and with careful attention to the published works at each phase of Frankl's work. Yet Pytell is also careful to assume critical distance from Frankl's late-career narratives, some written as late as a half-century after the original events.

The story follows Frankl's moves from working on Freud's theory, stressing individuals, then to espousing Adler's psychology to account for the individual within a group (an interest also of Red Vienna), and then working under the influence of Otto Rank at the University of Vienna from 1928 on (he finished his medical training in 1930). Rank officially became a Nazi sometime between 1930 and 1933.

Like many in Austria's Jewish population, Frankl ultimately did not see how the political winds were blowing, despite his proximity to Austrofascism. Between 1926 and 1927, he published only practical clinical articles, not theory, as he tried to overcome what he considered the depersonalized and dehumanizing tendencies of traditional therapy. As he found his voice as a practical worker in clinical contexts, he wrote advocating sexual reform for youth, critiquing Freud's emphasis on the libido and Adler's undervaluing of individual experience, and seeking to recapture, by reference to existentialism, how to factor individual experience into therapy.

Frankl's career took its fateful turn when the Göring Institute moved into Vienna in 1930, seeking to establish at Steinhof a center for non-Freudian (that is, "non-Jewish") therapy. Frankl now positioned himself as evolving a substitute for depth psychology, a *Höhenpsychologie* or "psychology of the heights." Pytell's most daring work on Frankl—the reconstruction of a somewhat muddy professional chronology—describes his medical research on reviving and administering therapy to suicidal Jewish patients who embraced the so-called "Masada solution" (pp. 101 ff.). To revive attempted suicides, Frankl experimented with shock therapy, stimulants administered directly to the heart, and amphetamines used to stimulate the brain—experiments he justified in a 1942 publication in Switzerland (p. 105). Later, he tried surgical solutions, which were, however, beyond his personal competence (p. 104). The Nazis supported him because they did not want suicides on their arrest records (pp. 114-5).

Such shared aims did not shelter Frankl from losing his practice after the *Anschluß*. He had acquired a U.S. visa in 1941, but did not use it: he asserted this decision was made in light of his patients, but his parents and fiancée were more likely factors (96 f.). His first wife Tilly, a nurse, died in Bergen-Belsen (p. 99); Frankl himself was deported to Theresienstadt in 1942, where he eschewed opportunities to escape and worked with Leo Baeck. Late in 1944, he was moved to Auschwitz, but spent only two or three days there before he was sent on a work detail in Bavaria. After the war, Frankl made good his personal tragedy and professional near-suicide in a series of three books, using existentialism to work through his death-camp experiences and find a new approach to the therapy of guilt, loss, and responsibility. He claims to have developed logotherapy while in the camps (pp. 122-23), as he saw how individuals transformed the camps into meaningful personal experiences.

Pytell does not try to make Frankl into a conscious opportunist or self-apologist. In the eighth and ninth chapters of the study, he instead sets the psychiatrist next to the developing postwar contexts of Austrian identity politics. The result is the account of a professional whose drive for recognition and fame probably overrode his ethics at moments throughout his career. Pytell's new conclusion uses a first-person narrative to speak to Austrians today, clearly anticipating resistance and defending his research over and against other recent Frankl biographers more prone to believing Frankl himself and more likely to preserve his image.

This is a worthy book, one that needs to be taken seriously not only as an account of Frankl's work, but as an exemplary investigation of a career made and lost during the Nazi era, and of a survivor whose personal story was most likely less than heroic. The results are, at the same time, nervous: Pytell has probably not offered the last word on Frankl's motivations (many of those would emerge in the later U.S. context, which have not been reworked in this version). Current theorists of post-memory would find fruitful material here, if they were

to return to Frankl's autobiographies from the points of view established by Pytell.

I particularly question the editorial decision that did not allow Pytell to pair his analysis of Austrian reactions to Frankl with an account of American/international ones, thus leaving open many questions about psychotherapy's postwar evolution. Nonetheless, this excellent translation of Pytell's clear, measured prose deserves serious attention as a generation of therapists pass and as the histories of psychotherapy need retelling.

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**Citation:** Katherine Arens. Review of Pytell, Timothy, *Viktor Frankl: Das Ende eines Mythos?*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. February, 2006.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11462>

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