Meaning and the Good Life in Counselling Psychology

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education
in
Counselling Psychology

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Abstract

Existential, postmodern, and positive psychologists tell stories about meaning and human flourishing beset with philosophical difficulties. Canadian counselling psychologists would benefit from a story of meaning and flourishing which views both as shaped and constrained by human nature, rather than being reducible to subjective preferences or cultural constructions. A Franklian-Aristotelian synthesis of the human good illuminates the centrality of virtue for living and fulfilling potential meanings in life. Specifically, given our nature as ultrasocial reasoning primates, a flourishing human life involves having rich relationships with others and pursuing aims that require us to embody moral virtue(s). This theory does not *a priori* reject meaning and goodness as having larger metaphysical aspects, offering common ground for psychologists holding a variety of beliefs to explore and discuss the good human life. In an age where common ground is scarce, such a story is desperately needed in psychology. My core argument is that synthesizing the thoughts of Aristotle and Viktor Frankl will help psychologists articulate a realist story about the natural foundations of human meaning and flourishing that is consistent with the core values of counselling psychology, converges with research from multiple disciplines, and has practical applications for understanding our work with clients.

Keywords: Aristotle, Frankl, Meaning, Eudaimonia, Human Nature

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Joshua M. Tippe. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

Acknowledgements

I offer my profound thanks to **Dr. William Whelton** for the support and guidance he provided me throughout my Master's education, both in-person and behind the scenes. His suggestions and constructive criticism were instrumental for refining my arguments, expanding my horizons, and bringing my research to its final form. I am deeply grateful for all he has invested in my education and professional development.

I am also very grateful towards **my parents**, **Merv and Cathy Tippe**. They have given me their warm, unwavering support throughout my education. I want to specifically thank my mother for proofreading more drafts of this thesis than I dare count. Without her help, I would have been unable to communicate my thoughts with the precision I desired.

I give my most special thanks to **my wife, Camille**. Without her love, support, sacrifice, and encouragement, I would not have been able to devote the necessary time and resources required to write this thesis. I could not have done this research without her love and hard work behind the scenes.

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Chapter 1. Counselling Psychology Needs a New Story of Meaning and Human Flourishing

What is the meaning of life? What makes my life "worth it"? What or who should I live for? Prior to the modern and postmodern eras, answers to such existential questions were frequently nested within the context of overarching religious and/or spiritual beliefs, traditions, and systems. However, as religious belief waned during the Enlightenment and early 20th century Europe, various thinkers and artists attempted to discuss meaning in what became an increasingly "disenchanted" view of the cosmos. Psychologists have not shied away from entering the fray of these discussions. Two kinds of stories are commonly told about the ontology of meaning in counselling psychology: Existentialism and postmodern constructivism. We also tell stories about the nature of the good life, which are often told from the hedonic instrumentalist perspective of positive psychology.

Upon scrutiny, however, these prominent stories about meaning and the good life in psychology face significant philosophical difficulties. By way of preview, (a) postmodern constructivist stories are self-contradictory, (b) the individualistic subjectivism of existentialist theories grate against widespread, phenomenologically-informed intuitions about the ontology of meaning in life, and (c) the hedonic instrumentalism of positive psychology affords a limited framework to explain the nature of ethical behaviour and human flourishing. The two stories of meaning (*a* and *b*) are nominalist/antirealist[1]: denying that meaning is anything more than the interpretations of individuals or constructions based on contingencies of history, power, and culture. Positive psychology has been criticized for its nonreflective stance toward its own cultural and philosophical assumptions, as well as its portrayal of relationships as merely a means to one's own personal happiness (e.g., Banicki, 2014; Fowers et al., 2017). In this present thesis, I argue that integrating the respective insights of Aristotle and Viktor Frankl about

[1] Hicks (2019) defines *antirealism* as the thesis that "it is impossible to speak meaningfully about an independently existing reality… [denying] that reason or any other method is a means of acquiring objective knowledge about that reality" (p. 6).

meaning and the good life will enable counselling psychologists to tell a new story about meaning and the human good that avoids the difficulties of nominalism/antirealism and hedonic instrumentalism. Before I describe this new story, I will quickly summarize the content and limitations of the stories psychologists commonly tell about meaning and the good life in counselling psychology.

1.1. Stories We Tell About Meaning in Life

A common story psychologists tell about meaning is individualistic and subjectivistic, coming from those who are influenced by the existential philosophical tradition. Such psychologists describe meaning as primarily a matter of one's freely chosen commitment(s) and authentic self-creations/interpretations. From this point of view, meaning is a matter of how authentically one attends to his or her own emotional desires and commits oneself to freely chosen goals, based on those desires (Aho, 2014; Yalom, 1980). Such existentialists advise us to create our own meaning in a defiant stance of authenticity against an otherwise absurd existence (e.g., Camus, 2016; Sartre, 2016; Taylor, 2016). In a cosmos otherwise devoid of meaning, a meaningful life is understood as a matter of being "true to oneself". Meaning is found within an individual's own subjectivity and will – the individual is the sole ultimate authority over his or her life.

Another, perhaps more prominent story about meaning in psychology is postmodern constructivism, which postulates that meaning is a psychosocial construction that emerges from the complex interplay of cultural, social, economic, and/or historical contingencies and power dynamics. Such contingencies and dynamics shape the narratives, identities, and power structures an individual grows up within, which consequently determine their lived experience(s) and sense of self. The old logocentrism of the Western intellectual tradition is considered *faux pas* – reality is no longer understood as being comprehensible by careful application of rational thought. *Rather than objective Reality, there is an indefinite array of possible subjective and/or perspectival realities*. Each person's reality is thus relative to his or her social location, group identity, and social power.

At the heart of postmodernity is the declaration that Reason, Meaning, and Truth (i.e., *Logos*) are defunct concepts which obscure the power dynamics at play in any given discourse (Hicks, 2019, p. 65-66). Where the totalizing, universal *Logos* of the West was, there is now a polyphony of different voices and perspectives embroiled in struggles for power. Thus, to understand the meaning(s) of an individual's lived experience, one must understand a person's respective power and privilege (or lack thereof), as well as the social and historical contingencies which intersect at an individual's social location. There are no epistemological foundations by which to judge one set of interpretations from another, but instead an infinite number of perspectives, each telling their own respective stories about meaning in life.

Both schools of thought can be traced back, in some capacity, to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, who is considered among the key figures of existentialism as well as the father of 20th century postmodern philosophy. Specifically, postmodern philosophers inherited and expanded Nietzsche's (e.g., 1990) critical and deconstructive attitude toward metaphysics and universal truth claims (see Hicks, 2019). As the possibility of a complete, universal description of reality was increasingly declared dead, postmodernity became described by Jean-Francois Lyotard as a philosophical school skeptical of *metanarratives*, or totalizing descriptions of reality (Honderich, 2005, p. 548).

According to a recent review by Bedi and colleagues (2016, p. 157-158), postmodern theories are the third-most popular theoretical orientation among counselling psychologists. However, Rainer Friedrich (2012) identifies two ways in which the postmodern rejection of metanarratives commits fatal self-refutations. First, prominent postmodern thinkers claimed the death of metanarratives, on the one hand, yet proposed or presumed their own metanarratives about the nature of reality, on the other. That is, by proclaiming the death of metanarrative, Truth, Reason, and Meaning, they violated the parameters of their own antirealist commitments. Second, one must inevitably abide by the Laws of

Logic[2] to critique the Laws of Logic, which is likewise self-contradictory. According to Friedrich (2012), these charges entail that postmodern metanarratives refute themselves because they presuppose Reason, Meaning, and Truth in their own meaning constructions. He explains that "the chief postmodern discourses practice the very thing they anathematize… the sweeping proclamation of the death of all metanarratives is itself a totalizing metanarrative" (p. 32, 40). Thus, at the heart of postmodernity is a decisively undercutting contradiction[3]. Despite such self-refutations, however, postmodern stories of meaning have become quite popular in contemporary counselling psychology (Bedi et al., 2016).

The challenges which face 20th century existentialist stories of meaning are more nuanced, but quite similar. These existentialists believe that totalizing descriptions of reality are to be replaced with perspectival descriptions of reality (Aho, 2014). Existentialists of a Sartrean bent agree with Nietzsche (1990) that meaning and value are fundamentally self-creations. As a person interprets him- or herself and the world around them, that person freely commits themselves to his or her created values and meanings (Sartre, 2016). In the absence of any external, universal meaning or morality, one is radically free to create and re-create one's own meanings and values. Meaning and a good life, then, is a matter of living authentically for oneself rather than conforming to the whims or norms of others. There are no external constraints from nature, culture, or God(s) that can determine how one should live, so we must thus look to ourselves to create meaning in our lives and seek to live authentically.

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[2] The laws of thought/logic are, *the law of identity* (*a* is *a*), *the law of noncontradiction* (something is not both *a* and *non-a* at the same time and in the same respect), and *the law of excluded middle* (something is either *a* or *non-a*) (Honderich, 2005, p. 507).

[3] It should be noted that, because postmodern philosophers reject the laws of logic, they would deny that logical inconsistencies refute their position. As Nietzsche (1990) writes, "The falseness of a judgement is not necessarily an objection to a judgement", for "the fictions of logic" hold no sway over [our] arguments (p. 35). The presuppositions of postmodern philosophers are irreconcilable with the idea that logical consistency and/or validity is a necessary condition for correct judgement. Given this conceptual irreconcilability, I make no attempt to bridge this gap.

However, this mainstream existential perspective grates against widespread phenomenological intuitions about how people experience meaning. Meaning is often experienced by individuals as something they discover (Frankl, 1969/2014), rather than something they invent (e.g., Sartre, 2016; Taylor, 2016). Many 20th century existentialists share similar metaphysical assumptions to Nietzsche (e.g., 1990), who helped inaugurate the widespread impression that Meaning, Reason, and Truth are defunct concepts (Aho, 2014, p. 25-28; Hicks, 2019, p. 56, 81-83). To the extent that a psychologist wishes to avoid such conclusions, he or she should consider alternative perspectives about the ontological status of meaning that favour some degree of realism over antirealism/nominalism. Counselling psychologists would thus benefit from having an alternative theoretical perspective about the ontological status of meaning which accommodates the intuition that meaning is, in some sense, real, rather than a post hoc self-creation.

1.2. Stories We Tell About the Good Life

Ever since the origins of applied psychology (e.g., clinical and counselling psychology), psychologists have been looked to as scientific authorities about people's inner lives and how they should live. As Leahey (2018) writes, "As the [scientific] study of the individual flourished… Psychology would be asked to provide help in making life's new decisions: counselling psychologists to help one choose a suitable job, clinical psychologists intervening when the pursuit of happiness went awry" (p. 417). Consequently, psychologists also have a propensity to tell stories about what constitutes a good human life. Since the turn of the 21st century, there has been tremendous scholarly and popular interest about the variables and causes of human happiness and well-being, inaugurated largely by the positive psychology movement. The landmark publication of the *Character Strengths and Virtues* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) was heralded by its authors as a manualized approach for classifying the character strengths and virtues that contribute to a flourishing human life.

Positive psychology focuses on "the study of positive subjective experiences, the study of positive individual traits, and the study of institutions that enable positive experiences and positive traits" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 5). Its research programmes are oriented toward understanding the traits and institutional variables which increase an individual's subjective happiness and life satisfaction. The overall aim of positive psychology is to balance psychology's traditional focus on psychological difficulties and disorders with matters of strengths and well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Martin Seligman – the widely recognized "father" of positive psychology – credits significant inspiration from virtue ethicists of antiquity in the formation of positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 18). While the progenitors of positive psychology claim their understanding of human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) took significant inspiration from Aristotle, many of the underlying presuppositions of mainstream positive psychology are incongruent with Aristotle's ethical philosophy (Fowers, 2008).

Contra Seligman and other early positive psychologists, Aristotle *did not* equate eudaimonia with subjective happiness. Rather, the philosopher believed that "the work of a human being is a certain [kind of] life… the human good becomes an activity of the soul in accord with virtue… but, in addition, in a complete life" (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, 1098a13-14, 16-17, 19). For Aristotle, flourishing was a matter of having lived a complete life characterized by the cultivation and embodiment of virtue. Progenitors of the early positive psychology movement, in contrast, tended to construe the good life in hedonic terms and character strengths as tools for individual fulfillment and subjective happiness. In the introductory paragraph of his book titled *Flow*, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) construes Aristotle as saying that "every other goal – health, beauty, money, or power – is valued only because we expect that it will make us happy (p. 1). Seligman's PERMA+ model of functioning similarly states that flourishing and well-being depends on (1) positive emotions, (2) engagement, or flow, (3) positive relationships, (4) meaning, and (5) a sense of accomplishment (see Madeson, n.d.). In both cases, well-being is implicitly defined in terms of positive

experiences and/or instrumental gain. However, such construals are based on a misunderstanding of what Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2022) meant by the term eudaimonia, which is often translated as "happiness". While Aristotle did think subjective happiness is an important aspect of flourishing – after all, someone in a state of unremitting misery is hardly flourishing – his vision of eudaimonia is more about *the virtuosity and completeness of a life well-lived*.

Two prominent assumptions underlie much of positive psychology (Fowers et al., 2017, p. 38, 42). The first is *individualism*: the idea that the fundamental unit of analysis in social science and philosophy is the individual, rather than groups. The second is *instrumentalism*: that all actions are properly analyzed in terms of means-ends relationships. For example, on such an analysis, *my* marriage to *my* wife could be construed as a means for increasing *my* individual happiness. With this assumption in place, there is no room for viewing shared goods – such as belonging, justice, or love – as intrinsically desirable for human beings. Rather, the good things in life are best understood in terms of their instrumental value to the individual. While Seligman's definition of *eudaimonia* is not purely hedonistic (Huta, 2015), the instrumentalist and individualist assumptions which pervade its descriptions of the good life are clothed in largely hedonic and subjectivistic language (see Fowers, 2008, 2012).

The individualistic and instrumentalist assumptions underlying positive psychology imply that the goods which foster individual happiness and authenticity are of highest value. The happier people are with their lives and relationships, the more they flourish. However, it is not obvious that subjective happiness deserves such status as the highest good. Measuring and classifying what people value says nothing about whether they *ought* to value those things. This is one example of how positive psychologists sometimes conflate descriptive "is" statements with prescriptive "ought" statements, a perennial challenge in moral philosophy[4]. The instrumentalist and individualist assumptions of positive

[4] Honderich (2005) summarizes the challenge the Is/Ought distinction poses in moral philosophy in the following way: "Moral philosophy has to give an account of how, if at all, we are legitimately to move from *is* to *ought*, from

psychology are hardly the stuff of a universal, impartial science of virtue. Instead, what is found is a theory of well-being that is culturally conditioned in a modern Western context, one that implicitly views virtues and character strengths as instrumental tools for securing greater individual happiness (Banicki, 2014; Fowers et al., 2017). While positive psychology did achieve its overall aim of making matters of character strengths and well-being a greater focus in psychology, the views of the good life which emerged from its early efforts were inevitably conditioned by the Western cultural context in which it originated.

To view strengths of character as a means to increase one's happiness is rooted in an Enlightenment-esque project to expand scientific explanations to provide an objective, impartial, and universal account of morality that was free of value-presumptions (Banicki, 2014; see also Hunter & Nedelisky, 2018). The early positive psychology movement was criticized for not reflectively examining its own predominantly Western philosophical and cultural assumptions, given that its individualist and instrumentalist assumptions of positive psychology are anything but "value-free". Positive psychology has generally understood happiness primarily in terms of subjective and hedonic well-being, rather than in terms of an Aristotelian understanding of eudaimonia. It has only been recently that virtue science has moved in a more Aristotelian direction, focusing on the overall quality of one's life (in terms of virtuosity) over subjective happiness (e.g., Fowers et al., 2021; see also Tippe, 2020).

1.3. Why We Tell Stories About Meaning and the Good Life

Humans tell stories about meaning and the good life because they are universally and existentially important to us. No matter how these stories get construed, people grasp for an intelligible meaning in their lives. Few people want to live a meaningless life, instead aspiring to live a life they can look back on with pride and satisfaction. Our stories about meaning and the good life are (a) the fabric

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describing how thangs do in fact stand, to expressing an urgent concern either that they be changed or that they be respected, preserved as they are" (p. 446).

by which our lives make sense to us, (b) how we assess the adequacy of how we live, and (c) how we understand the significance of the purposes and projects we commit ourselves to.

Scholars who tell the above stories should be commended for their contributions to how psychologists understand and discuss meaning and the good life. Existential psychology yields valuable insights about the importance of being authentic and bravely confronting the frailties and limitations of human existence. Postmodern theorists rightly emphasize the importance of comprehending an individual's intersectionality, social location, and historical context to properly understand their values and meaning constructions. Finally, positive psychologists are to be commended for bringing the positive aspects of life into focus in psychological discourse, theory, and research. Each of these stories certainly has valid insights to offer about the construction of meaning in an individual's life.

However, each of these stories also espouse antirealist perspectives on meaning and the good life: holding that meaning has no "ontologically thick" or mind-independent status. All these stories deny that meaning has any universalizable or common properties between individuals and/or groups. From the positive psychology perspective, what constitutes a good life is determined by whatever increases the happiness of the individual. The existentialists similarly claim that meaning is something a person projects onto an otherwise meaningless reality. From a postmodern perspective, there is no common ground from which one could define or describe a good human life or meaning. Each community and/or group has their own meaning systems which they agree to, but there is no foundation upon which meaning can be understood as "in common" between members of different or competing groups. In sum, none of these nominalist/antirealist stories treat meaning or the good life as something that can be described – in any capacity – in neutral or objective terms that are universal between persons or groups, preferring anti-realist perspectives instead.

1.4. Why Counselling Psychology Needs a New Story

The problem with antirealist stories of meaning and the good life is this: If we emphasize difference without searching for common ground, then meaning constructions and values risk being entirely subjective. If such a subjectivist, antirealist position were true, one wonders how psychologists can (at bottom) justify our own values and perspectives about meaning in life to those we serve. I think psychologists are implicitly committed to the belief that some values and meaning constructions are preferable, if not superior, to others. It is difficult to live consistently with postmodern claims about the death of metanarratives and value hierarchies. Would not counselling psychologists wish to say that the core values of our discipline – social justice, multiculturalism, and respect for diversity (Bedi et al., 2011; Bedi et al., 2016; CPA, 2009) – are *truly* preferable to injustice, monoculturalism, and discrimination? Likewise, are not vicious qualities like avarice, selfishness, or closed-mindedness less desirable than virtuous qualities like benevolence, compassion, and openness?

Even if one gives lip service to the deaths of knowledge, metanarrative, and hierarchies of value, that person's actions and/or statements ultimately reveal what he or she believes to be true and valuable in life. As Burton (2018) correctly observes, "To assert anything, [the postmodern thinker] must assume the very laws of thought that they aim to deny; doing so ends up in self-contradiction and the lack of significant speech… To affirm anything is to say something definite about it" (p. 168-169). If counselling psychologists were *consistently* postmodern, we would be faced with the dire situation of admitting that our proclamations about meaning and the good life are, ultimately, meaningless. On a postmodern way of thinking, the belief that any values are ultimately better or worse than others cannot be adequately justified without contradicting the declared deaths of Meaning, Reason, and Value (Burton, 2018; Friedrich, 2012; Hicks, 2019).

The fact that psychologists have been researching and writing about the human good and/or meaning presupposes that there is at least one reasonable, intelligible, and ethical way of understanding

these subjects, even if we do not agree about what that proper understanding might be. Overall, Canadian psychologists do agree on some common ethical principles (see Canadian Psychological Association, 2017, p. 4) and Canadian counselling psychologists are committed to promoting "the positive growth, well-being, and mental health of individuals, families, groups, and the broader community" (Canadian Psychological Association, 2009, para. 1). Given these value commitments, I believe it is preferable to have a framework of the human good which specifies what positive growth, well-being, and mental health looks *qua* human being, rather than regarding positive psychological functioning as merely a matter of self-interpretation and post-hoc constructions of meaning.

If meaning and values are only constructed posterior to experience, that puts us in the position of having to admit that there is no objective foundation for meaning and the human good. Without such a basis, meaning and the human good are matters of individual or communal interpretation, which threatens to undermine our ability to describe one mode of functioning as preferable to any other. This would also undermine our ability to say anything meaningful about the good and meaningful human life. After all, who is to say our perspective(s) about what constitutes well-being is preferable to any other? If we affirm that perspectives on meaning and a good human life are unconstrained by any objective reality outside of the subjective opinions and interpretations of an individual and/or group, we risk undermining our credibility in helping others find meaning and happiness in their day-to-day lives.

Why should psychologists care about our propensity to tell antirealist stories about human meaning and the good life? There are a few reasons worth considering. First, the public listens to what we say – society deems psychology a discipline worthy of respect. Because psychologists are committed to promoting the good of both individuals and society-at-large, our profession has been granted relative autonomy and self-regulatory latitude (Truscott & Crook, 2013). Thus, we should take the philosophical implications of the stories we tell the public about meaning and the good life seriously. Second, I think there is tremendous utility for psychologists to articulate the structure of a flourishing human life in a

more robust way than the antirealist theoretical alternatives described above – subjectivism, (strong) constructivism, and individualistic-hedonic-instrumentalism – can offer. Clarity about what it means for a human being to live well will refine our understanding how best to promote the good of individuals and society-at-large. Understanding the structure of meaning and the good human life (should such a structure exist) would clarify the *telos* of our day-to-day activities as counselling psychologists.

Counselling psychologists thus find themselves faced with a philosophical quagmire: the difficulty of reconciling postmodern death certificates with the value commitments of our discipline. This looming spectre of pure arbitrariness has led me to search for an alternative realist story of meaning and the good life which describes both as having an ontologically thick grounding. By *ontologically thick grounding*, I mean such a story meet two criteria: (1) describe meaning in a way that is universal and foundational across human beings without (2) bruising the subjectivity and particularity of meaning and well-being between human beings. *The foundations of meaning and human flourishing must remain viable amid human diversity*. Whatever story of meaning and the good life psychologists choose to tell, that story must accommodate the influence of individual, bottom-up affective processes and top-down effects of culture, systems, ecology, and sociohistorical contingencies. These bottom-up and top-down forces inevitably shape our own individual perceptions of reality and the way we describe our subjective experiences to each other, and thus must be accommodated in our stories of meaning and the good life.

My underlying concern driving this thesis is this: If the stories psychologists tell about meaning and the good life are antirealist in nature, then psychologists risk resting our assumed values on unstable philosophical foundations. Stories in counselling psychology which entail or imply subjectivism, individualistic instrumentalism, and/or strong social constructivism are vulnerable to the value-upheaval I have alluded to *because* they all embrace forms of meaning and value antirealism. I believe one should

be prepared to reflect upon, articulate, and (if necessary) defend or revise one's core values and assumptions.

My fundamental argument is that synthesizing the thoughts of Aristotle and Viktor Frankl can help psychologists articulate a realist story about the natural foundations of human meaning and flourishing. Instead of being condemned to embrace subjectivism and strong forms of social constructivism, putting Frankl and Aristotle's ideas in dialogue with (a) each other and (b) our current scientific understanding of human nature provides counselling psychologists with an alternative philosophical framework containing the necessary resources to ensure that we can still speak meaningfully, yet flexibly, about meaning and the good human life. This thesis represents my quest for the natural, universal commonalities about what it means to flourish *qua* human being. I hope you will join me in the search for a new foundation – a new story – about meaning and the good life in counselling psychology.

1.5. Thesis Overview

By the end of my thesis, I hope to have successfully addressed the following questions: "What is the structure of a good human life?" and "How are meaning and the good human life connected?"

In the second chapter of my thesis, I summarize how Viktor Frankl's logotherapy is both continuous and discontinuous with the core themes of the existential philosophical and psychotherapeutic tradition. Frankl, a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, wrote multiple essays, articles, and books about the innate human desire to find and fulfill meanings in life, believing this to be the most important of human pursuits. Contrary to some of his existentialist contemporaries, such as Jean Paul Sartre, Frankl thought the way we choose to live our lives has a greater significance and ontological status than that of a mental projection (Frankl, 1969/2014). He argued meaning was somehow part of the ontological fabric of reality, which grounded his conviction that "[one] may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be

changed" (Frankl, 1959/2006, p. 112). However, Frankl's theory of meaning has not been widely embraced by psychologists, perhaps because his theory does not fit well within a naturalist paradigm. I believe Frankl's central insights still have relevance for counselling psychologists today, provided they are tethered to a theoretical framework more explicitly wed to naturalistic assumptions. I close this chapter hinting at my belief that Aristotle's moral philosophy can help psychologists bridge this gap.

In chapter three, I elucidate an Aristotelian perspective on the good human life. Here I primarily draw from Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011), but also rely on insights contained in his *Politics* (ca. 350 B.C.E./2013). Aristotle's former work is the first definitive treatise on virtue ethics as a normative ethical philosophy, whereas the latter provides insight into his overall understanding of human nature. Consistent with Aristotle's views, I advance a two-step plausibility argument for the claims that (a) human beings share an evolved ultrasocial and rational nature and (b) our evolved nature gives rise to an emergent structure of human flourishing. As ultrasocial primates, goods such as justice and belonging are naturally conducive to human flourishing (Fowers, 2015). As rational creatures, goods such as knowledge and having a coherent life narrative are likewise important to human flourishing. This eudaimonic structure of human goods is largely open-ended, as these goods can be pursued and exemplified in myriad ways. Nevertheless, this structure is grounded in our shared human nature, and thus retains a recognizable degree of universality amongst human beings (Fowers, 2015, p. 317). Consistently with Aristotle, I argue in this chapter that our human nature shapes and constrains the goods and/or activities that are naturally good and meaningful for human beings.

My discussion of Frankl and Aristotle, respectively, will form the backdrop for my integrative proposal, which I discuss in chapter four. I argue these two thinkers can be fruitfully combined to tell a new realist story about human meaning and flourishing. I begin by identifying numerous independent parallels between the reflections of Frankl and Aristotle on the nature of meaning and the good human life, followed by advancing my integrative proposal. My central hope is that my proposal offers an

amenable way for counselling psychologists to understand meaning as having a "weighty" ontological status. In fact, my proposed theory does not preclude counselling psychologists from believing that meaning or humans have transcendent or spiritual dimensions. Such dexterity is positive insofar as it does not require psychologists to endorse any particular set of metaphysical or metaethical assumptions. Thus, psychologists are free to take this theory and (a) integrate it with their own beliefs and/or (b) use it as a framework to relate to the religious and/or spiritual beliefs of their clients.

In my final chapter, I articulate some practical benefits of my theoretical proposal. I first argue that the stated values of Canadian counselling psychology are consistent with a neo-Aristotelian perspective about the structure of a flourishing human life. Second, I will describe the striking ways a eudaimonic structure of natural human goods (see chapter 3) converges with the widespread recognition in psychology that human social behaviour can be categorized along two dimensions: agency and communion. A eudaimonic perspective clarifies how our agential and communal strivings (a) can be optimally arranged, (b) require wisdom and virtue to balance these strivings in concrete situations, and (c) should be balanced across time. Third, I will illustrate how the art of psychotherapy involves leveraging and developing our clients' capacities as ultrasocial and rational creatures. In short, human beings find healing and meaning through healthy connection with others, who help each other live more integrated and meaningful lives.

1.6. Methodology

The present thesis is a unique project drawing from disciplines of philosophy, neuroscience, evolutionary science, and other branches of psychological inquiry. Given the novelty of this project, I will summarize the methodology I employed in writing this thesis. This project began three years ago when I first identified similarities between Frankl's and Aristotle's views about meaning and the good life. To avoid identifying spurious parallels, I researched and wrote my respective chapters on Frankl and Aristotle independently, focusing narrowly on their theories and reflections on meaning and the good

life. To further mitigate against the risk of shallow reasoning, the insights I gained from investigating Frankl and Aristotle were integrated (chapter 4) during the latter stages of my research.

My starting point for this project was the chapter on Aristotle (chapter 3). I re-read the relevant sections in Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) and *Politics* (350 B.C.E./2013), specifically those pertaining to the core concepts of his virtue theory and his understanding of human nature. To ensure my exegetical comments were faithful to Aristotle's view of human nature and the structure of a good human life, I read articles and book chapters by philosophers and historians who specialize in Aristotle's life, writings, and philosophy. I followed this stage by reading peer-reviewed articles and book chapters relevant to putting Aristotle's views in dialogue with contemporary psychological science. There is much literature pertaining to this subject, although my argument invoking neuroevolutionary data to illustrate Aristotle's prescient understanding of human nature is (to the best of my knowledge) an original contribution to this area of scholarship.

Once I finished writing my chapter on Aristotle, I turned my attention to researching Viktor Frankl's existential therapeutic theory – logotherapy. To communicate the novelty of Frankl's theory, I contextualized Frankl's theory against the backdrop of 20th century existential philosophy. First, I reviewed Kevin Aho's (2014) book *Existentialism: An Introduction* to re-familiarize myself with the essentials of existential philosophy. Next, I reviewed Prochaska and Norcross' (2018) and Irvin Yalom's (1980) seminal textbooks to research how existential philosophy influenced existential psychotherapy. Once this was completed, I re-read Frankl's memoir, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 1959/2006), his theoretical introduction to logotherapy (Frankl, 1969/2014), and a posthumous collection of his published essays. I used these materials to outline the core features of Frank's logotherapy, identifying his respective continuities and discontinuities with his 20th century existentialist contemporaries.

After writing these chapters, I identified and tabulated six areas of common ground between Frankl and Aristotle's respective views on meaning and the good human life: (1) the highest human

good, (2) the ontological status of meaning, the inadequacy of pleasure and (4) wealth as the highest pursuits in life, as well as their common emphases on (5) particularism and (6) virtue, attentiveness, and potential. Having done my research on these figures separately, the contribution Aristotelian philosophy offers for Frankl's theory of meaning became clear: Aristotle offers a more amenable, naturalistic understanding of meaning and the human good to a contemporary audience of counselling psychologists, without closing off the possibility of a transcendent element to meaning and the good human life. Only after completing this fourth chapter did I write the introductory and concluding chapters of this thesis. Having summarized my methodological approach, I turn to my discussion of the first titular thinker in my thesis: Viktor Frankl.

Chapter 2. Existentialism and Logotherapy

My objectives for the second chapter of my thesis are threefold. First, to contextualize Frankl's logotherapy, I will outline the basics and history of mainstream 20th century existential philosophy. As a philosophical movement, existentialism is best understood by comprehending the historical context in which it emerged and the philosophies its progenitors reacted against. Second, I will summarize how existential philosophy influenced existential psychotherapy, with particular emphasis on the givens of existence as summarized by Irvin Yalom (1980). Third, I will demarcate how Frankl's account of meaning, freedom, and human nature contrasts with traditional existential philosophy and psychology.

2.1. The Basics and History of Existential Philosophy

Existentialism is a school of philosophical thought that grapples with the experience of existing as a finite human being. It is a diverse school of thought, aptly described in Viktor Frankl's (1969/2014) lament that, "…there are as many existentialisms as existentialists" (p. xiii). Principal thinkers within the existential tradition hail from a multitude of religious, non-religious, and cultural backgrounds. Each existentialist had diverse reasons for rejecting the scientific and rationalistic foundations of Modernity, and each provided his or her own unique analysis of human existence (Aho, 2014). The diversity within existential thought results in the absence of a shared systematic philosophical framework, which renders summarizing existentialism a difficult task. Considering such diversity, the only viable definitions of existentialism must be expressed in broad terms.

In this present section, I intend to summarize existential philosophy in a twofold manner. First, I will summarize the historical context in which existential philosophy emerged. Second, I will provide a brief overview of the key themes of existential thought and how these themes remain influential within existential psychology and psychotherapy.

2.1.1. Existentialism as a reaction against logos and modernity. Existentialism first emerged during the 19th century and proliferated throughout the early 20th century (Aho, 2014). Philosophers and

thinkers who are regarded as "existentialist" explore fundamental questions and concerns of human existence, such as: "Why am I here?", "What is the meaning of my life?", "Who should I be?", and "How should I live?". Despite their diversity, all existentialists eschew abstract rationalizing about such questions, displaying an incredulous attitude toward the idea that logical arguments or scientific knowledge could explain one's purpose in life – they found such rationalizing to be too detached from people's lived experience of the human condition (Aho, 2014). This attitude was embodied by Albert Camus (2016) in his famous essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, who writes, "Judging whether or not life is worth living amounts to the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest… comes afterwards" (p. 465). Existentialists thus answer such questions by attending to people's *felt sense of congruence or incongruence* as they encounter their existential finitude (Aho, 2014). Understanding why existential philosophy took the general form it did requires an appreciation of the philosophies its adherents were reacting against.

Aho (2014) believes the existentialists reacted against notions of *Logos*, or Reason, which can be traced back from some of the early Greek philosophers through to the Modern era. The preference given to objective rationality has its origins in the writings of the Greek philosopher Plato, particularly his allegory of the cave in his seminal work, *The Republic*. The allegory describes the need for a person to transcend the profane, material, changing world by contemplating eternal, unchanging truths via the use of one's reason. Socrates and Plato helped inaugurate an influential current of Greek philosophical thought which believed the human mind could, in principle, perceive and understand truth about reality-as-it-is (Kolak & Thompson, 2016, p. 74). Aristotle, who studied under Plato, later expanded the same basic project. While they differed in many important respects, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle – arguably the foundational figures of Western philosophy, as we know it – all affirmed some kind of "isomorphism", or continuity, between Reason and Being/Reality (Burton, 2018, p. 159). These

foundational philosophical figures believed the laws of thought/logic[5] were the fundamental metaphysical laws of reality. Because nothing that exists can violate the laws of logic, they are to be the shared source of authority in public discourse and argument.

Rene Descartes (1641/1996) helped inaugurate the Modern era of philosophy with his radically skeptical project to secure incorrigible epistemological foundations (i.e., beliefs impossible to doubt) from which a person could begin building his or her structure of knowledge. In the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Modernity is defined as that historical period of philosophy which "… starts out with Descartes's quest for a knowledge self-evident to reason and secured from all the demons of skeptical doubt" (Honderich, 2005, p. 617). Inheriting the assumption that Reason and Being are isomorphic/continuous, philosophers of the Enlightenment/Modern era thus sought epistemological methods – be they rationalist or empiricist – that would reveal the objective Truth about the world "as it really is" (see Hicks, 2019, p. 7-12). Popular tools in this quest were the scientific method and the rigorous mathematical modes of exploration within the emerging science of physics (Aho, 2014). It became popular to view the world as a mechanistic, natural system governed by rational laws of nature and deterministic principles of cause-and-effect. Any action or event in the world could ultimately be reduced to – and thereby fully explained by – natural laws and the motions of nature's most fundamental parts.

The Modern quest for certainty resulted in rationalism, empiricism, and varieties of skepticism becoming the default epistemological assumptions of most Enlightenment thinkers. Additionally, Enlightenment intellectuals tended to believe that, with sense perception and/or the light of reason as one's epistemological starting points, a rational subject could (in principle) embark on systematic quests of scientific and philosophical inquiry to provide an exhaustive description of reality. The ensuing

[5] The laws of thought/logic are, *the law of identity* (*a* is *a*), *the law of noncontradiction* (something is not both *a* and *non-a* at the same time and in the same respect), and *the law of excluded middle* (something is either *a* or *non-a*) (Honderich, 2005, p. 507).

philosophical projects of the Enlightenment era thus sought to secure epistemological methodologies and construct metaphilosophical systems that would provide exhaustive, consilient knowledge in the various domains of philosophy and science.

Existentialism emerged as part of a transition in philosophy hostile to Modernity's assumptions of rationalism, empiricism, individualism, positivism, and instrumentalism (Aho, 2014). As the existentialists eschewed so-called detached, objective rationality, it is no surprise that they are not a homogenous group of thinkers. For example, some existentialists nested their reflections within their existing religious beliefs, while others were ardently secular. Some would go as far as to say such diversity within its ranks disqualifies referring to existentialism as a unified "school of thought". However, despite the diversity of worldviews that thinkers within the existentialist tradition ascribe to, common ground does exist regarding their core contentions about reality and the human condition. Aho (2014, pp. xi-xii) notes seven core themes that characterize the gamut of existential philosophy, which I have adapted below:

Table 2.1. Seven Core Themes in Existential Thought (adapted from Aho, 2014, pp. xi-xii)

Existence Precedes Essence	Humans are not merely "*any thing*" – we have no essential essence which determines the choices we make. We continuously create and re-create our identity via our free choices, actions, and interpretations.
The Insider's Perspective	Existentialists eschew any reductionist description(s) of human persons or systematic metaphysical projects. Instead, they emphasize exploring human life in phenomenological – rather than empirical or rational – terms.
The Self as Tension	The tension of the self is between *facticity* and *transcendence*. That is, our contingent "factual" properties (physiology, sociohistorical context, etc.) constrain our choices and interpretations of reality. Nevertheless, existentialists affirm that humans can transcend these constraints by reinterpreting themselves and their circumstances. In doing so, a person creates an authentic self-identity.
The Anguish of Freedom	Given that a person has the freedom to make and re-make oneself, s/he alone is ultimately responsible for who s/he becomes and for the consequences of his or her actions.

Moods as Disclosive	Existentialists eschew "detached" rational thought as the best means for self-understanding, believing such thinking to ultimately lead to self-deception and inauthenticity. Rather, one's emotions and moods reveal his or her true, authentic desires and beliefs.
The Possibility of Authenticity	Rejecting conformity to social mores or traditional sources of authority, existentialists instead emphasize the need to be true to oneself (as revealed by our affective experience) in the face of an absurd existence and inevitable death.
Ethics and Responsibility	Ethical living is not about abstract values or utility calculations, but a matter of courageously and autonomously answering questions like, "Who do I want to be?", and then acting accordingly. Due to our terrible freedom, we are ultimately responsible for who we are, what we do, and how our actions impact others.

Due to their influence on the existential psychotherapeutic tradition, I will primarily focus on the non-religious streams of existential thought that are broadly "Sartrean" in character. According to Jean Paul Sartre (2016, p. 474), non-religious existentialists endorse the thesis that individuals construct their own realities via their free choices and our interpretations of oneself, others, and the world they inhabit. Subjective experience and historical context are thus prior to, and give shape to, any "objective" theorizing. Like many others in the postmodern era, most 20th century existentialist thinkers regarded metaphysics as a defunct area of philosophical study. Within this philosophical climate, Aho (2014) observes that many existentialists in the 20th century embraced perspectivism and phenomenology. *Perspectivism* was the view that so-called "Absolute truths" are so indelibly coloured by one's sociohistorical perspective as to render its pursuit futile. *Phenomenology*, on the other hand, can be thought of as a "a [philosophical] method that is concerned with describing '*how things are'*, that is, how things reveal themselves or appear to us in ordinary experience", rather than trying to describe what things are, in their essence (p. 29). Ultimately, 20th century existentialists adopted a radically subjective philosophical turn – focusing singularly on one's lived experience and felt meanings over abstract theorizing – which Aho (2014) calls "the Insider's Perspective" (see p. 19-33).

Non-religious 20th century existentialists – who constituted the mainstream of existential philosophy during this time – responded in a twofold manner to the proclaimed death of metaphysics and collapse of transcendent meaning: (1) to courageously face the absurdity of being and (2) to freely bear the responsibility of carving out an authentic existence for oneself, unconstrained by the illusory meanings and social roles of our sociohistorical context(s) (Aho, 2014; Camus, 2016; Sartre, 2016). In the Greek myth of Sisyphus, Sisyphus is condemned by the gods to roll a boulder up and down a mountain indefinitely for imparting divine knowledge to humankind. Richard Taylor (2016) asks "Does Sisyphus' life have any meaning?", answering his own question in this way:

> "… you realize there is no point to it all, that it really culminates in nothing, that each of these cycles, so filled with toil, is to be followed only by more of the same… [But] We noted that if Sisyphus had a keen and unappeasable desire to be doing just what he found himself doing, then, although his life would in no way be changed, it would nevertheless have a meaning for him…. It would be an irrational one… but a meaning nonetheless" (p. 955, 957).

In summary, 20th century existentialist philosophers widely believed meaning is not something rationally discovered in the "objective" world. Meaning is instead a self-creation from one's free choices in the face of an otherwise absurd existence.

2.2. Traditional Existential Psychotherapy

Existential philosophy has significantly influenced the world of psychotherapy. Like the non-religious 20th century existential philosophers, traditional existential psychotherapists/analysts chose to face the consequences of their antirealist philosophical commitments as squarely and honestly as possible. That is, despite the apparent absurdity of Being and the failure of science, religion, traditions, and metaphysics to provide sustainable and absolute Meaning, existentialists sought to find a new way forward to rehumanize existence in a disenchanted and de-objectivized world. Aho's (2014, p. xi-xii) seven core themes of existentialism (as noted previously) can be identified – implicitly or explicitly – in

the writings of existential psychotherapists and psychologists, who applied those insights to their therapeutic work. One particularly notices the themes of existence preceding essence, authenticity, the insider's perspective, moods as disclosive, and the anguish of freedom (e.g., Aho & Guignon, 2011; Schnieder et al., 2009; Yalom, 1980) as predominant within existential psychotherapy.

2.2.1. View of therapeutic techniques and diagnostic categories. Existential psychotherapy is best understood as a philosophy of therapy; its adherents do not focus on the development of theory-laden techniques to implement with clients (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018; Yalom, 1980). Expectedly, existential psychologists and psychotherapists reject deterministic and reductionistic descriptions of any individual person; eschewing abstracted, scientific descriptions of their clients via the administration of psychometric instruments or diagnostic categories. Alternatively, they emphasize the importance of contextuality, freedom, responsibility, choice, and authenticity in their psychotherapeutic work. In therapy, existential psychotherapists not only challenge their clients to become more authentic and honest with themselves, but also aspire for the same authenticity in their own lives, as well.

2.2.1.2. Contextual and phenomenological understanding of clients. Due to their rejection of positivism, and consistent with the themes of the insider's perspective and existence preceding essence, existential psychologists are incredulous about scientific inquiry yielding adequate descriptions of an individual person's existence (Aho, 2014). They bristle at notions of conceptualizing clients primarily in terms of diagnostic categories, personality dimensions, treating them with purely pharmaceutical interventions, or other "objective", manualized scientific methods. Rather, existential psychologists contend that clients are individuals in a perpetual state of becoming and, as such, need a contextualized and individualized approach to psychological care (e.g., Aho & Guignon, 2011; Yalom, 1980). They are wary of intervention models that objectify their clients, reducing them to dehumanized entities describable by discrete diagnostic categories, technique combinations that assume determinism, and biopharmaceutical interventions to reduce symptomology.

Moreover, existential psychotherapists do not regard psychopathology as a deviation from normal functioning. Rather, they view symptoms of depression and anxiety, for example, as a natural outgrowth from confronting the dismal conditions that are endemic to humanity's existence as creatures that are conscious of their finitude and limitations (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018, p. 82-84). Against the tendency to explain mental illness in medicalized terms, existential psychotherapists conceptualize clients first-and-foremost as self-conscious agents in the world; as creatures uniquely capable of making free choices amid the frailty, mortality, meaninglessness, and isolation of their own existence (Yalom, 1980). The existential psychotherapists do not deny the reality of mental illness or the utility of biopsychiatric categories and/or interventions. However, they reject the view that the *only* valid way to describe mental illness is in terms of diagnostic and medicalized categories. They believe that mental health professionals should instead focus on entering client's phenomenological world, or lived experience, "recognizing that the ways in which our experience of things – including mental illness – is shaped by the socio-historical situation into which we grow" (Aho, 2008, p. 244).

Clients must be understood and treated with an awareness of their social context, how they interpret themselves and their experience(s), and the ways in which they create and re-create themselves through their choices and self-interpretations (Aho, 2008, 2014; Aho & Guignon, 2011). During therapy, existential psychotherapists attempt to enter the subjective world of a given client in the here-and-now. Yalom (1980, p. 17) notes that, if there is one thing that all existential practitioners agree upon, it is that therapists must attempt to enter the world of the client via phenomenological means. To do so, the existential therapist attempts to create an environment of complete authenticity between themselves and the client. Prochaska and Norcross (2018) summarize the phenomenological method as follows:

> "The phenomenological method emphasizes the immediacy of experience, the perception of experience, the meaning of that experience, and observation with a minimum of a priori bases…

> The therapist attempts to experience the patient's unique construal of the world without imposing any theoretical or personal preconceptions onto the patient's experience… Once the therapist has gained a phenomenological understanding of the patient, the therapist chooses what techniques to follow" (p. 85).

2.2.1.3. Authenticity vs. conformism. As we have seen, existentialists reject reductionism and determinism, instead affirming authenticity and believing people create and re-create themselves as they experience, interpret, and make choices in the world (Aho, 2014). Prochaska & Norcross (2018, p. 80) observe that existentialists view an individual's personality, then, as a process of "exist[ing] in relation to three levels of our world". There is the *Umwelt*/being-in-nature – the biological and physical aspects of our world – the *mitwelt*/being-with-others – our social world – and the *eigenwelt*/being-for-oneself – the way in which we reflect on, interpret, and experience ourselves. To live authentically is to live for oneself amid the constraints our physical and social worlds may bestow upon us. Many existentialists follow Nietzsche's (1990) lead in castigating conformism to the mitwelt: the need to simply live within the "boxes" others have created and told us we should/should not live within. As far as the existentialists are concerned, conformism is a truncated form of existence and antithetical to authentic living. While we cannot function in our mitwelt without some degree of conformity to social roles, we cannot be so inauthentic that we hide behind norms of "average" functioning and lie to ourselves about who we *really* are (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018, p. 83-84).

2.2.2. Existential anxiety and the givens of existence. Rather than considering anxiety a psychological abnormality to be remedied, existential psychologists and psychotherapists understand anxiety and dread to be an intrinsic aspect, or default state, of human existence. Irvin Yalom (1980) gives a clear and seminal elucidation of four existential givens: Death, freedom/responsibility, isolation, and meaninglessness. Yalom refers to his paradigm as a form of existential psychodynamics (p. 8-11) in

which the core postulation is that "… anxiety emanates from the individual's confrontation with the ultimate concerns in existence" (p. 110).

2.2.2.1. Death. Regarding the existential given of death, Yalom (1980) defends two propositions: that (1) death awareness is always present within us – even if at a subconscious level – and exerts significant influence on our behaviour, and (2) "Death is a primordial source of anxiety and, as such, is the primary fount of all psychopathology" (p. 29). Regarding the latter, Yalom defines death anxiety as the fear of nonbeing – that one's life will eventually end, never to return and never to continue. What makes death anxiety so terrifying is that it is not fear of *some thing*, but fear of becoming *not any thing* (i.e., nonbeing). The primary way people combat death anxiety is by displacing it onto the mundane features of one's life, which are concrete and tangible in contrast to the fear of nonbeing (p. 43).

Citing Heidegger, Yalom (1980) believes that, instead of accepting our finitude and embracing the implications of our inevitable death, most people embrace conformism and/or other denial-based psychological defenses (e.g., sublimation) to suppress their awareness of death (p. 44)[6]. However, he argues it is precisely the awareness of the fragility of our own lives – particularly the transitoriness of our positive experiences – that are often what give life its feeling of significance. Becoming aware of our death can spur us to change ourselves for the better and to live more authentically[7]. One of the most poignant statements in Yalom's entire book is frequently reiterated in his initial chapter discussing death: "Although the physicality of death destroys man, the idea of death saves him" (p. 30). Confronting the idea of death can create an awareness of a person's being and inevitable nonbeing, which can serve as a catalyst to live authentically/for oneself.

[6] Two defense mechanisms against death anxiety originate in childhood, according to Yalom (1980, pp. 95-96). First is the belief in *personal invulnerability*: limitations and bad things happen to other people, but not me. Second is the belief in an *ultimate rescuer*: one's parents or (for religious individuals) in God. These are claimed to persist into adulthood and constitute the grounds of one's psychological defenses against death anxiety.

[7] See Yalom (1980, pp. 33-40) for case examples.

2.2.2.2. Freedom/responsibility. The second existential given that Yalom explores is freedom and responsibility. Following Sartre (1967), Yalom (1980) construes freedom primarily in terms of an individual being the sole and ultimate author of his or her life. This maps on to the theme of "the anguish of freedom", which Aho (2014, p. xi) describes as the most central idea in existential philosophy (p. 63). We are accountable to no one and no thing – there are no higher courts of appeal to turn to, no gods to judge us, no essential nature or biological mechanism(s) that determine who we are or who we should become. Each person is ultimately and solely responsible for his or her choice to either (a) become a true individual or (b) conform to pre-packaged social roles.

Yalom (1980) focuses on two types of freedom most relevant for the clinician and client: (1) the freedom to create and shape one's life and (2) the freedom to choose, desire, act, and (by implication) change oneself. The burden of our freedom and consequent responsibility for our lives is truly terrible – "heavy is the head that wears the crown", so it is said. According to Yalom's existential psychodynamic model, the burden of freedom is so heavy that we develop defense mechanisms to avoid making choices and suppress awareness of this fact of existence. Typically, we do so via displacement of responsibility on to our parents or religious authorities, as well as embracing compulsivity (a means of abdicating responsibility) or denying our responsibility (p. 222-230). Ultimately, however, these defense mechanisms – while not pathological in themselves – impede awareness and authentic living, as the human tendency to seek structure and stability amounts to conformism: the ultimate existential "sin".

The clinician's role, then, is to expand the client's awareness of his or her freedom and responsibility, guiding the client toward a more authentic mode of existence. The clinician explores the life narrative the client creates for him or herself. The process involves applying the phenomenological method (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018), seeking to understand and evoke the client's experiences and awareness of freedom in the here-and-now. Yalom (1980) contends the therapist's role is determining "what role a particular patient plays in his or her own dilemma, and find ways to communicate this

insight to the patient… the therapist concentrates upon increasing the patient's awareness that (like it or not) he or she is faced with a choice and cannot escape this freedom" (p. 232, 243).

At the heart of existential psychotherapy, then, is helping clients assume responsibility for their condition, believing this to be the key for helping them unlock new ways of being-in-the-world. Only when clients realize they are (at least partly) the creators of their undesirable situation(s) can they begin the task of un-creating and re-creating themselves. The therapist must increase the patient's awareness in such a way that they can be encouraged to take an active, authentic stance toward their own lives (Yalom, 1980, p. 242, 267). Consistent with the core existential theme of the self as tension (Aho, 2014, p. xi), Yalom (1980, p. 286-291) posits that, by increasing self-awareness, clients are said to transcend their contingencies and increase their capacity to make free choices.

2.2.2.3. Isolation. Awareness of our freedom and responsibility awakens us to another sobering fact of existence: our fundamental isolation from others. Yalom (1980, p. 355) conceptualizes our existential isolation as an "unbridgeable gulf" of subjectivity between self and other. In other words, there is no way in which I, in this body, can transcend the gap of my own experience to *truly* understand the subjective experience of another, in their body. Our experiences cannot be truly shared by another, no matter how much we explain our feelings or how connected we feel to them (Aho, 2014). There is no amount of empathy which could allow me to truly experience another person's suffering, joy, anger, et cetera. Our experiences are ultimately our own and cannot be fully shared with others.

Our existential isolation means we must all confront the givens of our existence alone. Yalom (1980, p. 353-362) observes how isolation is connected to the prior existential givens he discussed. First, awareness of one's finitude and inevitable death leads to the realization that one will ultimately die alone. No matter how strongly I commit myself to particular values, causes, or people, no one can die with me or for me – we all die alone. The awareness of how we create our perspectival worlds leads to the realization that there is no ultimate grounding for our values and meanings beyond our own

subjectivity. We are only accountable to ourselves. Related to our terrible freedom and responsibility, the process of becoming a more authentic individual also renders a person more isolated and differentiated from others. That is, as we create ourselves, we become more unique and different from those around us. Becoming authentic is the antithesis of conformism.

Nevertheless, while we might be ultimately isolated from others, we paradoxically do not have to suffer the grim realities of existence alone. Yalom (1980, p. 362) argues that truly authentic relationships with others become possible through confronting and accepting one's isolation from others. Yalom believes we can transcend our isolation through our relationships, sharing the burdens of existence with others. He writes that, "Each of us is alone in existence… [Yet] I believe that if we are able to acknowledge our isolated situations in existence and to confront them with resoluteness, we will be able to turn lovingly toward others" (p. 363). Yalom describes what Martin Buber called an *I/Thou* relationship: a kind of authentic relating to and full experiencing of another person. The alternative mode of relationships, to the dismay of existentialists, is what Buber called an I/It relationship: a way of relating only to another as if they were an object to be analyzed. This is said by existentialists to be a consequence of Modernist instrumentalism, relating to other persons as objects or things to be used or profited from rather than doing so authentically and with an open posture (Aho, 2014). While the intersubjective gap may be ultimately unbridgeable, attaining an I/Thou relationship is the closest we can come to overcoming our existential isolation (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). As we experience the fullness of another person, without holding back anything of who we are, we can satisfy the innate human need for relationship *without lying to ourselves* about our fundamental isolation.

2.2.2.4. Meaninglessness. The final existential given Yalom (1980) discusses is the meaninglessness of Being. Questions surrounding the meaning of life are important to people, and these are the questions with which existential thinkers are principally concerned. Yalom (1980, p. 422-423) believes each person must face the following dilemma, which he calls *the problem of meaning*. First,

humans require meaning in their lives to operate functionally in the world – a type of ethical "north star" to guide one's actions in the world. Second, despite this innate need for meaning, the existential understanding of freedom/responsibility entails that "the only true absolute is that there are no absolutes" (p. 423). Therefore, there are no ultimate values to which a person can turn to for guidance, so all valuations and meanings must come from within. This leads Yalom to pose the following question: "How does a being who needs meaning find meaning in a universe that has no meaning?" (p. 423).

Yalom (1980) believes the cosmos that humanity inhabits possesses no teleology, or purpose, whatsoever. There are no external forces or authorities which dictate what a person *should become* or what he or she *should do*. But the absence of cosmic Meaning does not trouble Yalom. Although he recognizes that religious structures help people feel that existence is meaningful, he argues the contemporary secular person can still find *terrestrial meaning* in the absence of *cosmic meaning*. The former refers to personal meanings in our own lives without reference to the latter: those supposed higher metaphysical sources of transcendent or absolute meaning in the world (p. 423-424). Yalom (1980) believes that an authentic personal commitment to values and meanings does not require either to be universalizable or derived from a source beyond one's own subjectivity and will. On his view, the only values and meanings which exist are those authentically chosen by individuals. Like Sartre (2016), Yalom (1980) believes meaning is found exclusively in an individual's subjectivity and will. Meaning is not found through abstract rationalizing, but by making freely chosen, nonrational value commitments that are to the benefit of self and others. These value commitments can be described as nonrational because Yalom believes are no universal, authoritative, rational foundations of meaning and morality. In this way, Yalom's attitude towards the ultimate meaninglessness of Being is the same as those of Camus (2016), Sartre (2016), and Taylor (2016).

By locating (terrestrial) meaning solely within an individual's subjectivity and will, Yalom (1980) expresses an affinity for Sartre's (1967) conception of a "leap of engagement". Kierkegaardian fideism is

the view that belief in God cannot be argued for, but requires a leap of faith that is not justifiable in rational terms. In the same way, Sartre's leap of engagement is an equally nonrational, yet justified commitment to one's chosen values and projects – despite the fact these commitments and projects possess no meaning beyond one's own subjective valuations. Hence, the leap of engagement amounts to committing oneself to a freely chosen terrestrial meaning for which he or she is solely responsible. While this terrestrial meaning can sustain an individual's existence, an individual should not lie to oneself that the cosmos – or one's own life – has a Meaning that is beyond one's own subjective, perspectival horizon. Nevertheless, we can create meaning in our lives by nonrational acts of will, behaving in accordance with our wishes and committing ourselves to the things we value *simply because we value them* – no further justification required.

2.2.3. Summary of existential psychotherapy. For existential psychotherapists, the foundation of psychopathology is lying to ourselves about our existential situation, as such self-deception allows us to avoid confronting the givens of human existence (Prochaska and Norcross, 2018, p. 82). From this perspective, people lie to themselves to protect themselves against confronting the inherent conditions of existing. Over time, this lying results in telling ourselves myths that we are the victims of external forces and lack the capacity to make choices that alter our state of being. *We look to others to ground our meaning, when the reality is that meaning is something created, rather than something discovered*. While this may be comforting, it is a lie that is ultimately detrimental to becoming an authentic individual (Aho, 2014). The existential givens trigger feelings of anxiety, which activates unconscious defense mechanisms that protect us from existential dread (Yalom, 1980). Such self-deception leads one to erect defense mechanisms that, while helpful in the short-term, are not sustainable in the long-term.

For existential psychotherapists, each of these existential givens are not mutually exclusive, as confronting one existential given (particularly our inevitable death) will entail confronting the others. As existentially isolated creatures, we are condemned to create meaning in our lives, for all human beings

are meaning-making creatures (Aho, 2014). To be the author of one's own life means one cannot look to others to justify how one lives, which amounts to a warning against conformism. Conformism is the antithesis of authenticity, but the comfort of conformism and suppressing awareness of these existential givens draws us to refrain from carving our own path. People fail to exert control over their lives, opening themselves to feeling victimized by their circumstances and controlled by others. In other words, when we fail to confront the givens of existence, we fail to realize our freedom. Non-religious existentialists believe that, due to the meaninglessness of Being, the only source of salvation is self-creation: we must confront the grim realities of Being and make our own way. Rather than suppressing our awareness of these existential givens, we must honestly confront and accept them, for the key to creating self-sustaining meaning is a leap of engagement in an ultimately meaningless cosmos.

2.3. Logotherapy: Viktor Frankl's Existential Psychotherapy

Viktor Frankl shared many common points of theoretical and clinical emphasis with the existential thinkers of his time, particularly those surrounding the themes of freedom/responsibility. However, in contrast to most other existentialists, Frankl (1959/2006, 1969/2014) believed that meaning was not a mere psychological projection onto reality. Rather, he seems to have believed that life presents people with meanings to fulfill that are, at least partially, ontologically real in a sense that extends beyond an individual's own subjectivity and will. That is, Frankl did not think that meanings were creations of our free choices in interpretations, but that we *discover* potential meanings and can choose to either fulfill them or leave them unfulfilled. He strongly believed that meaning was the most important thing humans desire in life and that life was never without a potential meaning – even in the worst of circumstances. One of the most remarkable things about logotherapy is the circumstances in which its founder's beliefs were forged and tested: during his experience(s) as a prisoner in the Nazi concentration camps. Knowing the context within which Frankl's reflections on finding meaning in one's life were birthed gives his theory a sense of enduring significance and credibility.

2.3.1. Life in the concentration camps. On reading Frankl's memoir, *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959/2006), one will encounter the grim realities of life in the concentration camps. Many died from horrible diseases and malnutrition, which were exacerbated by the unforgiving work standards in the camps (p. 28, 34-35). Some of Frankl's fellow prisoners became Capos, acting as informants for the camp guards in exchange for special privileges, such as additional food. These Capos were known to beat the other prisoners, sometimes worse than even the SS guards did (p. 4). The remaining prisoners lost touch with previously cherished moral values and lost all sentimentality (p. 33). They began to behave, as Frankl puts it, like animals in their respective efforts to survive.

Upon arriving at Auschwitz, an original manuscript of a book Frankl was writing – the *Doctor and the Soul* – was destroyed beyond salvage in the disinfection chambers (Batthyány, 2010, p. 26, footnote 3). Amid the conditions of his internment, Frankl (1959/2006) chose to conduct careful observations of the prisoners' behaviour. He became determined to survive the camps so that he might one day finish his lost manuscript and give lectures about the psychology of life inside a concentration camp (p. 73). After contracting typhus close to the end of his imprisonment, Frankl willed himself to continue living by scribbling down notes for his book, using whatever materials he could find. In this way, Frankl found a source of life-sustaining meaning. Another significant source of motivation for him was to see his wife once again[8]. In one march to a work site, Frankl writes that he felt profoundly comforted by thinking of the image of his wife. The mere thought of seeing her once again gave Frankl another reason to continue living, despite the horrors of his circumstances (p. 37).

Looking back on his experiences in the concentration camps, Frankl (1959/2006) concluded that the one thing that survivors of the camps had in common was this: Every one of them found a meaning

[8] Unbeknownst to Frankl at the time, his wife and numerous family members had already been killed in the camps (Batthyány, 2010, p. 28). Nevertheless, it was the thought of surviving *for his wife* that motivated him to persevere, despite the horrific conditions around him.

to sustain them, a reason to feel hopeful that the future would be better than their current circumstances. Disclosing this revelation, Frankl cited a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche which he was quite fond of: “He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how” (as cited in Frankl, 1959/2006, p. 76). Frankl also found purpose by beginning to focus his energies toward helping those around him. He wrote a card that he would hand out to fellow prisoners, which read, “There is nothing in the world that empowers a human being to overcome external difficulties or internal hardships so much as the awareness that one has a task in life” (Batthyány, 2010, p. 27). Frankl believed that finding a meaning to fulfill was the only thing that could sustain his fellow prisoners to continue living, despite the decay of their bodies and the horrifying conditions of their internment.

2.3.2. The three pillars of logotherapy. Logotherapy is unique within the larger family of existential therapies, particularly in its emphasis on helping patients *discover* meaning in their lives. Frankl (1969/2014) believed that people experience themselves not as creating meaning, but as finding or discovering meaning in their lives. Logotherapy, then, was developed as a therapeutic approach that is oriented towards helping clients discover meaning(s) that exists in their lives, which has yet gone unrecognized (Frankl, 1959/2006, p. 98-99). As Frankl himself writes, “But we still have to free [clients] from their ontological blindness, we still have to make the meaning of being shine forth. This is the step taken by logotherapy… in that it is not only concerned with ontos, or being, but also with logos, or meaning” (p. xvii-xviii). For Frankl, logotherapy is literally helping clients find healing through meaning (Frankl, 2010e, p. 125).

In his brief book outlining the theoretical foundations of logotherapy, Frankl (1969/2014) states that logotherapy rests upon three pillars, or central postulations. These postulates are (1) freedom of the will, (2) the will to meaning, and (3) the meaning of life. In what follows, I will first describe each of these core postulations of logotherapy as outlined by Frankl (1969/2014), followed by an exploration of the discontinuities between his theory and the mainstream emphases of wider existential thought.

2.3.2.1. Freedom of the will. Like other existential thinkers, Frankl held to a very strong view of libertarian freedom – the thesis that a person's choices are not determined by prior causal factors, that in some sense a person is the ultimate originator of one's actions. Frankl is careful to note that freedom of the will does not entail freedom from influence by external factors. Rather, reflecting the theme of self as tension between facticity and transcendence (Aho, 2014), Frankl (1969/2014) states that, despite being influenced by unchosen biological, psychological, and sociological contingencies, humans nevertheless always retain the capacity to choose the stance they take toward their circumstances (p. 4-5). He called this capacity self-transcendence, or self-detachment, and it was this capacity that Frankl believed allowed people to be able to find potential meaning(s) in their lives, even in the face of the worst possible suffering (Frankl, 1959/2006). What makes this claim profound rather than pedantic is that Frankl himself experienced horrific suffering, and yet remained steadfast in this belief.

For Frankl (1969/2014), human beings cannot be reduced to explanations at biological and psychological levels of analysis, so there must be another, higher dimension required to explain the constitution of human beings. Frankl did not deny the reality of biological and psychological aspects of human beings, but he was strongly motivated to avoid reductionism, which he believed amounted to a "mask for nihilism" (1969/2014, p. 8; see also Frankl, 2010f, p. 139, 2010g, p. 165). He lamented that biologists, neurologists, and other scientific specialists made proclamations about the nature of humankind, but only within the narrow horizons and frameworks of their respective disciplines.

To avoid subjecting human persons to the reductionisms of specialized academic disciplines, Frankl (1969/2014) posited that human beings had a spiritual, or noögenic dimension which was not amenable to reductionistic description or explanation. It is in this dimension that one finds explanations for man's sense of meaning, choice, and the capacity for self-transcendence. In an admittedly mysterious way, however, Frankl maintained that the biological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of a person were all equally real elements of a single person that somehow cohered into a unified whole

(Batthány, 2010, p. 32; Frankl, 1969/2014, p. 9-12). Frankl did not deny the legitimacy of neurobiological explanations for behaviour. His point was simply that such explanations omitted the spiritual dimension of human beings, which is where meaning(s) and value(s) are to be found (Frankl 2010f, p. 139).

The following example will be helpful to illustrate Frankl's dimensional anthropology. If a neuroscientist reduces qualitative psychological phenomena as "nothing but" neurobiological events, then that scientist does not regard phenomenological experience as scientifically relevant for explaining human behaviour and cognition[9]. Such a professional will not believe attending to a client's interpretations of events to be particularly important for treatment. Rather, he or she might opt for pharmacological or behavioural interventions to restore balanced brain chemistries. This example is illustrative of Frankl's comment, "Meaning is missing in the world described by many a science" (Frankl, 2010g, p. 168). Exploring patients' neurophysiology tells you nothing about the fine-grained details of their qualitative experience, aspirations, and the meaning(s) they ascribe to life and/or their circumstance(s). Frankl would have certainly argued against such an eliminativist view. Each level of human existence – biological, psychological, and noölogical – is indeed real, according to Frankl. The spiritual dimension, specifically, is an equally real "higher level" of analysis which transcends the descriptions available to specialized and narrow scientific perspectives on human beings.

One of the motivating factors behind Frankl's dimensional anthropology was to avoid charges of determinism and reductionism when explaining human psychology and behaviour. He considered such views of human beings to not only be incorrect, but also dangerous, because they rob the person of a sense of ownership and an internal locus of responsibility for one's own life and actions. In contrast, Frankl (1959/2006) believed that there was one freedom that was always available to a person: "… not a freedom from conditions, but… freedom to take a stand toward the conditions" (p. 130). Like Yalom

[9] Such a strong version of psychophysical reductionism is referred to by philosophers of mind as eliminative materialism, or simply eliminativism (Honderich, 2005, p. 238).

(1980), Frankl (1969/2014) believed freedom and responsibility were two sides of the same coin, and it was his conviction that freedom without responsibility "threatens to denigrate into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibleness" (p. 31). However, where Frankl again differs from many other 20th century existentialists is in the ontological status that he gives meaning, which he aptly discusses in his description of the human will to meaning.

2.3.2.2. The will to meaning. Frankl contrasted his perspective of humankind's foundational motivation against two other mainstream psychological theories of his day: Freudian psychoanalysis and the Adlerian focus on self-actualization, or status-striving. In his book outlining the theoretical foundations of logotherapy, he names the foundational motivational principles of each of these schools thus: the Will to Pleasure (Freud), the Will to Power (Adler), and the Will to Meaning (Logotherapy).

Freud's psychoanalytic views were deterministic and reductive. He believed that all human action is causally determined by unconscious psychological drives (sexual and aggressive ones, fundamentally) that demand satisfaction and, as one becomes socialized, are displaced into socially acceptable forms of behaviour (Leahey, 2018, p. 258-259). Frankl takes issue with this Freudian principle because he believed that people were not fundamentally seeking desire gratification in life, but instead seek *a reason to be happy at all*. That is, people seek a purpose in life that brings them happiness as a by-product of pursuing it. Happiness, Frankl (1969/2014) writes, "is, and must remain, an effect, more specifically, of attaining a goal" (p. 19). If one makes gratification of pleasure drives his or her primary goal in life, Frankl believed this would ultimately prove elusive. If one makes pleasure his or her primary aim, that person will find it continues to evade his or her grasp. Pleasurable feelings are too ephemeral, temporary, and elusive to provide one's existence with a "why" to justify the "how" of one's existence (Frankl, 1959/2006).

Frankl (1969/2014) also found the Adlerian view of self-actualization inadequate as the ultimate human good. Just as he characterized Freud's view as postulating a "pleasure principle", he characterized Adler's view as being animated by "the status drive" or "power principle". However, Frankl thought that living according to one's status drive was also inadequate to provide a sustaining sense of meaning. In particular, he thought that if one made power or status his or her primary aim in life, he or she would ultimately be dismissed by others as a "status seeker" (p. 20). Just like pleasure, if one overemphasizes the pursuit of power or status they will find it evades his or her grasp. Frankl thus reasoned that status is likewise insufficient be the ultimate end that people seek in life.

In contrast to the Freudian Will to Pleasure and the Adlerian Will to Power, Frankl placed the desire for meaning as the ultimate end that people pursue in life. Frankl wrote that (1959/2006), "… one of the basic tenets of logotherapy [is] that man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life" (p. 113). Frankl called this main concern of humankind *the will to meaning*. Frankl believed that it is the finding and fulfilling of meanings in one's life that brings true fulfillment – a complete and satisfying life. It is important to note here that Frankl believed that finding meaning in life is so important for human beings that it is their highest good. He describes meaning as the end to which there is none greater – it is something people pursue for its own sake, perceived as having intrinsic value. In other words, Frankl (1969/2014) believed all other activities are choiceworthy insofar as they contribute to a person's finding and fulfilling meaning(s) in his or her life.

2.3.2.3. The meaning of life. Frankl (2010j) was careful to emphasize that answering the question of life's ultimate meaning is, in the final analysis, inscrutable and perhaps admits of no rational answer (p. 190). In concert with other existentialists, Frankl believed that questions of life's ultimate meaning were ultimately beyond human comprehension. Across the corpus of writings I surveyed, Frankl appears to have oscillated between agnosticism and hopefulness that questions of ultimate meaning can be answered throughout his life. However, he ultimately seems to have believed there was

a transcendent, objective foundation for Meaning (see Reitinger, 2015). In contrast to many of his secular existential contemporaries, Frankl believed that because meaning is (somehow) part of the fabric of reality, the existential burden of one's life is not to confront life's absurdity, or meaninglessness. Rather, he claimed that human beings' existential burden was to "bear his [or her] incapacity to grasp [life's] unconditional meaningfulness in rational terms. *Logos* is deeper than logic" (Frankl, 1959/2006, p. 118). He believed that human life had an unconditional meaningfulness that was not purely graspable in rational terms and that persons possess an intrinsic dignity and infinite value that should be treasured and nurtured.

Frankl (1969/2014) did not consider logotherapy's aim to help patients discover meaning in their lives as a matter of the therapist "telling" the patient what he or she should do or value. Instead, he believed logotherapy was ultimately about helping clients see that their life circumstances always have a potential meaning, and that the therapist is to guide and (if necessary) confront patients with the possibility of meaning in life. While he was open to the relevance of religion and theology for explaining both ultimate and particular meaning (Reitinger, 2015), Frankl (1969/2014) believed it was the particular meanings found in the concrete situations of a person's life that were of greatest interest – both philosophically and psychotherapeutically.

2.3.3. Frankl's discontinuities with mainstream 20th century existentialism. Upon superficial examination, one can see many parallels between Frankl's thought and other existentialists of his time. For example, one can find a strong emphasis on freedom and responsibility and the phenomenological method (Aho, 2014; Prochaska & Norcross, 2018; Yalom, 1980). However, one can also find discontinuities between Frankl's thoughts and those of his existential contemporaries. When compared to more Sartrean, secular existential thinkers of his time, Frankl held iconoclastic views regarding the ontology of human beings, that people had intrinsic dignity and infinite value. His most iconoclastic position was his broadly realist view of meaning, which he regarded as having an ontological basis that

extended beyond an individual's subjectivity and interpretations. Instead, he believed that a person's subjectively experiences ontologically real meanings in the world, rather than creating those meanings purely "within themselves". These discontinuities are worth noting as a historical curiosity. However, as I discuss in the final chapter of my thesis, Frankl's discontinuities with mainstream existentialism also afford inroads for counselling psychologists to consider alternative ways of understanding and discussing human meaning and flourishing.

2.3.3.1 Dimensional, not relational, ontology. Frankl's conception of freedom is connected to his philosophical anthropology. Like other existentialists, he eschews reductionistic thinking about human beings. Frankl (2010b, 2010e, 2010f) claimed human behaviour and thought was not reducible to psychosexual drives, biological explanations, or social conditioning, elsewhere referring to these explanatory models of behaviour as mechanistic or rat models of human beings (Frankl, 1969/2014). Instead, he argues, freedom of the will is part of that spiritual dimension of humankind that transcends physicality (Frankl, 1959/2006, 1969/2014). Thus, for Frankl, humankind is characterized as a unified entity who has three dimensions to their being: the biological, psychological, and noölogical/spiritual dimensions. None of these dimensions are reducible to each other: all three are equally real and concomitantly constitutive of all human beings.

Most existentialists are willing to posit freedom of the will and the irreducible subjectivity of individuals while remaining resolutely committed to the monistic notions that (1) a person is identical to his or her body and (2) human consciousness and selfhood are nothing but relational properties, which (3) emerge from the ongoing process the body's engagement with and interpretation of the world around him or her (Aho, 2014). In contrast, Frankl posited his dimensional anthropology as a better way to make sense of the human capacities for free will and self-transcendence (Frankl 1969/2014). The basic tenet behind dimensional anthropology is, if one conducts a narrow inquiry into the nature of human beings, that inquiry will yield conclusions that are both (a) in apparent contradiction with notions

of man as a meaning-seeking creature and (b) may eliminate the qualitative experience of meaning altogether. Frankl thus seems to have endorsed a substantial philosophical anthropology, which does not fit well with the more mainstream existential claim that existence precedes essence (see Reitinger, 2015, p. 346-347).

By claiming that a proper understanding of human beings required comprehending a person as having three dimensions to their being – a biological, psychological, and nöetic/spiritual levels – Frankl parts company with the widespread existential theme of existence preceding essence. Reitinger (2015) notes that most existentialists, in contrast to Frankl, opt for a relational, rather than substantial, ontology in their account of personhood. These existentialists generally agree that people's identities are constituted by their relations with and interpretations of themselves, other objects, or people. As Sartre (2016) aptly puts it, "… man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself" (p. 475). A relational ontology undergirds the theme of existence preceding essence, leading to the thesis that "my identity" is ultimately a self-creation based on my free choices and commitments, despite the undeniable influence by sociohistorical contingencies (Aho, 2014). However, it seems that Frankl believed his substantialist, dimensional view of human persons enabled him to consistently allow for the possibility that meaning is not created by individuals, but discovered by them. Discovery implies that meaning is somehow part of the fabric of reality, not reducible to any more basic element of reality (e.g., biology or psychosexual drives).

According to Batthyány (2010, p. 18-24), it was in Frankl's early psychiatric career, working with those who were depressed, suicidal, and had irremediable physical conditions, that his views about the spiritual resources of human beings became solidified. Frankl observed that recruiting the "spiritual resources" of patients could meaningfully impact outcomes of psychotherapy. He observed that patients under his care who were encouraged to take a different mental or spiritual stance toward their conditions could improve their lives dramatically — their life philosophies could be altered so their

perceptions and attitudes toward their illnesses could also be altered. Batthyány (2010) writes that Frankl believed if people could transcend their circumstances and find meaning despite them, then they in effect could re-shape the course of their diagnoses. Seeing the impact that this self-transcendence had for his patients, Frankl (1969/2014) came to believe – in contrast to the Freudians and behaviorists of his time – that a person's striving to find meaning in life was fundamentally a spiritual and agential phenomenon, not reducible to mere subjective projection (existential), unconscious psychological forces (psychodynamic), or conditioning (behaviorism).

2.3.3.2. Meaning as discovered, not created. As we have observed above, most existentialists do not view meaning as being part of the fabric of "objective" reality. Rather, most existentialists deny the metaphysical and epistemological resources of bygone premodern and modern philosophical systems, which posited that it was possible to secure knowledge of reality "as it really is". Rather, there is only knowledge of reality as it is lived – our ongoing participation in and interpretation of the world, of which we are inextricably bound within (e.g., Sartre, 2016; Taylor, 2016; Yalom, 1980). Most 20th century existentialists emphasize the power of interpreting one's circumstances anew as an avenue for finding purpose and meaning in life (e.g., Camus, 2016; Sartre, 2016). That is, meanings are constructed by individuals within their historical, social, and individual contexts. Although we can transcend and take a stand against an absurd existence, we can never fully extricate ourselves from our limited epistemological and historical horizons (Aho, 2014). Thus, we are to confront and accept the absurdity of Being and – despite this – make a free, nonrational commitment to authenticity as we interpret and reinterpret ourselves and our circumstances.

In contrast to the mainstream existential view outlined above, Frankl (1969/2014) claimed the subjectivity of experience did not necessitate the denial of an objective world, for (presumably) there is an objective world that a person is interacting with and experiencing. He also believed, based on phenomenological analyses of various patient cases, that meaning is (at the very least) *experienced* as

something that exists "out there" to be discovered. Frankl proposed, then, the following consideration. Because the subjectivity of one's own internal, first-person experience does not necessitate denying the existence of an objective, third-person world, Frankl believed the same may be true for meaning. That is, just as people subjectively experience an objective world around them, it is possible the subjectivity of meaning does not entail the absence of its ontological status in the "out there" reality. Frankl calls this tension between affirming subjectivity and objectivity *trans-subjectivity* (p. 33, 41).

Frankl (1959/2006, 1969/2014) believed the self-transcending stance people can take toward their circumstances was not a matter of merely choosing a different interpretation of one's circumstances. He did not advocate for a subjectivist or historicist view of meaning (Aho, 2014), nor did he view meaning as a mere projection upon an otherwise meaningless existence (see Camus, 2016; Sartre, 2016; Taylor, 2016; Yalom, 1980). Rather, he was willing to grant a mind-independent ontological status to meaning. Speaking directly against Sartre's view of meaning as a self-creation, Frankl writes:

> "What is *seen through* the perspective, however subjective the perspective may be, is the objective world… This trans-subjectiveness has really been presupposed all along whenever we spoke of self-transcendence. Human beings are transcending themselves toward meanings which are something other than themselves, which are more than mere expressions of their selves, more than mere projections of these selves. Meanings are discovered but not invented" (Frankl, 1969/2014, p. 41, italics in original).

The meanings people discover, says Frankl (1969/2014), are both ultimately grounded and found in something or someone apart from, or other than, oneself (see Reitinger, 2015, for further reading). One example that Frankl gives in this regard is the meaning that is found in relationships, particularly love relationships. He was incredulous about attempts to explain the felt sense of meaning a person finds in a love relationship as either (a) reducible to something more simple or basic, such as

psychosexual drives, or (b) something that person merely projected onto the other person or situation. Rather, Frankl wants to say, the meaning found in loving another person is real and ontologically "weightier" than any subjectivist, historicist, or reductionist account can offer. Also, based on his phenomenological analysis of patients, he came to find that they described meaning as something found and discovered, which was only solidified in his experiences in the Nazi camps (Frankl, 1959/2006). Thus, even if meaning were a mere projection, Frankl's (1969/2014, p. 48) own research and experience led him to think that people phenomenologically experience themselves as discovering meaning(s) in their lives, rather than inventing it/them.

2.4. Chapter Summary

The notion that meaning is discovered, rather than invented, is one of Frankl's most controversial claims. Counselling psychologists, in contrast, typically opt for more postmodern theoretical perspectives (Bedi et al., 2016), which entail that meaning is not an "objective", or "out there", phenomenon. There are no objective phenomena immediately accessible to agents, only our limited subjective horizons and interpretations, which are ultimately mere social-linguistic constructions and/or products of our sociohistorical context(s) (see Hicks, 2019). The existentialists place greater emphasis on locating meaning within the subjectivity and will of the individual. Because there is no "ultimate meaning', an authentic mode of existence is to live for one's freely chosen values and meanings that we create for ourselves (e.g., Aho, 2014; Sartre, 2016; Yalom, 1980).

Such statements run the risk of self-referential incoherence. For the postmodern thinker, is the belief that, "truth claims about the world are ultimately social-linguistic constructions, grounded in past historical contingencies and power dynamics" itself a sociohistorical and/or social-linguistic construction? Or, for the existentialist, is the belief that, "there are no universal descriptions of reality, only perspectival ones" itself a perspectival description or a universal one? Perhaps now is an opportune time to explore alternative stories of meaning and value that are (1) philosophically sophisticated, (2)

not self-refuting, and (3) consistent with counselling psychology's central values of openness, commitment to diversity, and multiculturalism (see Bedi et al., 2011; Bedi et al., 2016).

In the larger context of my thesis, my summary of Frankl's views will be indispensable for understanding how his insights – which I believe have some merit – might be integrated with a neo-Aristotelian natural ethic to construct a robust, scientifically-informed perspective on the human good and meaning. In the context of the present chapter, however, contrasting Frankl with other existential thinkers will serve the modest purpose of introducing my readers to his theory of meaning's central place in human life. This introduction will set the stage for my attempts to integrate his views with neo-Aristotelian ethical philosophy. In the following chapter, I will provide a thorough introduction to neo-Aristotelian thought, arguing that such a perspective on human flourishing is consistent with psychological science and is worthy of serious consideration by counselling psychologists.

Chapter 3. Aristotle and The Good Human Life: A Natural Account of Human Flourishing

Aristotle, a Greek philosopher who lived during the 4th Century B.C.E (384-322), was a true intellectual giant. His writings have exerted an enduring influence on the history of Western thought that persists to this day (Kolak & Thompson, 2016, p. 437-439). On the breadth of the Greek philosopher's intellectual contributions, Aristotle scholar Jonathan Barnes writes, "Choose a field of research, Aristotle laboured in it; pick an area of human endeavour, and Aristotle discoursed upon it. His range is astonishing" (Barnes, 2000, p. 3; as cited in Haworth, 2012, p. 38). Summarizing Aristotle's impact on the Western intellectual tradition, Carnes Lord writes: "It was in and through the elaboration of a philosophic-scientific approach to natural and human phenomena by the ancient Greeks – *above all, by Plato and Aristotle* – that the intellectual categories of the Western tradition took shape" (in Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013, p. viii, emphasis added).

Among Aristotle's greatest intellectual contributions were his penetrating insights about ethics and the good human life. While Aristotle was not the first philosopher of his time to reflect and discourse upon the importance of moral virtue for living well, his *Nichomachean Ethics* (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) is considered the first systematic treatise in virtue theory. As such, Aristotle is commonly regarded as the progenitor of contemporary virtue ethics. The two foundational questions for virtue ethicists are, "What kind of person should I be?" and "What is the best kind of life for a person to live?". Rather than exclusively analyzing rightness or wrongness in terms of an individual's actions and/or their consequences, virtue ethicists place greatest emphasis on analyzing the *moral character* of a person at the time of action (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2018; MacIntyre, 1981/2006). It is thus not merely the *doing* of a right action that matters: *the motivations*, *affections*, and *intentions* of the individual must also be rightly calibrated toward what is best or most fitting – both in terms of what is best for (a) the situation and (b) *qua* human being (Annas, 2016; Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011; Fowers et al., 2021;

Sherman, 1997). Following Aristotle, the virtue ethicist would claim that right action flows naturally from the diligent practice of virtuous behaviour, which cultivates good character.

In this chapter, I argue that a neo-Aristotelian perspective offers a plausible framework for understanding the structure of human flourishing and is consistent with contemporary psychological science. The plausibility argument that runs through this section can be summarized by the following set of premises and conclusions, which constitute a two-step argument (1-3 and 5-7):

1) Aristotle believed humans were social and rational animals.
2) Humans share an evolved ultrasocial and rational nature.
3) Therefore, Aristotle's beliefs about human nature were (broadly) correct.
4) According to Aristotle's function argument, to flourish well *qua* human being is to live well considering what it means to be human. That is, human nature gives rise to a general eudaimonic structure which demarcates the kind of life that is naturally choiceworthy for human beings (i.e., eudaimonia/flourishing[10]).
5) If Aristotle's function argument is successful, a neo-Aristotelian understanding of the good human life is a robust framework for conceptualizing human flourishing.
6) Aristotle's function argument is successful.
7) Therefore, a neo-Aristotelian understanding of the good life is a robust framework for conceptualizing human flourishing.

The conclusion denoted by (3) is implied by the dependent premises (1) and (2), which, if true, would render the conclusion correct. (4) is a summary statement of Aristotle's function argument, which serves as the necessary informational backdrop for (5), (6), and (7), respectively. The conclusion denoted

[10] *Eudaimonia* can be alternatively translated as "happiness" or "well-being" (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2018). However, in keeping with Fowers and colleagues (2017), I use the translation "flourishing" because it captures the depth and richness of what Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) described a good human life to be – the coherence and completeness of a life well-lived.

by (7) deductively follows from premises (5) and (6) via *modus ponens*. If I can successfully support premises (2) and (6) in this present chapter, then the conclusions denoted by (3) and (7) can be considered more plausible than not. Those seeking to critique me in this chapter should thus focus on critiquing the arguments I offer in support of premises (2) and (6), respectively, as these form the lynchpin of my overall argument. If (3) and (7) can be considered more plausible than not (i.e., are reasonably supported by the evidence), then I will consider myself to have successfully argued that a neo-Aristotelian eudaimonist theory is a robust and plausible framework for conceptualizing human flourishing by counselling psychologists.

The remainder of this chapter consists of three sections. First, I explicate the three foundational concepts of Aristotle's eudaimonist virtue theory: virtue and wisdom/*phronesis*. Second, I springboard from these foundational concepts to discuss Aristotle's function argument. For now, the function argument can be summarized as the claim that understanding human nature provides clues about what it means to function well *qua* human being. That is, a human being flourishes by exemplifying his or her natural human characteristics excellently (Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011). I will explicate and defend this view of humans as rational and social animals in my second section. In my third section, I will explicate how Aristotle's virtue theory and understanding of human nature led him to posit a natural hierarchy of human goods, providing a brief overview of how of a neo-Aristotelian account of a flourishing life is consistent with contemporary psychological science. Overall, I will argue that Aristotle's understanding of human flourishing (a) renders the human good intelligible, (b) is consistent with psychological science, and (c) avoids the pitfalls of being narrowly prescriptive or proscriptive.

3.1. Virtue, Practical Wisdom, and Character: Foundational Concepts in Aristotle's Moral Theory

Virtue, practical wisdom, and character are three critical concepts for understanding Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) moral theory and his function argument in the remainder of this chapter. *Virtue* refers to how reliably a person's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours (a) cohere together at the time of

action and (b) are directed toward what is fitting to the circumstances (Fowers, 2008; Fowers et al., 2021). As we practice engaging in virtuous behaviour, we simultaneously refine our *practical reason* (*phronesis*) – the ability to perceive and deliberate rightly about how best to act in specific situations (Fowers, 2003; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Cultivating discrete virtues is a matter of creating good habits – calibrating one's affections, refining one's reasons, and practicing virtuous behaviours across time.

For Aristotle (ca 340 B.C.E/2011), living a complete human life (*eudaimonia*) is inextricable from cultivating a virtuous character. *Character* refers to how consistently a person (a) is oriented toward what is good (for the circumstance[s] and *qua* human being) and (b) accurately perceives what is important and best in his or her circumstances. Not only does a virtuous person think, feel, and act rightly in moral situations, but their emotions, thoughts, and actions are reliably disposed toward what is most fitting and best in specific situations (Fowers et al., 2021). As our habits become stable and consistent parts of who we are, we come to intrinsically desire what is good. Thus, building good character entails the cultivation of multiple virtues, which help us act rightly more consistently in a variety of contexts and circumstances (Fowers, 2008).

Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) believed it better to focus on the character of an individual than formulating moral rules or laws for him or her to abide by. Rules have utility in guiding one toward what is good, Aristotle thought, but always admit of exceptions. Due to the complexities and ambiguities of life, he believed it better to articulate what a morally praiseworthy, flourishing person is like. Thus, he emphasized practicing moral virtue and cultivating practical wisdom as the pathway to reliably acting well in the world. For Aristotle, cultivating good habits through practice is key to becoming a more virtuous and wiser person. The more a person practices behaving virtuously, the more that virtue becomes a part of who they are, which enables them to act well even in "morally grey" situations. The generality with which Aristotle discussed ethics and the human good should not be conflated with triviality or lack of depth. Rather than appealing to abstract duties or utility calculations, Aristotle (ca.

340 B.C.E./2011) tied his eudaimonist account of ethics to human nature, which is called his function argument (Fowers, 2012). The basic logic of Aristotle's function argument is that, if one has an accurate understanding of those defining features of human nature – those properties which make us *human* rather than a chimpanzee, a slug, or a cat – then we can meaningfully articulate what it means to flourish *qua* human being.

3.2. Human Nature and Aristotle's Function Argument

In this section, I will summarize Aristotle's function argument (premise 4) and provide an exegesis of his view of humans as social and rational animals (premise 1) (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013). Next, I will provide a defense of premises 2 and 3 that considers relevant data from the fields of evolutionary psychology, neuropsychology, developmental psychology, and social psychology. After that, I will articulate and defend a neo-Aristotelian version of Aristotle's function argument (premises 5, 6, and 7), which will be dependent upon whether my argument for human nature – that we are ultrasocial and rational primates – is successful (premises 2 and 3).

3.2.1. Aristotle's function argument. What does it mean to function well *qua* human being? Fowers (2012, 2015) defines Aristotle's function argument in the following way: by understanding the *kind of creature* human beings are, one can infer the structure of what *kind of life* is naturally good for humans to live. Understanding the good life *qua* human being is inextricable from an adequate grasp of human nature: "*an unquestionably good life [is] one that expresses human nature in the best ways*… The idea is simple but powerful: A good example of any given thing is one that fulfills its function excellently" (Fowers et al., 2017, p. 20-21, emphasis added). This fits with Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) description of *eudaimonia* as a kind of work or activity that expresses human nature excellently.

Flourishing *qua* human being is not a mere subjective state, here one moment and gone the next. Rather, *eudaimonia* describes a kind of life, best characterized as way of being-in-the-world

excellently and reliably, given the kind of creature human beings are. Sachs (in Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2004) clarifies this point well:

> "Aristotle's teleology is often misunderstood. The *telos* for the sake of which everything does everything it does, on his view, is the wholeness of purpose… To speak of an activity as being for its own sake means that the one engaged in it feels complete or fulfilled when at work in that way… *Properly human work could not leave our distinctive capacities unfulfilled*" (p. 27-29, emphasis added).

What, then, are the distinctive human capacities? Comprehending Aristotle's conception of human nature will require looking at two of his writings: the *Nichomachean Ethics* (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) and *Politics* (ca. 350 B.C.E/2013). These works were intended by Aristotle to be a complementary two-part series in his systematic philosophy of human affairs (Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, 1181b12-23, p. 234-235). The distinct points of emphasis in each work are worth briefly noting. In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) launched his investigation into the nature of the human good and the virtues, giving special attention to our rationality with more oblique (yet pervasive) references to our intense sociality. In the *Politics* (ca. 350 B.C.E./2013), Aristotle focused more on the social nature of human beings, where he emphasized the importance of optimal political organization to ensure individual citizens can flourish. Given our nature as intensely social animals, Aristotle thought it inconceivable that a human being could flourish without rich communal relations with others.

From his exploration of the distinctive features of human nature, Aristotle constructed a theory about the natural structure of a flourishing human life. He frames his argument functionally, seeking to identify the human *telos* – that is, the highest good that human beings seek for its own sake, not as a means to some other end (Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011). *Functioning well requires the exercise and embodiment of a thing's distinctive virtues*: those features and/or characteristics that enable a thing to perform its function well. As an illustration, Aristotle describes the *telos* of an eye: "… the virtue of an

eye makes both the eye and its work excellent, for by means of the virtue of the eye, we see well" (1106a). We might say that an eye works well *iff*[11] it performs its function well (i.e., enabling an organism to see). In other words, human flourishing is not a psychological state that one temporarily achieves – it is a product of the choices, strivings, and goods that he or she pursues across a complete life.

It is notable that Aristotle's conceptions of good and *telos* are framed in broadly natural terms. He writes, "virtue will be further manifest as follows – if we contemplate what sort of thing its nature is" (Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, 1106a25-26). When contemplating the human good, it is foundational to Aristotle's ethical theory to rightly describe the *kind of creature a human being is*. Comprehending Aristotle's enquiry into the human good generally requires that one understand (a) the central features of human nature, from which one can infer (b) the structure of a good human life and (c) the virtues which constitute eudaimonic living (Fowers, 2012). From his *Nichomachean Ethics* (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) and *Politics* (ca. 350 B.C.E./2013), one can surmise that Aristotle believed there were two features of our animal nature that were distinctive to human beings: our rationality and ultrasociality.

It is important to make a preliminary note, however, that Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) himself thought our rationality was more important to *eudaimonia* than our sociality. I do not think I (or anyone else) am obligated to agree with Aristotle on this point – I think sociality and rationality are both central for understanding human flourishing. Hence, my account will be neo-Aristotelian because I think Aristotle gets a lot of things right about the human good, but also gets some things wrong. Thus, the approach I will take in this section will (1) appropriate Aristotle's insights about the human good insofar as they are accurate and (2) update them where they are inaccurate. I will exposit Aristotle's view of

[11] In philosophical jargon, *iff* functions as an "Abbreviation for a biconditional connective 'if and only if'" (Honderich, 2005, p. 420). I use this here to emphasize the centrality of Aristotle's idea that, without *X* exemplifying the virtues that enable a thing to embody its defining characteristics well, *X cannot function well and thus cannot flourish* as the kind of thing it is.

human beings as rational and social animals, followed by a summary of the plausibility of such a view in light of contemporary scientific evidence demarcating the distinctive features of evolved human nature.

3.2.2. Humans as political/social animals. In both the *Nichomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, Aristotle refers to human beings as intensely social and/or political animals. One of Aristotle's most striking assertions comes in his *Politics* (ca. 350 B.C.E./2013): "…man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals" (1253a8-9). Commenting on this passage, Carnes Lord (2013) observes that Aristotle's description of human beings as "political" carries an implicit teleology. This teleological structure of human beings is demarcated "In *History of Animals* (I.I.487b34 ff.), [where] Aristotle defines political animal as one that has a single and common task [*ergon*] or function" (p. 4, footnote 15). For Aristotle, a good human life inherently involves relationships within a political community, and that good political communities likewise facilitate the flourishing of their citizens (Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013).

Aristotle's conception of human beings as "political animals" can be formulated alternatively as "social animals" to render his point more applicable to our contemporary context. It should be noted that, when Aristotle described human beings as political animals in his *Politics* (ca. 350 B.C.E./2013, 1253a8-9, p. 4), he intended to argue that the Greek *polis* was the highest end of human social/political organization. The *polis* was a democratic city-state "organized around an urban center and typically governed by formal laws and republican institutions" (Lord; in Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013, p. vii). Furthermore, Haworth (2012) helpfully comments, "It transpires, then, that when Aristotle describes us as political animals, he doesn't *just mean that we are social creatures by nature*. He means that our natural home, the setting in which we are most likely to flourish, is a particular type of association, the *polis*." (p. 45, emphasis added).

Nevertheless, my recasting of Aristotle's conception of humans as social animals remains true to his view of human nature. Such a reformulation is consistent with the neo-Aristotelian approach of

updating and revising Aristotle's philosophy in light of our current knowledge and context. Thus, even if Aristotle's views about the optimal form of human political organization (i.e., the Greek *polis*) are now antiquated, one can faithfully expand upon the broad contours of Aristotle's thought in affirming the profound sociality of human beings.

The significance of human sociality for human flourishing is reflected most clearly in Aristotle's discussion of friendship. In the *Nichomachean Ethics,* the philosopher devoted two whole books to discussing friendship as indispensable to a flourishing human life (*eudaimonia*). In fact, Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) believed friendship was so integral to the well-functioning of human beings that he wrote, "… without friends, no one would choose to live, even if he possessed all other goods" (1155a5-6, p. 163). The profound sociality of human beings entails that having close interpersonal relationships with others is an integral aspect of Aristotle's understanding of a well-functioning human being. Just as knives cut well when sharp, humans function well when they belong within a community and/or have rich social relationships with others. Being profoundly social creatures, feeling a sense of connectedness, belonging, and bonding with others are all inextricable and vital aspects of human flourishing (Fowers, 2015; Fowers et al., 2017).

In summary, Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) function argument is centrally informed by his recognition of the profound sociality of human beings. Human life is characterized by dependence and interdependence upon others, from infancy until death. Aristotle strongly emphasized that friendship, particularly character friendship, is vital to human flourishing. His recognition of human ultrasociality offers a basic, but nontrivial, insight for understanding what it means to flourish *qua* human being – human beings *need* to feel connected to others in friendships of mutual goodwill and love, as well as a sense of belonging within a community of others, within which each of us has a distinctive role.

3.2.3. Humans as rational animals. Rationality was emphasized by Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) as the most distinctive human capacity. However, MacIntyre (1999) observes Aristotle did

not bifurcate human modes of rationality from that of animals, which later readers often interpret him to be saying (p. 5). But while Aristotle placed human beings within the context of the natural world, he recognized that humans possessed distinctive rational potentials not available to other organisms. For Aristotle, human rationality exceeded that of the animals insofar as they possessed the ability to produce speech and perceive logical relationships between propositions.

Since intellect (specifically, practical wisdom) helps perfect moral virtue, Aristotle believed that practical wisdom must be of greater value than moral virtue, and thus, more desirable than a morally virtuous life. According to Bartlett and Collins, Aristotle saw the intellectual pursuits of the contemplative life "as marked by the greatest self-sufficiency, understood now not as the perfect freedom from all need or want… but as freedom from reliance on other human beings above all" (in Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, p. 297). He contrasts the contemplative life as one in which a person's basic needs are met, allowing that person to engage in a life of leisure and study, which allows him to develop his intellect most fully.

Aristotle appears to be of two minds in his *Nichomachean Ethics* regarding how centrally he thought rationality and contemplation were tied to the human good. Bartlett and Collins (in Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, p. 296-302) notice Aristotle's description of the contemplative life appears to clash with his emphasis on the human need for connection with others and the necessity of the *polis* as the social infrastructure for an individual to flourish (see also Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013). Aristotle seems to have been content to hold these claims in tension. On the one hand, the contemplative life requires a stable social infrastructure to enable leisure and contemplation. On the other hand, he reasons that humankind's premier qualities – speech and intellect – are necessary for cultivating moral virtue, thus are superior to virtue, and thus more choiceworthy to cultivate. Indulging in base pleasures can detract from living a life of contemplation, as such behaviour does not culminate in a full, flourishing life.

Do we, as psychologists, have to endorse Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) abrupt shift from emphasizing sociality and moral virtue for the first three-quarters of his *Nichomachean Ethics* to the contemplative life, in the closing pages of his treatise? From a neo-Aristotelian point of view, no one is obligated to agree with everything Aristotle believed. It is widely recognized that dependence upon and relationships with others are equally vital aspects of healthy human development and a flourishing life. We are free to disagree with Aristotle about the primacy of the contemplative life, yet still retain the many valuable insights his understanding of human nature provides us.

3.2.4. Did Aristotle get human nature right? A sketch of our evolved ultrasociality and rationality. Psychologists can use Aristotle's insights as a springboard for further reflection about the human good. I propose that Aristotle's overall view of humans as rational and social animals remains plausible *even if* some details of his own account are incorrect or questionable. From here, I argue that Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013) conception of human nature remains defensible considering contemporary psychological science. The present section constitutes my defense of the second and third premises of my argument: that humans share an evolved nature as ultrasocial, rational primates, which would entail that Aristotle was broadly correct in his construal of human nature.

3.2.4.1. A nomological account of evolved human nature. The notion of human nature is controversial today. On one hand, many philosophers of biology regard the idea as untenable; species are merely evolved, historical entities which do not possess any essential properties that are necessary and sufficient to make an organism a member of that species. On the other hand, there are many psychologists and social scientists who endorse "blank slate" views of human nature. From this perspective, human nature can be understood as either a sociocultural construction or individual self-creation, akin to Sartre's (2016) view that existence precedes essence. That is, we create ourselves through our choices and narrative self-interpretations, whereas claims about universal properties are inadequate and/or oppressive in the wake of the (supposed) death of metaphysics (Aho, 2014).

However, I believe the concept of human nature can be redeemed – that Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013) insights into humans as rational and social animals are consistent with contemporary psychological science, particularly known facts about human evolution. If psychologists are to have an accurate theoretical picture of human nature and behaviour, they must incorporate the insights of evolutionary science (Buss, 2020; Tooby, 2020). Evolutionary theory is indisputably the best scientific paradigm for identifying the origins and nature of the properties which define us as a species. As Lewis and Buss (2021) note, "Since evolution by selection is the only known causal process that is capable of producing the fundamental components of… human nature, *all psychological theories are implicitly or explicitly evolutionary* (p. 8, emphasis added). I agree with Blaine Fowers (2015, p. 307-344, 345, footnote 1) that a nomological account of our evolved human nature, in conjunction with a neo-Aristotelian natural ethic, renders functioning well *qua* human being a comprehensible and defensible perspective in psychological theory and practice.

The nomological account Fowers (2015) cites is provided by Edouard Machery (2008), who defines human nature not in terms of necessary and sufficient properties, as Aristotle did, but as the "set of properties that humans *tend to possess* as a result of the evolution of our species" (p. 323, emphasis added). Evolutionary science demonstrates how certain genes, features, and other properties are shaped over time via selective processes (Gregory, 2009). While Aristotelian essentialism is generally regarded as untenable by philosophers of biology, Machery (2008) argues biological evolution does not render the concept of human nature defunct. He carefully notes that a nomological account of human nature applies only to those common properties that are *ultimately caused* by evolutionary processes. Aristotle's original essentialism required that a thing's nature be only defined by a set of necessary *and* sufficient properties that uniquely inhere within the thing in question. The nomological account proposed by Machery thus avoids the weaknesses of Aristotelian essentialism by merely describing *the properties humans generally share due to our species' evolutionary history*.

On a nomological account of human nature, the common properties which belong to a species must be *products of ultimate evolutionary causes*, rather than proximal causes such as culture, learning, or epigenetic processes (Machery, 2008). Hence, such an account avoids having to ascribe absurd commonalities between humans as being part of human nature (e.g., believing water is wet). Machery observes a nomological way of discussing an organism's nature is pervasively implicit when biologists describe common properties of other animals in scientific educational literature. Thus, he argues, perhaps one should not reject the possibility of referring to an organism as having a nature so quickly, given its widespread presumption in scientific education.

Machery (2008) lists five advantages that his nomological account of human nature possesses. First, his account does not require the properties of human nature to be shared by every individual human. For example, some humans possess properly functioning theory of mind (ToM) faculties, but others do not (e.g., individuals with autism) – yet both are human beings. Second, properties of human nature are not immutable and may change in the future (through evolution or other means). Third, the details of the evolutionary process remain open for discussion. Fourth, the nomological properties of humanness *are not normative* – it is not morally wrong to be devoid of some property *P* that humans typically share. Finally, Machery is clear that *bimodal traits are not part of human nature*. Thus, traits which cluster within subgroups of the human species (e.g., sex differences) are not part of his definition of human nature. While bimodal traits emphasize individual differences, human nature is "a useful counterpoint to the widespread neglect of the similarities between humans [in psychology]" (p. 324).

Fowers (2015) argues our evolved human nature can serve as the foundation for a natural, emergent structure to a flourishing human life. While natural selection in itself is "blind" to the features and adaptations it produces – given that the mutations which persist only reflect those which are either (a) conducive or (b) neutral to an organism's surviving long enough to enjoy differential reproductive success (Al-Shawaf et al., 2018; Gregory, 2009) – the evolutionary history of our species has given rise to

(among other things) the common properties of rationality and ultrasociality (Fowers, 2015). Nomologically, Fowers' (2015) definition of human nature is couched as follows: rationality and ultrasociality are the two higher-order, emergent properties that are generally shared among human beings and have their origins in prior evolutionary causes.

There is a tremendous amount of literature one could canvas to argue a neo-Aristotelian understanding of the human good comports well with extant literature explicating our evolved human nature. Furthermore, there are a variety of ways one can trace the evolutionary origins of various aspects of our human nature. Here, I will trace the mammalian neuroevolutionary precursors of human sociality, followed by articulating the conditions which gave rise to human *ultra*sociality. Second, I will make a brief case for why rationality can also be considered a constitutive element of evolved human nature. I believe the following evidence means that a neo-Aristotelian perspective of human nature is defensible considering contemporary psychological science, as denoted by premise (2) above.

3.2.4.2. Primordial origins of human sociality. Multiple lines of evidence indicate the human brain evolved to be a social organ. One important line of evidence pertains to the conservation of ancient subcortical neural control systems which mediate pleasant affective feelings associated with signature mammalian social behaviours. These systems afford mammals capacities and propensities for "(1) lactation and associated maternal care, (2) vocal communication to maintain mother-infant contact, and (3) playful behaviour facilitating social learning" (Torunchuk & Ellis, 2013, p. 6). Each subcortical neural system mediates experiences with specific affective and somatic qualities, forged by selective pressures to efficiently get mammals to engage in prototypic approach and avoidance behaviours conducive to their survival (Davis & Montag, 2019; Panksepp & Watt, 2011).

For example, endogenous opiate systems within the brain are highly implicated in mammalian attachment, particularly manifestations of separation distress (Torunchuk & Ellis, 2013). When low doses of exogenous opiate agonists are administered to lab animals, such as puppies and guinea pigs,

the frequency of distress vocalizations due to separation from caregivers decreases. In the same experimental conditions, when opiate antagonists are administered instead, the frequency of distress vocalizations increases (Herman & Panksepp, 1978; Panksepp et al., 1978). Simply put, "the neural circuits mediating distress are under the control of [endogenous] brain opioids", which is furthermore evidenced by the similarities between the dynamics of opiate addiction and social dependence (see Panksepp, 1998, p. 255, Figure 13.5). When mammals feel disconnected or separated from attachment figures, these opioid systems are inactive. When these systems are inactive, the pleasant feelings and felt sense of safety that accompanies connection with others are absent, resulting in feelings of distress and their corresponding attachment behaviours[12], such as crying vocalizations.

Like endogenous opiates, the brain systems and structures which govern the release of oxytocin, prolactin, serotonin, and dopamine are all implicated in the maternal care, attachment and distress, and rough and tumble play behaviours distinctive to mammals (Cozolino, 2014, Tables 8.1-8.4, pp. 122-127). Further supporting the primordial origins of human sociality, many ancient neural networks of mammalian sociality traverse the anterior cingulate (Torunchuk & Ellis, 2013, Table 2, p. 11, specifically systems E5-E7[13]). In humans, the anterior cingulate helps mediate the processing of three kinds of pain: observation of others' emotional pain, pain of social ostracization, and physical pain (Botvinick et al., 2005; Stein et al., 2007). Given the overlap in the neural processing of social and physical pain, it is not surprising that the absence or loss of connection with others – particularly caregivers and other attachment figures – is, quite literally, a painful experience that leads to feelings of insecurity, stress, and distress. In contrast, ample experimental evidence attests that positive social support is associated with superior cardiovascular health, immunological functioning, mental health, and cognitive functioning over time (see Cozolino, 2014, Table 15.1., p. 245, for a summary).

[12] Fraley and Shaver (2021) describe *attachment behaviours* as "adaptive responses to separation from a primary attachment figure" that signals distress and motivates caregivers to re-establish proximity to the child (p. 643).
[13] Respectively labelled LUST (E5, sexual desire), ATTACHMENT/PANIC (E6), and maternal CARE (E7).

Overall, these primordial affective networks pertaining to mammalian sociality have been conserved in the human brain because they facilitate attachment and adaptive social interaction, which provide clear survival advantages (Ellis & Solms, 2018, p. 91-92, 95-99; Panksepp, 1998, p. 223-224). These ancient affective circuits constitute the universal foundations for the social behaviours distinctive to all mammals, with at least three primary emotional systems having plausibly evolved to mediate the satisfaction of specific social needs (Panksepp & Watt, 2011; Torunchuk & Ellis, 2013, Table 1, p. 4). The neural control systems that have achieved widespread recognition by affective neuroscientists are the maternal CARE, PANIC/GRIEF, & PLAY systems, respectively. These systems mediate archetypal mammalian propensities to (1) care for one's offspring, (2a) vigorously pursue the felt safety of social connection and (2b) alleviate feelings of distress that accompany social isolation, and (3) joyfully engage in rough-and-tumble play (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 437-439). The proper functioning of each of these systems was crucial to the survival and reproductive success of our mammalian ancestors; thus, they have been conserved as genetically hard-wired neural control systems within subcortical regions of the human brain (Davis & Montag, 2019; Ellis & Solms, 2018, p. 100-101, 109-115; Panksepp & Watt, 2011).

3.2.4.3. Becoming ultrasocial primates. While all mammals evolved to be social creatures, humans are more aptly characterized as *ultra*social primates. *Ultrasociality* is defined by Campbell (1982) as "the most social of animal organizations, with full-time division of labour, specialists who gather no food but are fed by others, effective sharing of information about sources of food and danger, [and] self sacrificial effort in defense of the collective" (p. 160). According to E. O. Wilson (2013), humans are the only organism on earth apart from insects like bees, ants, and termites to have evolved capacities for large-scale communal living. Unlike such insects, however, the distinctive features of human ultrasociality are characterized by the increased complexity and size of our communicative capacities and social hierarchies. This distinctive complexity is only comprehensible in light of how the neocortex fits into our neuroevolutionary history.

Because evolution by natural selection is an accretive process (see Gregory, 2009), the neocortical structures and systems of the human brain are inevitably built upon the primordial, subcortical affective structures and networks which evolutionarily preceded them (Panksepp, 1998, p. 122-123). As Cozolino (2014) writes, "The contemporary human brain has been built, layer by layer, through millions of years of adaptational challenges and evolutionary changes" (p. 175). According to *the social brain hypothesis*, the demands of dyadic pair-bonding led to the evolution of a markedly larger average frontal lobe volume within the primate lineage of the evolutionary tree of life (Dunbar & Shultz, 2017; Gowlett et al., 2012). Increased frontal lobe volume was "favoured" by natural selection because greater computational complexity in these regions of the brain is necessary to engage in sophisticated forms of social communication and behaviour, as well as creating and maintaining complex social relationships and hierarchies (Dunbar, 2016; Sutcliffe et al., 2012). Having the most pronounced developments in these brain regions, humans became able to live within larger social groups *and* engage in complex planning, division of labour, and cooperative behaviours to resolve individual and group survival challenges, such as predation risk (Dunbar & Schultz, 2017; Tomasello et al., 2005).

Despite only comprising 2% of an adult human's body weight, the brain requires 20% of the body's total energy output (Dunbar, 1992, p. 469). The increased computational power of a larger brain required significant adjustments to our ancestors' daily lives, particularly the adoption of new dietary and social grooming strategies. The advent of cooking meat – a major technological revolution due to our increased intelligence and mastery of fire – better preserved the nutrients within meals, enabling the efficient replenishment of our big brain's increased metabolic output (Dunbar & Schultz, 2007). Socially, our larger sclera (whites of the eyes) and adaptations for making and understanding complex facial expressions enabled better attunement through shared eye-gazing and faster, more detailed nonverbal communication than is available to other primates, whose sclera are much smaller and facial muscles less expressive (Cozolino, 2014, p. 164-167, 178-179).

These and other adaptations granted humans remarkable capabilities for complex pairbonded relationships, as well as for planning, communicating, and sharing our intentions with others and cooperating on complex tasks (Tomasello et al., 2005). Larger group sizes thus emerged as a by-product of the survival benefits afforded by complex pairbonding (Dunbar & Shultz, 2017). Enlarged frontal lobes afforded immense survival benefits for humans and our primate cousins, such as "deal[ing] with predators and, when group sizes became larger, cooperat[ing] with conspecifics" (Noonan et al., 2018, p. 12). Our newly evolved neocortex afforded social-computational abilities – such as ToM and the associated ability to understand and predict the future intentions and emotional states of others – and enabled the maintenance of complex social relationships within group sizes of approximately 150 individuals (Cozolino, 2014, p. 371; Dunbar, 1992, 2016; Thornton et al., 2019; Tomasello et al., 2005).

Furthermore, humanity's new social-cognitive and linguistic capacities allowed social grooming to take alternative linguistic forms, such as conversation and storytelling, which in turn helped facilitate the development of culture (Cozolino, 2017, p. 239). Culture, in turn, facilitates the rapid transmission of norms and knowledge, which helps individuals within groups form a sense of collective identity (Tomasello et al., 2005). Having a sense of collective identity helps ingroup members (1) cooperate effectively on various tasks, (2) monitor and regulate deviant behaviour of others within the group, and (3) band together in times of conflict (Fowers, 2015, p. 198-225, 250-255). Overall, humans are capable of social computations that far outrank other organisms in the evolutionary tree of life.

In his book, *The Evolution of Ethics*, Fowers (2015, pp. 234-266) cites an array of experimental and meta-analytic studies attesting to the ease with which four social heuristics can be activated within humans: social categorization, collective identity, ingroup favouritism, and loyalty. Even subtle priming strategies can activate any of these four social heuristics. These heuristics serve the survival-related function of promoting group identification, which allows members to reap the survival and reproductive benefits of group living. These conclusions are consistent with the social brain hypothesis: as we

diverged in cortical complexity from the other great apes, the brain mechanisms underlying these evolved social-cognitive abilities became ubiquitous among human beings.

Additionally, due to limitations in birth canal size, human infants enter the world with an underdeveloped brain. Human offspring thus require extended child-rearing periods, as our subcortical and cortical hardware need to "download" social software via interactions with both caregivers and peers (Cozolino, 2014; Dunbar & Schultz, 2017; Grossman, 2015). *In other words, it takes time to socialize a social brain*. The plasticity of our cortical endowments, guided by our affective systems, enable us to readily adapt ourselves to the particularities of our social and cultural context(s) (e.g., language, cultural norms; Ellis, 2019; Ellis & Solms, 2018, p. 113-115, 144-146). Adequate socialization buffers against a person being ostracized from his or her group(s), and group living entailed a higher probability of survival and reproduction for our primate and Pleistocene ancestors. Human brains evolved to (a) be highly sensitive to social stimuli, (b) care deeply about social relationships, and (c) seek belonging within their groups (Fowers, 2015; Tso et al., 2018). The universality of human sociality renders it incredibly unlikely to be a product of mere social construction or something that can be disregarded by a sheer act of will – the human brain clearly evolved to be an ultrasocial organ.

In summary, due to the adaptive benefits of pairbonded relationships and group living, natural selection "favoured" adaptations and exaptations that fostered cooperation and the forming of deep social bonds (Dunbar & Schultz, 2017). Individuals living in groups that effectively maintain their norms and boundaries enjoy greater prospects of survival and differential reproductive success. Groups with a greater proportion of individuals possessing traits conducive to complex social cognizing and behaviour were more likely to survive intergroup conflict, regulate intragroup conflict, and effectively cooperate in efforts to forage for sufficient resources to replenish the energy expended by a large brain (Dunbar, 2016; Dunbar & Schultz, 2017). Over time, the proportion of individuals inheriting such traits increased, although individuals prone to selfishness may not be eradicated from the gene pool. However, evolved

cognitive mechanisms that facilitate cheater detection and the maintenance of social norms were likely sufficient to maintain the integrity of human intragroup functioning (see Fowers, 2015, p. 174-185, 271-274). Overall, the neural mechanisms underlying social emotions, ToM, imitation, predicting others' emotional states and intentions, and other social-cognitive processes conducive to group formation and maintenance are pervasive, automatic, and incredibly efficacious in normally developing human brains (Cozolino, 2014, p. 50; Fowers, 2015; Thornton et al., 2019; Tomasello et al., 2005; Tso et al., 2018).

The innate human proclivity for attaching to, connecting with, and relying upon other human beings is one of the best attested facts in psychological science. Our dependency upon others lasts from infancy until death, and our social relationships have a profound influence on who we become. The most important early social connection is the dyadic relationship between children and their primary caregiver(s), whose presence and responsivity contribute to how we understand and perceive ourselves, other people, and the world around us (Fraley & Shaver, 2021, p. 645-646). Thus, it is impossible to truly understand an individual human person without accounting for their social context and the relationships within which they have lived and developed (Cozolino, 2014, p. 366-368). Sociality pervades the fabric of human life from the first to final moments of our existence; the basic human need to belong and connect with others directly reflects our evolved ultrasociality. As a result, group identity and belonging are inextricable aspects of a flourishing human life.

3.2.4.4. Human rationality and the neocortex. The computational gains associated with the evolution of the social brain enabled significant advancements in humanity's rational capacities. It is speculated that as humans became more social, we also became more intelligent (Cozolino, 2014, p. 50). As social groups increased in number and the relationships within groups became more complex, so too emerged capacities which enabled symbolic representation and new means of vocal communication that led to the development of language. Consistent with the social brain hypothesis (Dunbar, 1992, 2003), our large neocortical structures (particularly the frontal lobes) mediate our capacities for

symbolic representation and language (see Cozolino, 2014, p. 19, 205-224), as well as our capacities for "imitation, norm-interest, group identity, teaching, shared intentionality, social surveillance and sanctioning, and interband relationships" (Fowers, 2015, p. 216). In sum, humans possess (1) evolved cortical hardware to download (2) the software of cultural norms and knowledge that is necessary to maintain group integrity and collective identity. No animal on earth is as cultural as humankind.

Human intelligence belongs to a unique stratum in the animal kingdom. The evolved neural mechanisms underlying humanity's ultrasocial nature simultaneously facilitated massive increases in our intelligence. Fowers and colleagues (2017) correctly observe that "our rationality – our higher language and reasoning – develops from our dependency, making our interpersonal interdependency vital to reaching our full capacities as human beings" (p. 84). Our impressive neocortical capabilities evolved largely due to natural selection's "favouring" increased sociality, and thus depend vitally upon social connection(s) for their proper development and function. These capacities allow us to engage in complex cognitive processes like (a) prospecting about possible futures, (b) reflecting on past events, and (c) deliberating about the behaviours, higher-order goals, and values we commit ourselves to. Without such rational capacities we would be unable to reflect on our values, think hypothetically about counterfactual scenarios, deliberate between options, and make choices in our daily lives.

Granted, neural processes underlying our intuitions strongly influence our higher-order cognitive processes involving reasoning and decision-making (Bechara et al., 2000; Damasio et al., 2000; Kahneman, 2013), as well as our moral judgements, demonstrating high resistance to counter-evidence and exposure to logical fallacies (e.g., Haidt, 2001, 2007, 2012). Yet the relationship between intuition and/or affect and higher-order reasoning may not be unidirectional, thus allowing for a meaningful sense in which deliberative, reflective, and prospective cognition have meaningful effects on our behaviour. The relationship between automatic/intuitive cognition(s) and higher-order, slower forms of cognition is an area of significant interest and controversy amongst philosophers, psychologists, and

physicists. While our affective and cognitive equipment clearly evolved to be biased toward the survival value of rapid, affectively laden judgements and response-sequences, there are good reasons to question the claim that our reasoning is merely a "post-hoc process in which we search for evidence to support our initial intuitive reaction" (Haidt, 2007, p. 998).

Responding to Haidt's (2007, p. 998) claim, Fowers (2015, p. 325-333) argues reflection and deliberation are evolved capacities that are necessary for moderating the inevitable tensions in our human nature, serving important survival-related functions. For example, he argues that higher-order cognition is necessary for adaptive cognitive functions such as delaying gratification, abstractly weighing social costs of possible future actions, and reflecting upon and/or changing existing cultural practices to become more adaptive to a given ecological context. He concludes that it is difficult to justify the claim that "such a costly and potentially troublesome capacity would evolve solely to provide post hoc justification for automatic behaviours" (p. 327). Our goals and valued goods often conflict with one another, and we must employ our reflective and deliberative abilities to understand, interpret, and/or prospect about which actions are best or most fitting in our here-and-now circumstances. For example, there are situations when what is good for one's group conflicts with the needs of a friend. What is a person to do in such a situation: be loyal to the group or to their friend? Apart from deliberating over contextual information, it is doubtful a one-size-fits-all answer can be given for many such dilemmas. The causal efficacy of such higher-order cognizing could also have helped our Pleistocene ancestors to solve other adaptational problems such as identifying optimal solutions to maintain intragroup integrity and choosing the best strategies to emerge victorious in intergroup conflicts.

Natural selection acts upon on mutations in heritable genetic traits. Any given genetic mutation and/or trait persists because the phenotypic adaptations it produces are either (a) conducive or (b) neutral to an organisms' prospects for survival and differential reproductive success (Al-Shawaf et al., 2018; Gregory, 2009). Given that the human brain was built by such a patchwork and accretive process,

it is not surprising that tensions often arise between our automatic intuitions and many of the higher-order goods or values we commit ourselves to. It is via processes of reflection and deliberation that we work out answers to ethical questions as they arise: seeking to embody moral virtue and practical wisdom in our reflections, deliberations, and subsequent actions in our local contexts and efforts to approximate the human good (Fowers, 2015, p. 329).

To be sure, subcortical and/or other affective processes strongly influence and can overwhelm the slower, effortful processes involved in higher-order cognizing and decision-making (Bechara et al., 2000; Damasio et al., 2000; Ellis, 2019, p. 21; Panksepp, 1998, p. 319). For example, states of intense fear and stress inhibit processing in Broca's area. When this occurs, people cannot put their feelings into words, which prevents them from making sense of their experience, learning appropriate lessons, and can contribute to the development of psychopathology (Cozolino, 2017, p. 362-363). Affect's ability to overwhelm higher cognitive processing reflects the efficacy of the brain's (a) subcortical affective neural control systems and (b) other evolved psychological mechanisms for promoting the differential reproductive success of our ancestors. Nevertheless, I think there are *sufficient* reasons to believe our higher-order cognitions and actions are not merely rationalizations of automatic moral and/or affective intuitions. Even though intuition is clearly influential in the formation of our thoughts and judgements, this does not entail that they unilaterally drive our reasoning.

In neurophysiological terms, causation in the brain occurs along *both* bottom-up and top-down pathways (Ellis, 2019), meaning that our higher-order cortical regions *can* exert inhibitory effects on lower-level affective processes, and vice versa. For example, the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex can inhibit aggressive impulses which emerge from rapid subcortical processes, via serotonergic neural pathways (Choy et al., 2018). Additionally, an influx of opiates in the brain – producing feelings of contentment and safety – will inhibit subcortical processing that corresponds to intense feelings of rage (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 146). The complex interplay of bottom-up and top-down causality in the

brain is described by Tirch and Gilbert (2015) as “The Interaction of Old- and New-Brain Psychology” (p. 61). Processing in the older affective systems of the brain and the newer neocortical regions do not always cohere well, leading to inevitable psychological tensions due to the patchwork evolutionary development of the human brain (Cozolino & Santos, 2014, p. 158). However, with training, the cognitive mechanisms which underlie our linguistic, prospective, deliberative, and reflective capacities may grant us the capacity and time necessary to make voluntary choices, via the (limited) inhibitory effects our cortical structures can exert on lower-level processing (Ellis, 2019; Tirch & Gilbert, 2015).

Because of such bottom-up and top-down causality in the brain, humans are uniquely able to articulate, reflect upon, and/or deliberate about how to behave and/or the aspirations and values we could pursue. Our higher-level cognitive-linguistic processes are inextricably influenced by affective processing. This creates the opportunity for intrapersonal discord, as sometimes our thoughts, values, and beliefs run at cross purposes with our affections (Cozolino & Santos, 2014; Tirch & Gilbert, 2015). Neural systems such as those described above and their accompanying inhibitory effects can be developed with practice, typically in the context of social relationships that help us regulate and make sense of our emotions and experiences (Cozolino, 2014). In fact, such neurophysiological differences would be expected among those who have cultivated moral virtues as stable traits (Fowers et al., 2021). Panksepp and Biven (2012, p. 46) go as far as to say it is plausible these capacities, endowed to us (largely) by the prefrontal areas of the neocortex, are necessary for living wisely amid the pushes and pulls of our affects; retraining them as best we can to what is right, which sometimes requires us to act contrary to how we feel.

In summary, various scholars have argued that higher-order processes in the neocortex – such as those underlying deliberative and reflective thought – can have a meaningful causal effect on “lower” affective processes in the brain. Such scholars point to neural feedback mechanisms (as opposed to feedforward) involved with the inhibition of affective and other rapid processes in the brain as

necessary for such top-down causation to occur (e.g., Ellis, 2016, 2019). Without the cognitive capabilities afforded by our enlarged neocortex, a flourishing human life would look very different. Indeed, without such evolved capabilities, humans would not need to spend time narratively structuring their lives to imbue them with a sense of meaning, coherence, and integration in their life, which they clearly do (Cozolino, 2017, p. 27; Fowers et al., 2017, p. 30). *If these scholars are correct*, then Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013) construal of human beings as rational animals remains defensible in light of contemporary psychological science (see Ellis, 2016, p. 183-209, 291-384; Ellis, 2019; Fowers, 2015, p. 325-329; and Mitchell, 2018, for further reading).

3.2.4.5. So, was Aristotle right about human nature? It is abundantly clear that human beings are ultrasocial primates, rendering it something of a consensus view amongst social scientists from a variety of disciplines. Humans are hardwired with an intense, innate need for belonging and connection with others (Cozolino, 2014; Fowers, 2015). Due to our evolved ultrasociality, loneliness and social isolation (real or perceived) are deleterious to an individual's sense of subjective well-being and predict significantly higher mortality risk (e.g., Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Pantell et al., 2013). On the other hand, connection with others involves the release of opiates, oxytocin, and dopamine within the brain that are correlated with feelings of safety, security, contentment, and reward (Cozolino, 2014, p. 115-130; Johnson et al., 2013; Torunchuk & Ellis, 2013). It is a very short inference from these observations to the claim that attachment and group belonging are inextricable elements of what is *naturally good* in a human life. That is, connection and belonging are necessary conditions for flourishing *qua* human being.

Although controversial, I argue it is defensible to describe human beings as rational animals. Our enlarged forebrain mediates our unparalleled intellectual and linguistic potentials as a species. The ascending and descending systems from the neocortical structures and the older, ancestral structures of the mammalian brain are the physical mechanisms which enable us to engage in deliberative and reflective thought (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, Figure 1.4, p. 10). With varying degrees of success, the

connections between neocortical (cognitive) and subcortical (affective) systems allow us to regulate our affections and make wise choices about how best to act in a given situation (Panksepp & Biven, 2012, p. 46). Our human capacities for rationality – "our higher-order reasoning and language" (Fowers et al., 2017, p. 84) – are necessary for developing moral virtue and *practical wisdom*: the ability to discern how one should act, based on the contingencies of ethically challenging situations (Fowers et al., 2017, p. 119-122). Our rational capacities also enable us to discuss with others the cultural norms and accepted values of our groups and institutions, opening new possibilities for cultural innovation and moral reform in light of our ever-changing cultural, political, and historical landscape(s) (Fowers, 2015, p. 329-333; Fowers et al., 2017, p. 85)[14].

One of the most striking things about how Aristotle described human beings is that he did so explicitly in animalistic terms. Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, 350 B.C.E./2013) emphasized that human beings are animals with distinctive social and rational capacities. While he thought humans were distinct from animals in important ways, the placement of human beings within the natural order of the animal kingdom is a strikingly modern conceptualization. MacIntyre (1999) comments that, "no philosopher has taken human animality more seriously [than Aristotle]" (p. 5). Considering the above evidence, I think it is appropriate to extend Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013) view of human nature nomologically: Human beings evolved to be ultrasocial creatures with impressive cognitive faculties that mediate our remarkable intelligence and capacities for deliberative reasoning, reflective thought, and symbolic representation (Cozolino, 2017, p. 239). *Put simply, humans are ultrasocial, rational primates*.

3.3. Flourishing *Qua* Human Being: A Natural Eudaimonic Structure of the Human Good

The previous section constituted my defense of the second and third premises in my argument of this chapter: that (a) humans share an evolved nature as ultrasocial and rational primates and (b) Aristotle was (broadly) correct in understanding human beings as social and rational animals. In sum,

[14] Of course, this opens possibilities for moral regression, as well.

Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, ca. 350 B.C.E/2013) claims about human nature were remarkably insightful and prescient. The present section is my defense of the sixth premise of my argument: that Aristotle's function argument is successful. If I successfully argue in favor of this premise, then Aristotle plausibly provides psychologists legitimate insights about what it means to flourish *qua* human being.

From a neo-Aristotelian perspective, human beings function well by developing their potentials as rational and ultrasocial creatures. MacIntyre (1981/2006, p. 53) describes Aristotle's teleological view of human nature in a threefold way: (1) untutored human nature, or human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be, (2) transformation via experience, and (3) the actualization of human-nature-as-it-could-be, considering its *telos*. We all inherit a common ultrasocial and rational human nature, but it takes time and effort to refine our base, untutored human nature. Without socialization and instruction, humans' proclivity for social connection and our capacities for rational thought, symbolic representation, and discourse are unrefined and only exist as human potentials. However, these potentials can be cultivated and refined with practice. Though it may not be possible to "perfect" human nature, one flourishes by living a life oriented toward authenticity, integration, meaning, excellence, and growth (Huta, 2016). While our limitations thwart attaining "perfection", a life lived in pursuit of excellence *qua* human being is possible for everyone (Fowers et al., 2017).

The contemporary form of virtue ethics that is closest to Aristotle's own views is called *eudaimonist virtue ethics*. According to Hursthouse and Pettigrove (2018), eudaimonist virtue ethicists "define virtues in terms of their relationship to *eudaimonia*" which is "standardly translated as… 'flourishing'" (section 2.1, para. 1, para. 2). Aristotle's views can be further categorized as an *Objective List Theory* of well-being. Objective list theorists seek to demarcate a comprehensive list of goods that are objectively conductive to a good life (Crisp, 2017). If a neo-Aristotelian objective list, eudaimonist theory is correct, then human flourishing should be, in principle, empirically verifiable and the goods which contribute to human flourishing possible to demarcate.

The question to which we now turn is, "On a neo-Aristotelian/eudaimonist framework, how, if at all, should these goods be hierarchically arranged?". Adequately answering this question is precisely why it was vital to exegete and evaluate Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013) claims about human nature. Given our nature as ultrasocial reasoning primates, Aristotle's function argument entails that the broad outline of what it means to flourish *qua* human being is not a matter of subjective preference – some things are *objectively* contributive or detrimental to human flourishing. There is an objective list of natural human goods, and some of these goods are more contributive to human flourishing than others. For example, our ultrasocial nature renders connectedness with others a positive contributor to human flourishing, whereas rejection and isolation detracts from our well-being and health (e.g., Cohen, 2004; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Lim et al., 2020; Pantell et al., 2013).

In this final section of the present chapter, I will first outline the different kinds of activities, goals, and goods which contribute to a flourishing human life (eudaimonia). Next, I will advance the following argument: As rational and ultrasocial creatures, goods which entail the exercise of moral virtue and connectedness with others are *objectively* and *naturally* more contributive to human flourishing (eudaimonia), and thus hierarchically superior to goods which do not necessitate such things.

3.3.1. Goals and goods. Fowers (2012, p. 11, footnote 1) differentiates goals from goods as follows. *Goods* refer to abstractions which people regard as choiceworthy. Because of their abstracted nature, goods are not the sorts of things a person can fully possess or achieve in the same way one possesses a house or achieves victory in a tennis match. Rather, goods are things aspired to but never, strictly speaking, possessed by the person who pursues them. Examples of goods include knowledge, justice, and friendship. To say a person possesses or achieves a justice is incorrect, because goods like justice are abstractions which people can only pursue/aspire toward, hoping to approximate them as faithfully as possible in their local circumstances. *Goals*, on the other hand, refer to concrete ways that

people choose to pursue the goods they value. In other words, goals are attainable states of affairs by which a person pursues any specific good(s), thus being local approximations of goods.

Consider the good of knowledge, which can be pursued in a variety of ways: reading a challenging book, attending university, publishing a scientific paper, writing a master's thesis, and other intellectual activities. Each of these activities can be considered goals conducive to the pursuit of knowledge. Nested within these higher order goals, however, are numerous sub-goals, each of which are attainable by finite human creatures. For example, I can progressively complete chapters of this thesis by setting deadlines, which will eventually result in a final manuscript. However, even when I finish writing this thesis, *I will not have achieved the good of knowledge* – I still have so much to learn! Knowledge is an abstraction that will never be fully realized by any human being, given our finite cognitive faculties. But I can choose to live a life dedicated toward pursuing the good of knowledge, which will involve setting and achieving goals that challenge me to grow intellectually.

In sum, *goods* are abstractions that cannot be fully exemplified by finite creatures, whereas *goals* are attainable states of affairs by which such finite creatures approximate and pursue various natural goods. Within a neo-Aristotelian framework, there are four kinds of natural human goods: Individual, instrumental, shared, and constitutive (Fowers et al., 2017). Demarcating these different kinds of goods is most clearly done by contrasting them against each other as follows: individual versus shared goods and instrumental versus constitutive goods.

3.3.2. Individual and shared goods. *Individual goods* are aims which a person pursues and attains individually, and as such do not necessitate the aid or cooperation of others in their pursuit (Fowers et al., 2017). Consider the example of pleasure. Even if, hypothetically, it was only possible to experience pleasure in the company of other people, the experience of pleasure is something that can only be had by an individual. If a person's goals and activities are directed toward experiencing as much

pleasure as possible, this does not necessitate the inclusion of other people. Other examples of individual goods are achievements, material possessions, recognition from others, et cetera.

Shared goods are aims which a person can only pursue in concert with others (Fowers et al., 2017). Goals which are aimed at shared goods, thus, necessarily involve cooperation with others. Friendship is a great example of a good that cannot be pursued in isolation. Friendship, by its nature, entails the mutual goodwill and care between two or more persons for the well-being and flourishing of another person. Friendship is not something a person "has" but rather is pursued collaboratively by two or more persons by engaging in activities aimed at deepening their relationship (e.g., spending quality time together, comforting each other when upset or sad, etc.). Shared goods such as friendship or justice "can only be sought and [their corresponding goals] achieved though sustained collaboration with other people" (Fowers et al., 2017, p. 42).

3.3.3. Instrumental and constitutive goods. *Instrumental goods* are characterized by means-ends activity (Fowers et al., 2017). That is, the value of an instrumental good can be gauged only insofar as the products of one's activities are ultimately aimed at some other desired good. Consider the good of wealth. Activities aimed at accruing wealth are means-ends activities: I sell you some service *X* to receive monetary compensation *Y*, for my services. Furthermore, most people pursue the good of wealth for the sake of obtaining other things, such as material possessions, satisfying basic needs (e.g., nutrition, shelter), providing for one's family, accruing monetary savings for future use, et cetera. Thus, instrumental activities and goods derive their value from the ends and other goods which they are aimed toward.

Constitutive goods, in contrast, are goods in which the means cannot be separated from their corresponding end "because *the means constitute the end*" (Fowers et al., 2017, p. 38, emphasis added). Friendship remains an illustrative example here. Cultivating friendships with others requires that one acts as a good friend would (e.g., supportive, empathetic, loyal). The activities of friendship are

presupposed by the good of friendship, and thus the latter cannot be pursued without the former. This leads to the insight that the pursuit of constitutive goods requires one to embody virtues that are inherently bound up with that good. Consistently acting as a good friend would require a person to embody those virtues which characterize good friendship. This harkens back to Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) insight that virtuous character is a matter of *consistently* acting rightly, at the right time, for the right reasons. Hence, the excellent pursuit of friendship requires one to cultivate the requisite moral virtues (and thus, character) that constitute good friendship. In sum, constitutive goals and activities are inextricably bound up with the ends and goods at which they are aimed.

3.3.4. A Eudaimonic hierarchy of goods. From a eudaimonic perspective, the essence of Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) function argument is that human flourishing is *a kind of life lived that is best for human beings, given the kind of creatures that we are*. As rational and social creatures, a flourishing life only requires the cultivation of virtue in accordance with goods – such as friendship, knowledge, belonging, and justice – which are naturally choiceworthy for human beings, given our nature (Fowers, 2012, 2015). By orienting ourselves toward (a) what is good *qua* human being and (b) that which is fitting to our local circumstances, we gradually make moral virtue a stable and consistent part of who we are, building our moral character.

3.3.4.1. Shared goods as hierarchically superior to individual goods. Given our nature as ultrasocial primates, it follows from Aristotle's function argument that goods shared with others are naturally better for human beings than individual goods. Consider again the deleterious effects loneliness and isolation have on the human psyche, compared to the salubrious effects of connection with others (e.g., Cohen, 2004; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Also recall the neurobiological evidence demonstrating that, when separated from close others (particularly caregivers), oxytocin and opiate levels decrease, which gives rise to feelings of panic and a strong desire to restore proximity and connection with the absent other. Such feelings of connection and safety are so important to human

beings (and other mammals), that depleted levels of oxytocin may prompt individuals to voraciously seek homeostasis and a felt sense of security via the abuse of pharmacological drugs which target these systems (Panksepp, 1998, p. 255).

This and other such evidence support the valid inference that goals and goods which are shared with others are naturally more contributive to human flourishing than those possessed by individuals alone. This is not to say that individual goods are irrelevant to human flourishing. Achieving individual goals (e.g., completing this thesis) and pursuing individual goods (e.g., knowledge) are generally good things. However, our profoundly social nature entails that shared goods like social harmony and belonging within a group are inextricable from living well *qua* human being (Fowers et al., 2017, p. 43).

3.3.4.2. Constitutive goods as hierarchically superior to instrumental goods. Recall that constitutive activity requires the embodiment of virtue(s) that are inseparable from the activity (e.g., being a good friend means consistently acting as a good friend would). In contrast, instrumental, or means-ends activity is concerned merely with outcomes, not the process by which those outcomes are obtained. This leads to an important insight: instrumental goals and/or goods, by their very nature, cannot be choiceworthy in themselves. Rather, they are only valuable insofar as they are directed toward some other end. Consider the instrumental good of wealth. Wealth is an instrumental good because it does not require virtuous action or character to accrue it. One can increase his or her wealth by faithfully going to work and being diligent in one's job duties each day. However, the same goal can be achieved by ignoble means, such as fraud or theft. Further, wealth is a good that is only valuable *in reference to some other good*. For example, having more money allows you to *do* or *get* other things: more food, better housing, a nice car, fancy vacations, et cetera. In other words, virtues – those qualities which enable a person to flourish – are not required in the pursuit of instrumental goods and/or goals.

Instrumental goods and/or goals are by no means evil or irrelevant to human flourishing. Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) recognized that instrumental goods like wealth and social status are

important for living a good human life, “for it is not easy for someone without equipment to do what is noble – many things are done through instruments” (1099a32-1099b1, p. 17). However, (a) instrumental goods do not necessitate virtuous activity or self-development and (b) are not intrinsically choiceworthy because they are always directed at some other goal or good. Both insights illustrate why instrumental goods are hierarchically subordinate to constitutive goods (Fowers et al., 2017).

Constitutive goods are naturally choiceworthy because they require the embodiment of the virtues that enable humans to naturally live well as the kind of creature they are (i.e., as rational and ultrasocial primates). Recall that friendship is a constitutive good and, as such, requires one to embody the virtues relevant to being a good friend, which are determined (in part) by the kind of creature we are. That is, as primates who have evolved capacities for deep pairbonded relationships, our other social relationships are likewise capable of greater depth and complexity than those found among any other creatures on earth (Cozolino, 2014; Dunbar, 2016; Dunbar & Schultz, 2017).

In summary, constitutive goods are naturally choiceworthy for human beings because they require us to embody those characteristics that – given our reasoning and ultrasocial nature – are conducive to living well *qua* human being (Fowers et al., 2017). Given our human nature, constitutive goods such as friendship and justice are evolved, natural goods for human beings. Instrumental goods are valuable and worth pursuing, to be sure, *but only insofar* as they are directed toward other ends and contribute to goods most conducive to human flourishing.

3.3.4.3. The eudaimonic structure of human goods. Perhaps the most crucial element to the neo-Aristotelian theory I have demarcated here is the natural eudaimonic hierarchy of human goods. This hierarchy illustrates that, given our nature as rational and ultrasocial primates, constitutive and shared goods are *naturally more contributive to human flourishing than instrumental or individual goods*. That is, goods that (a) demand the embodiment and/or practice of moral virtue (constitutive) and/or (b) necessitate life lived in concert with other humans (shared) are, given our evolved nature,

naturally better for human beings. Those goods which are most contributive to human flourishing are those which are *both* shared and constitutive. This hierarchical arrangement is aptly illustrated in table form by Fowers (2015), which I have adapted below:

Table 3.1. Eudaimonic Structure of Evolved Goods (adapted from Fowers, 2015, p. 337, Figure 10.1)

		Communal Dimension	
		Individual Goods	Shared Goods
Agentic Dimension	Constitutive Goods	Expertise	Friendship
	Instrumental Goods	Prestige Status	Justice
		Wealth	Security through mutual defense
		Dominance Status	Material goods through trade

Considering the empirical support for Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013) construal of human nature and his function argument, we can at last provide a systematic definition of a flourishing human life. Eudaimonia – the highest human good – is characterized by two things. *First, eudaimonia requires the way these four goods are organized in one's own life to accord with the constraints of our evolved nature*. Given our social and rational nature, a flourishing life is one where shared and constitutive goods are afforded primary value, without neglecting the importance of instrumental and individual goods in service to these goods (Fowers, 2015; Fowers et al., 2017). Hence, the general structure of a flourishing human life can be understood in naturalistic terms, and thus has a basis in objective, verifiable features of a person's life. *Second, it is important that one develop a life narrative which integrates his or her pursuits into a coherent whole*. This narrative integration involves using our evolved rationality and language to clarify our values, inform our deliberations, and commit ourselves to act consistently with our values and goals in life (see McAdams, 2021).

This theory regarding the natural, eudaimonic structure of the human good enjoys additional empirical support from various domains of psychological research, of which I will briefly list five

examples. First, increases in wealth (an instrumental and individual good) are arguably subject to a hedonic treadmill effect (Jebb et al., 2018) and thus not a source of sustaining happiness and meaning. Second, people's mental and physical health significantly deteriorate when isolated from others (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Lim et al., 2020; Pantell et al., 2013). Third, when people feel they belong in a group and/or are supported by others, their overall mental and physical health enjoys a variety of salubrious effects (Cohen, 2004). Fourth, empathic and attentive caregiving is a necessity for healthy brain development (Cozolino, 2014). Lastly, (5) there is abundant evidence demonstrating the human brain evolved to be an ultrasocial organ (e.g., Dunbar, 2016; Dunbar & Schultz, 2017).

All this evidence leads to another important conclusion: flourishing is not merely a matter of a single pleasant experience, nor achieving a greater proportion of pleasant versus unpleasant experiences across one's lifetime. Fowers (2012) helpfully comments, "the good is not simply a matter of psychological experience, but is located in our actions in the world and particularly in the quality of those actions" (p. 11). Eudaimonic functioning is more about the overall quality and coherence of a life well-lived than having positive subjective experiences, giving it a quasi-narrative character rather than a hedonic one. MacIntyre (1981) aptly puts the importance of narrative for eudaimonia this way: "… we can understand the notion of 'good for X' and cognate notions in terms of some conception of the unity of X's life. *What is better or worse for X depends on the character of that intelligible narrative which provides X's life with its unity"* (p. 225, emphasis added). This kind of unified and integrated narrative of one's life – for the neo-Aristotelian – can only be crafted by wholeheartedly committing oneself to the exercise and cultivation of virtue, for virtues are, by definition, those characteristics which enable human beings to live well as the kinds of creatures we are.

In summary, a neo-Aristotelian eudaimonic theory of ethics is an objective list theory which postulates a natural hierarchy of goods that are conducive to human flourishing. A eudaimonic life is characterized by commitment to an ongoing project of crafting a coherent life story, oriented around

characteristic human goods. This is sufficient grounds for saying the things which contribute to a good life are objective, in the sense that they emerge from verifiable aspects of our human nature. Thus, it is possible for a person to be mistaken about what kinds of ends and goods are most contributive to human flourishing (i.e., instrumental and individual goods). *Eudaimonia* is the highest good human beings seek and emerges from the primary pursuit of constitutive and shared goods, as well as organizing all of one's pursuits and aims (including instrumental and individual goods) into a coherent whole in one's life story (Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, 101097b1-2; Fowers, 2015, p. 337, Figure 10.1).

3.3.5. Diversity within the hierarchy of goods. The greatest strength of this neo-Aristotelian perspective of the human good is that it simultaneously provides structure and accommodates diversity in its demarcation of the human good. The neo-Aristotelian eudaimonic structure outlined above affords multiple pathways for an individual to flourish. Each pathway will be variable to individual and cultural differences, but each is ultimately unified by the foundations of our evolved nature (Fowers, 2015; Fowers et al., 2017). One can flourish *qua* human being as a shoemaker, engineer, yogi, psychologist, politician, grandmother, or any other social and cultural role human beings can inhabit. The eudaimonic structure of the good life specifies only *the kind of life* that is best for human beings *given our nature as ultrasocial, reasoning primates*. The structure of the good life thus reveals how our evolved nature shapes and constrains the ways of being that contribute to human flourishing (Fowers, 2015).

The above section constitutes my defense of the sixth premise of the argument listed at the beginning of the chapter: that Aristotle's function argument is successful. The neo-Aristotelian view I have articulated here is what philosophers call an *Objective List Theory* of well-being, specifically the objective list tradition articulated by Fowers (2015) and others (Fowers et al., 2017): that goods such as knowledge, justice, and friendship are naturally best for human beings, and that their optimality is partly explained by being emergent, natural extensions of our evolved ultrasociality and rationality. I have argued that striving for the highest expressions of our natural capacities as ultrasocial beings –

cultivating and developing these potentials excellently (i.e., virtuously), as it were – is a necessary condition to pursue what is naturally best for human beings, and thus for a flourishing life. It is important to stress that I have only articulated the general structure of the human good. In other words, while the specific ends a person might pursue can be highly variable and culturally adaptable, the degree to which one's activities and goals contribute to his or her flourishing is constrained by those common properties which adhere within and emerge from humanity's evolved constitution as reasoning, ultrasocial primates (Fowers, 2012, 2015; Fowers et al., 2017).

3.4. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I defended the following two-step plausibility argument for a neo-Aristotelian perspective of human flourishing (eudaimonia):

1) Aristotle believed humans were social and rational animals.
2) Humans share an evolved social and rational nature.
3) Therefore, Aristotle's beliefs about human nature were (broadly) correct.
4) According to Aristotle's function argument, to flourish well *qua* human being is to live well considering what it means to be human. That is, human nature gives rise to a general eudaimonic structure which demarcates the kind of life that is naturally choiceworthy for human beings (i.e., eudaimonia/flourishing).
5) If Aristotle's function argument is successful, a neo-Aristotelian understanding of the good human life is a robust framework for conceptualizing human flourishing.
6) Aristotle's function argument is successful.
7) Therefore, a neo-Aristotelian understanding of the good life is a robust framework for conceptualizing human flourishing.

I have principally defended premises (2) and (6) in this chapter, which form the lynchpin premises to the conclusions delineated by (3) and (7), respectively. Overall, I have argued that a neo-

Aristotelian function argument is compatible with contemporary findings in psychological science, and thus can render the natural human good comprehensible in terms that are universal across human beings, without affronting the diverse ways that individuals can flourish *qua* human being. I first summarized the foundational Aristotelian concepts of virtue and practical wisdom. Second, I exegeted Aristotle's construal of human beings as rational and social animals in both his *Nichomachean Ethics* (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) and *Politics* (ca. 350 B.C.E./2013). Third, I argued a neo-Aristotelian view of human nature is plausible – humans inherit an evolved ultrasocial and rational nature which a person can cultivate toward *either virtue or vice* (Fowers, 2015). Fourth, I delineated a neo-Aristotelian natural hierarchy of human goods, where *eudaimonia* is characterized by organizing the goods one pursues in a manner consistent with what is naturally good for human beings. Constitutive and shared goods are primary over individual and instrumental goods because they require the embodiment of moral virtue and foster connection and belonging with others. Considering these descriptive facts, it is a short inference to say that functioning well *qua* human being involves the following: connection and bonding with other humans, the right application of reason in moral matters, and living in accordance with the natural structure of human goods (Fowers et al., 2017).

This neo-Aristotelian perspective warrants serious consideration as a framework for human flourishing and the good life. Aristotle presciently surmised that the structure of the human good is inextricably tied up with the distinctive elements of our human nature: our rationality and propensity to form political/social alliances. For Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011), eudaimonia/flourishing is the ultimate good to which humans aspire – the end which people pursue as intrinsically valuable for its own sake (101097b1-2). Being intensely social creatures, connections with others and belonging are integral parts of human flourishing. Our rational capacities must also inevitably come into play in moral matters, either in our exercise of practical wisdom or in our need to rethink and (potentially) revise current practices considering new information and changing circumstances in our world. While the specific ends, goals,

and aims of individuals may differ, there are many pathways to flourishing, constrained only by the eudaimonic structure that emerges from our shared human nature (Fowers et al., 2017).

Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) was careful to emphasize the importance of moral and intellectual virtue in developing our natural characteristics. Both moral and intellectual virtues are cultivated as a matter of instruction and habit – modelled, taught, and learned in the context of the social communities a person inhabits. As a person internalizes cultural values and cultivates the corresponding habits of character (i.e., virtues), he or she become socialized to function well within that local community. To function well *qua* human being is to cultivate moral and intellectual virtues that enable a person to express the potentials of their nature as rational and ultrasocial beings in excellent ways. Excellent expression of human nature entails the authentic pursuit and proper order of one's pursuit of characteristic human goods. Flourishing may indeed look different for communities historically and culturally removed from each other. However, given our ultrasocial and rational human nature, a flourishing human life will retain characteristics which reflect a recognizable universality (Fowers, 2015; Fowers et al., 2017). This universality reflects the eudaimonic hierarchy of goods, which emerges from our evolved nature as rational and ultrasocial primates.

This neo-Aristotelian approach preserves the notion of human flourishing as a way of being with diverse pathways. There is a brilliance to how broadly Aristotle construes a good human life. Aristotle's moral particularism entails that being a virtuous person is not a matter of mere rule-following. Rather, being virtuous is a matter of how well one's intuitions, affections, motivations, thoughts, and behaviours cohere to enjoy doing what is best in each circumstance (Annas, 2016; Fowers, 2008; Sherman, 1997). Eudaimonia cannot be achieved without cultivating virtue, for flourishing is living well in accordance with virtue: pursuing shared and constitutive goods, which are naturally choiceworthy for human beings (Fowers, 2012, 2015). Fowers and colleagues (2017) aptly summarize the completeness of eudaimonia as follows: "The concept… [that one's] life comes together well as a whole and there is a coherence and

sense that ties it all together… eudaimonia is the excellent and most complete expression of the natural characteristics of human beings" (p. 221-222). Aristotle understood eudaimonia as a *kind of life* wherein a person's natural potentials as a human being are expressed in pursuit of natural human goods.

In a world where moral universals are culturally passé, Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) emphasis on context-specificity is one of the most promising features of his moral theory. Because Aristotle was correct in his conception of human nature as ultrasocial and rational beings, psychologists can yield plausible inferences about an objective, eudaimonic structure of the human good (Fowers, 2015). Thus, whatever is best in any given circumstance will ultimately have some grounding in the objective facts of human nature. While human nature does constrain what types of activities, goals, and goods are naturally best for us, it simultaneously leaves numerous possibilities for how any individual human being might flourish in his or her context (Fowers et al., 2017).

The above neo-Aristotelian perspective allows psychologists to tell a naturalistic story that posits what I referred to as an *ontologically thick grounding* (see section 1.4, p. 14-15) for human flourishing: (a) describing meaning and value in a way that is universal and foundational across human beings without (b) bruising the subjectivity and particularity of meaning and well-being between human beings. *The general structure of human flourishing emerges from our evolved human nature, but human nature does not itself describe all the possible ways in which human beings might flourish. Our human nature only delimits which kinds of life are not naturally conducive to a flourishing life. Framing the human good in terms of an objective list/natural eudaimonic hierarchy of goods, this neo-Aristotelian theory is not narrowly prescriptive or proscriptive of specific human activities or practices*. While there are limits to how a person might flourish *qua* human being, there are also many possibilities for how an individual might answer the question, "How can I flourish, in my life, here-and-now?". This simultaneous universality and particularism is perhaps the greatest strength of a neo-Aristotelian approach to understanding a flourishing human life.

Chapter 4. Meaning and Human Flourishing: A Synthesis of Frankl and Aristotle

In the present chapter, I argue that the philosophies of Frankl and Aristotle about meaning and the good human life, respectively, are remarkably compatible. Frankl and Aristotle talked about meaning and flourishing in complementary ways, even presenting the same basic arguments that lead to the same conclusions about what kind of life is best for human beings. Moreover, they appear to have done so independently of each other[15]. A neo-Aristotelian theory of human flourishing (eudaimonia; see Chapter 3: Aristotle and The Good Human Life) enriches and complements some of the claims Frankl was trying to make about meaning in life. If a neo-Aristotelian, naturalistic perspective on human flourishing is viable, then I argue it can help make Frankl's reflections on the centrality of meaning in life more amenable to counselling psychologists.

There are two principal benefits a neo-Aristotelian philosophy of the good human life offers the logotherapeutic understanding of meaning in life. First, Aristotle's concepts of virtue and practical wisdom offer a richer conceptual framework for understanding how people perceive and fulfill meanings in the world. In what follows, I will argue there is a remarkable compatibility between Aristotle's moral particularism and Frankl's meaning particularism. By way of preview, I believe that neo-Aristotelian conceptions of practical wisdom and moral virtue can be regarded as vital for the perception and fulfillment of meanings which manifest themselves to people in concrete circumstances.

The second principal benefit offered to Frankl's logotherapy is Aristotle's understanding of the natural structure of the human good, updating and clarifying Frankl's "will to meaning" and rendering his core ideas more amenable to contemporary psychologists. One of Frankl's (1959/2006, 1969/2014) core beliefs was that meaning was part of the ontological fabric of reality. Frankl was willing to postulate meaning had a transcendent quality and that, because we can perceive meaning in the world, there

[15] To the best of my knowledge, Frankl never cited Aristotle as a source of inspiration for his views about meaning in life. The fact that their arguments and conclusions often converge is thus quite remarkable.

must likewise be a transcendent "spiritual" dimension to human beings. In what follows, I will argue that the neo-Aristotelian view of our evolved, natural eudaimonic structure complements Frankl's claim that "There is no psychotherapy without a theory of man and a philosophy of life underlying it. Wittingly or unwittingly, psychotherapy is based on them" (Frankl, 1969/2014, p. 3). Insofar as such a theory can adequately describe the human good and the activities humans naturally find most meaningful, one can accept the Franklian contention that meaning is ontological. However, rather than construing meaning as "out there", the naturalistic psychologist can explain the objectivity of the human good and meaning as grounded in our nature as ultrasocial, reasoning primates.

However, the advantages of this proposal do not "run" in one direction, from Aristotle to Frankl. The integrative proposal I make in this chapter offers a third advantage for counselling psychologists: the transcendence of meaning and/or the spiritual dimension of human beings are left as open questions. Counselling psychologists should feel free to explore and answer such questions in ways they believe cohere adequately with the philosophical, religious, and/or spiritual beliefs of themselves and/or their clients. On one hand, psychologists with naturalistic philosophical predilections may find a neo-Aristotelian synthesis with Franklian existentialism furnishes a sufficient framework for discussing meaning and the human good. On the other hand, psychologists who are not metaphysical naturalists may find a purely natural account of meaning and the human good inadequate, even if they think my arguments in the prior chapter are plausible. I have avoided making definitive statement(s) about issues of metaethics, metaphysics, the "spiritual dimension" of human beings, or the transcendence of meaning. I am content to leave these as open questions here, free to be answered as individual counselling psychologists see fit.

Frankl's contribution to this synthesis will be felt most strongly for psychologists who (a) are sympathetic to a broadly existentialist perspective in psychotherapy, (b) hold religious and/or spiritual beliefs, and (c) seek to integrate and/or accommodate their beliefs with the datum of contemporary

psychological science. Given contemporary interest in analytic philosophy of religion (see Clark, 2017) and faith and science dialogues (e.g., John Templeton Foundation, 2021), I think there is rich potential to integrate the philosophical and scientific datum covered in this thesis with a variety of philosophic and/or religious traditions that counselling psychologists and – most importantly – their clients may affirm. Insofar as Frankl was willing to entertain metaphysical beliefs which naturalistically inclined psychologists find difficult to accept, they can feel free to explore and develop such metaphysical beliefs within the context of my proposed theory. I hope psychologists with non-naturalistic philosophical predilections can feel free to explore ways which my proposed theoretical perspective may (or may not) be integrated with their own existing beliefs, should they wish to do so.

Ultimately, my theoretical proposal provides common ground for counselling psychologists from a variety of worldview perspectives to discuss the human good in ways amenable to contemporary psychological science and discourse. In what follows, I argue that a Franklian-Aristotelian integration about meaning and the good human life (eudaimonia) can, minimally, offer a philosophically and scientifically robust perspective on the human good, while nevertheless retaining an open stance toward a variety of worldviews and philosophies. I believe such an integrative theory of the good human life has the following benefits for counselling psychology. First, it clarifies counselling psychologists' discourse about human flourishing and well-being by affording it a structure that is compatible with contemporary psychological science. The second advantage of this synthesis is that it leaves larger metaphysical and metaethical questions open, which promotes further development and personalization for psychologists who might endorse it. I hope professionals from multiple worldview perspectives can (a) appreciate the underlying rationale and argumentation for the view, even if they disagree with the view I have proposed, or (b) integrate it with their own existing philosophical and/or religious and spiritual beliefs.

4.1. Common Ground: Frankl and Aristotle's Philosophies of Meaning and the Good Life

Upon closer inspection, the philosophies of Frankl and Aristotle about meaning and the good human life are remarkably similar. There are six key parallels between logotherapy and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics that I will examine in the present section. First, Frankl and Aristotle both concluded pursuing wealth, pleasure, and power were not sufficient to describe a good, meaningful human life. Second, they both believed subjective happiness is not an end that is desirable-in-itself, but is instead best attained as a by-product of pursuing meaningful ends. The third parallel is that practical wisdom and one's moral sensibilities are an important part of perceiving and actualizing potential meanings in life. The similarities in the rationales used by Frankl and Aristotle in their respective discourses on these subjects is what makes the parallels so striking. This parsimony indicates that synthesizing their ideas is worth serious exploration in psychological theory. A fourth area of common ground is their remarkably similar beliefs about the particularism of meaning and morality. A related area of common ground is, fifth, the emphasis that each thinker places on one's conscience in the identification of what is best, right, or most meaningful in specific situations. These similarities are quite striking, leading me to believe that an integrative proposal for these two thinkers' ideas has significant potential.

Lastly, Frankl and Aristotle claimed meaning has a legitimate ontological basis in reality. Aristotle and Frankl offer different explanations on this front, and I will explore the extent to which they can be integrated together in the final section of this chapter. I will propose that, while Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) points counselling psychologists in the right direction for understanding the natural human good, his virtue theory does not answer all the philosophical questions we might wish to ask. I think this is where Frankl can contribute positively to this Franklian-Aristotelian synthesis, as he was quite open to the possibility of integrating religious and spiritual beliefs with his views on meaning in life (Reitinger, 2015). The Franklian-Aristotelian synthesis I am proposing is sufficient to explain the natural human good, but does not explicitly answer significant metaphysical and/or metaethical questions. Such

questions, as far as I am concerned, can be left open for counselling psychologists to explore and/or integrate with their existing philosophical and/or religious/spiritual commitments. I have listed common points of emphasis and potential areas for integration between Frankl and Aristotle in the table below:

Table 4.1. Six Parallels and/or Areas for Integration in Franklian and Aristotelian Thought[16]

Key Idea	Frankl	Aristotle
The Highest Human Good	The Will to Meaning: The desire to find meaning is the most important good human beings seek. The human motivation to find and fulfill meaning(s) in life is so important, in fact, it is pursued for its own sake.	Eudaimonia: To flourish as a human being is the only end pursued for its own sake. There is no good at which eudaimonia is aimed, and all other aims are subsumed under eudaimonia.
Inadequacy of Pleasure	Pleasure is too fleeting to be the ultimate good. Too reductive and not an end in itself. Excessive pleasure-seeking can ensue from existential frustration.	Pleasure is too fleeting to be the ultimate human good. Pleasure is, indeed, good, but one must take pleasure in the appropriate kinds of things that are naturally good for human beings.
Inadequacy of Ambition/Power and Wealth	Self-actualization, wealth, and power are not the ultimate good because (a) they are directed towards something else and (b) is conferred on one by others (risking conformism).	Honour is not the highest human good because it says more about what other people think about you than *who you actually are, as a person* (virtuous or vicious). Neither can accruing wealth (an individual and instrumental good) qualify as good in itself, because it is pursued merely as a means to some other end.
Particularism	Meanings are discovered, and Frankl encourages listening to one's conscience when life presents you with potential meanings to fulfill.	The right thing to do is underdetermined by rules and human nature. This is why virtue and practical wisdom are necessary to (1) discern what is right and (2) act rightly in the

[16] Background sources: Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013), Batthyány, 2010, and Frankl (1959/2006, 1969/2014).

		context of one's situation(s).
Virtue, Attentiveness, and Potential	Conscience as a guide to identifying and fulfilling a unique meaning, which is made manifest in a person's particular situation.	Practical wisdom as the means of discerning/intuiting what is right and how to do it, in a person's particular circumstances.
The Ontological Status of Meaning	Meanings are truly discovered by a subjective experiencer as he or she interacts with an objective world. Objective meanings are, somehow, part of the fabric of reality.	Meaning has a legitimate, objective, ontological status, insofar as it is grounded in human nature. That is, an activity is naturally good or meaningful for a human being if it is conducive to flourishing (a) as an individual and (b) *qua* human being.

Aristotle's understanding of eudaimonia has significant theoretical benefits to offer Frankl's conception of the human will to meaning. To recap, Frankl (1969/2014) believed the most important thing human beings seek is to find and fulfill meanings in life. Meaning, for Frankl, was so lofty a human good that it is pursued as an end-in-itself – something worthy of pursuit for its own sake. Frankl's construal of meaning as intrinsically desirable bears a striking resemblance to how Aristotle described eudaimonia. For Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011), while there are many good and worthy pursuits for people to pursue, the highest human good must be "that at which all [other ends] aim", and "that which is always chosen for itself and never on account of anything else" (1094a2-3**,** p. 1, 1097b35-36, p. 11). According to a review by Huta and Waterman (2014, Table 2, p. 1435), researchers who have explored eudaimonic well-being consistently consider meaning as either (1) a core or (2) close-to-core element of their definitions of eudaimonia. Most notably, they observe the way Blaine Fowers (2012) articulates eudaimonia – functioning well *qua* human being, having (a) constitutive and shared goods being primary

and (b) instrumental and individual goods as secondary – regards meaning and purpose in life as a core element of eudaimonic well-being.

Taking significant inspiration from Fowers' (2012, 2015) view of eudaimonia and his faithfulness to Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) account, I likewise understand meaning to be a core element of a flourishing human life. Thus, there appears a fruitful opportunity to integrate Frankl's reflections on meaning in life with Aristotle's understanding of the natural human good. Once I have explored all the above parallels between these two thinkers, I will conclude that a synthesis of Frankl's and Aristotle's views about the highest human good offer legitimate insights for how counselling psychologists can think and theorize about meaning. In what follows, I will explore each set of parallels in the table above, followed by a defense of this conclusion in the final section of this chapter.

4.1.1. Eliminating candidates for the highest human good. To illuminate the parallels between Frankl and Aristotle regarding the highest human good, it is useful to understand the candidates they both rejected. Specifically, these two thinkers rejected that pleasure- and power-seeking could be the ultimate, or best aims of a person's life. Frankl and Aristotle notably arrived at the same conclusions, even making the same arguments, independently of each other.

4.1.1.1. On the inadequacy of pleasure. From the outset of his *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) set out to discover, out of all the kinds of endeavours and ends that people pursue in life, which type of end is the highest good. He began his search for the ultimate end of human affairs by noting three possible candidates for the highest human good: pleasure, honour, and contemplation. However, Aristotle outright rejected pleasure as a viable candidate as something desirable-in-itself. He austerely refers to those who think pleasure is the highest human good as "crude" and "choosing a life of fatted cattle" (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, 1095b15-23, p. 6).

The principal reason that Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) disregards pleasure as a viable candidate is that pleasure is itself not intrinsically connected to the human good. Pleasant feelings are good, but they are not of ultimate value. Rather, within an Aristotelian framework, pleasant feelings are only good insofar as they are habituated to the appropriate objects and ends. In other words, Aristotle believed whether persons took pleasure in morally virtuous activities (versus vicious activities) was more important than how subjectively happy they were. Provided a person takes pleasure in what is morally virtuous, pleasure is desirable. To enjoy being virtuous is part of what it means to flourish *qua* human being (Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, 1099a7-26). However, it is important to note that moral virtue and good character are given primary value, not the pleasantness of one's experience(s). Where other ethical theories place value on states of affairs, Aristotle places value on the state of a person's character. It is not pleasure-in-itself that counts, but the things one takes pleasure in that matters most.

Frankl (1969/2014) believed a life spent pursuing pleasure could not provide a person with an enduring sense of meaning in life. In the second chapter of my thesis, I mentioned how Frankl's view of pleasure's place amongst the goods of human life were derived from his disagreements with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. According to Freud, unconscious sexual drives were among the principal motivational forces for human beings, and that all human behaviour could ultimately be reduced to psychological drives which governed all human behaviour (Leahey, 2018, p. 258-259). Frankl repudiated this perspective on account of its determinism and its impoverished view of human action. He referred to Freud's view of human motivation as the *homeostasis* or *pleasure principle*: that "the ultimate goal is to obtain that kind of full gratification which would restore the individual's equilibrium in bringing all his desires to rest" (Frankl, 1969/2014, p. 18). Frankl believed this to be woefully inadequate to fully understand the deep complexities of human motivation and behaviour.

In defense of his disagreement with Freud, whom he nonetheless maintained a profound respect for, Frankl (1969/2014) argued that it is not mere pleasure or internal equilibrium that human

beings seek in life. Frankl was incredulous that pleasure should or could be the ultimate aim of one's life, or that pleasure-seeking and homeostatic equilibrium could offer a complete explanation of human behaviour. Against such reductive theories, Frankl cites creative activities of human beings (p. 18) as examples of activities directed toward higher aesthetic values or meaning(s), rather than merely achieving homeostasis or pleasant affective states. He ultimately argued that people are more interested in *finding a meaning that they can take pleasure in fulfilling*.

Frankl believed that pleasure was ultimately not a good that provided a sustaining sense of fulfillment for two additional reasons. First, pleasure is fleeting and ephemeral. Frankl writes that pleasure, when made the primary objective in one's life, proves elusive. Second, he instead contends that people are not looking to merely feel pleasant, but to feel pleasant while engaging in meaningful activities. That is, people are not looking to find happiness for its own sake. Rather, people are looking for meanings in life which, once fulfilled, naturally make one happy (Frankl, 1969/2014, p. 19).

Frankl's (1969/2014) and Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) analyses of pleasure share the same core insights. First, pleasure cannot be the highest human good or pursuit: it is too ephemeral to provide one's life with a robust sense of meaning. Second, it is not merely pleasure that people desire to have in life, but to experience a fuller pleasure which is derived from living meaningfully. The reasons that Frankl (1969/2014) gives for this determination bear a striking resemblance to those given by Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011). For Aristotle, he understood pleasure to be good only in a qualified sense – insofar as it was derived from virtuous activity. Within a neo-Aristotelian, eudaimonist framework of the good human life, it is quite conceivable that meaningful activity and virtuous activity are deeply connected. I will return to this contention later upon analyzing how Aristotle complements Frankl's contention that meaning has an objective ontological basis. For now, I will simply say that a neo-Aristotelian understanding of human nature's implicit teleology, which transcends an individual's subjective interpretations, constrains the range of viable meanings a person can endorse and still flourish *qua*

human being. *If this is true, then there is reason to believe that moral virtue, human nature, and meaning bear some connection with each other.*

4.1.1.2. On the inadequacy of wealth and power/prestige. In his Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle (ca. 340 BCE/2011) also considered a life of honour or prestige as a candidate for the highest human good. However, he ultimately concluded that honour was also inadequate to qualify as the highest human good. Given that Aristotle (ca. 350 B.C.E./2013) was aware of the profound sociality of human beings, one would think he would consider honour as highly desirable. However, he observes that honour is ultimately not something that is a property possessed by a person, but something that is bestowed upon him or her by others, and the ultimate human good should not be so difficult to maintain (Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, 1095b25-28). Most importantly, however, Aristotle believed a person should not seek honour as a good-in-itself. Rather, one should desire to be honoured for their virtuosity, particularly by other virtuous people (1095b28-29).

In addition, wealth does not qualify as the ultimate human good because it is an instrumental good, thus only possessing value insofar as it is aimed at some further goal or good. To be clear, Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) was no puritan – he was not saying that wealth and honour were evil things. In fact, he was quite clear that both are good for people to have – that they each play a role in a flourishing human life (see 1095b31-35). Nevertheless, he was equally clear that the value of these goods was ultimately subsidiary to those which are most conducive to communal life and require the embodiment of moral and intellectual virtue(s). Thus, for Aristotle, though wealth and honour are valuable things that contribute to a person's flourishing, they both fail to qualify as the highest human good. The highest human good, eudaimonia, as noted in chapter 3 of this thesis, is to live a life oriented toward constitutive and shared goods – which by their nature require the embodiment and cultivation of virtue. While instrumental and individual goods surely play a role in a flourishing life, they are ultimately subsidiary to constitutive and shared goods in a flourishing human life (Fowers 2012).

Frankl's views of power and status as the ultimate human good stems from his critical evaluation of Alfred Adler's view of power/status as the fundamental human motivation. Frankl calls the Adlerian view of human behaviour and motivation "the status drive" and dismisses the possibility that status/prestige is intrinsically desirable. Why? Frankl (1969/2014) claims that a person who prioritizes the pursuit of social status above all else might "be dismissed by others as a status seeker" (p. 20). It appears that Frankl had in mind someone who "instrumentalizes" his or her relationships with others: seeing others only as means to an end for acquiring greater status in social hierarchies. In other words, when a person's status striving becomes excessive, he or she will find it difficult to attain status, as others dismiss him or her on account of their instrumentalizing behaviour.

Regarding both Freudian and Alderian views, Frankl thought that construing human behaviour as ultimately motivated by drives for status and/or pleasure reduced people to mere objects, closed systems, rather than human beings with dignity and free will. This was a very unwelcome conclusion, which Frankl was wont to reject:

> "The objects of the world are seen… only as more or less useful tools for the maintenance of homeostasis. There is no room left for anything such as causes and partners are devaluated to the level of mere means to an end, namely the end of restoring certain conditions in the subject's psychic system… as soon as the objects in one's world are considered merely as means to the end of need satisfaction, they may be neglected or even omitted altogether." (Frankl, 2010c, p. 94-95).

Such a disenchanted reductionism and instrumentalism of other persons, for Frankl, was inadequate to capture the fullness of human experience, goodness, and meaning. He believed such reductive analyses neglect the most desirable pursuit for human beings: the finding and fulfilling of a potential meaning in his or her life. As we have seen previously, Frankl (1969/2014) referred to this innate striving as the *Will to Meaning*. For Frankl, it is meaning that is intrinsically desirable for human

beings. Power and status are only valuable insofar as one can use them for other ends and are highly transient. People's opinions of others can rapidly change, and the agent is not always in control of what others will think of him or her. Furthermore, Frankl argues, pursuing status is self-defeating because others see through one's instrumental motivations for greater status, and subsequently think less of them. Thus, status-striving can often paradoxically result in status reduction. Insofar as wealth is derivative from "the will to power", Frankl (1969/2014) believes the same critiques apply to striving for greater wealth as one's primary aim in life.

Frankl (1969/2014) and Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) held similar beliefs about wealth and its relationship to the ultimate human good. Both recognized that wealth has only instrumental value. Money can only be valuable insofar as it enables someone to acquire more material resources or pursue some higher good. Such insights are consistent with findings that, in global samples, a hedonic treadmill effect has been observed relating to wealth and subjective well-being. After certain income levels have been reached, which varies by country and education level, recent findings indicate the relationship between wealth and subjective well-being eventually reaches a satiation point where additional income does not significantly and/or stably increase one's subjective well-being (Jebb et al., 2018). While wealth is important for one's well-being, insofar as it enables a person to satisfy basic needs, it is insufficient on its own to secure a flourishing human life.

Frankl and Aristotle also recognized that status, though valuable, is too unstable to qualify as the ultimate human good. Most interestingly, Frankl and Aristotle seem to agree that one's pursuit of status should be linked with how one behaves. For Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011), one should seek to be honoured for one's virtue, not merely to be honoured by others. Frankl (1969/2014), likewise, believed that honour and "power" were incomplete in themselves – that they failed to qualify as goods perceived by human beings as intrinsically valuable. Rather, such things have significance only insofar as they are directed toward the pursuit and fulfillment of meanings, which are connected to how one behaves

insofar as he or she chooses to actualize a potential meaning or not. Thus, Frankl believed that pleasure was ultimately the effect of meaningful activity, whereas "power" (economic or social) is ultimately valuable only insofar as they furnish the means for fulfilling potential meaning(s).

In summary, Frankl (1969/2014) and Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) once again make strikingly similar arguments as they considered and eliminated potential candidates for the human good. Both agreed that wealth, status, and "power" could not be the ultimate good, as their value is found as they are directed toward further goals and goods. Once again, we begin to see a possible connection between meaning and moral virtue. That is, wealth and power are only valuable insofar as they are directed towards the fulfillment of a meaning, which (presumably) requires moral virtue to be fulfilled. Considering the neo-Aristotelian theory I explicated in chapter 3, we see that wealth and power are merely instrumental and individual goods, not shared or constitutive goods. Honour, for example, only has merit if one is honoured for virtuous behaviour. Because honour does not necessarily reflect our true character, it does not qualify as a constitutive good. If meaning and moral virtue are, in fact, somehow connected to each other, then we begin to see how Frankl and Aristotle might be integrated with each other to furnish a more robust theory of human meaning and flourishing.

4.1.2. Particularism and practical wisdom. Another area of common ground between Frankl (1959/2006, 1969/2014) and Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) is the importance they place on the particularity of concrete circumstances in their theories of meaning and virtue, respectively. Frankl's particularism centres on meaning, whereas Aristotle's particularism focuses on how the right thing to do is ultimately contingent upon specific situations, rather than universal rules or laws. It seems to me that a synthesis between these two positions might be achieved if we can posit a means by which meaning and morality are plausibly connected with each other. I contend that a neo-Aristotelian view of human nature offers a viable way to connect Frankl and Aristotle's particularism, thus being a significant contribution Aristotle offers Frankl's theoretical views about the need for meaning in human life.

On the neo-Aristotelian view of the human good I have defended in this thesis (see Chapter 3), constitutive and shared goods are naturally best and most meaningful for human beings (see Fowers, 2012, 2015). If one regards a neo-Aristotelian view of the human good to be defensible, he or she might be able to plausibly say that those goods which are naturally most choiceworthy for human beings – i.e., shared and constitutive activities and/or goods – are also what is naturally most meaningful for human beings. In other words, on a neo-Aristotelian account like the one defended in chapter three of this thesis, it can be said there is a plausible connection between meaning and moral virtue. That is, moral virtues are the characteristics that enable a person to fulfill the specific meanings that life presents to him or her. I will develop this idea further by summarizing Frankl's (1959/2006, 1969/2014) and Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) meaning and moral particularisms in the next sub-section.

4.1.2.1. Frankl's meaning particularism. As I noted earlier (see section 2.3.2.3. of this thesis, p. 42), Frankl was agnostic about the reality of ultimate meaning in life, concluding that the answer to that question was likely inscrutable, given the finitude of human reason. However, his agnosticism about the question of ultimate meaning did not prevent him from making definitive proclamations about the reality of particular meanings in life. At the heart of Frankl's "will to meaning" is the idea that humans are drawn toward the fulfillment of particular meanings, and that it is such meanings which give people's lives an enduring sense of happiness and satisfaction. Frankl describes meanings as only perceptible in concrete, particular situations. As one engages with an objective world, he or she is presented with potential meanings to fulfill. Once a meaning has manifested itself in one's circumstances, a person is then faced with a choice: to fulfill the potential meaning or to let it slip into the past, forever unfulfilled (Frankl, 2010h). In sum, Frankl (1969/2014) was quite clear that, while the answer to the question of ultimate meaning may be inscrutable, the reality and discovery of specific life meanings in the here-and-now is not as opaque.

Frankl is willing to say that meaning is *discovered, not created*, as one engages with an objective world which presents to him or her meaning(s) to fulfill. For Frankl, meaning seems to have a mind-independent ontological status within the fabric of reality. This is a striking ontological claim, in contrast to other existential thinkers. While Frankl seems to have sometimes been agnostic, yet hopeful, about the possibility that an ultimate Meaning truly exists, he clearly affirmed that specific situations presented to people with potential meanings to fulfill that were, somehow, real in an ontologically "weighty" sense. That is, meaning is not a mere psychological or post hoc projection, but something "out there" that people genuinely discover as they interact with an objective world (Frankl, 1969/2014).

Frankl first began to think of meaning as ontological during his clinical work. When he attended to the phenomenological descriptions his patients gave regarding meaning in their lives, he observed that meaning *seems* to manifest itself to people, rather than perceiving themselves as projecting meaning onto the world (Batthyány, 2010; Frankl, 1969/2014). These potential meanings always manifest themselves to people in the context of particular circumstances, bound within the concreteness of one's context and current situation. Despite this particularity, however, Frankl's observations were that people experienced meaning as something discovered, not created or invented (contra Sartre, 2016; see Frankl, 1969/2014, p. 41).

Once a person encounters a potential meaning, he or she is presented with a choice to actualize that meaning or not (Frankl 2010h). There is also a quasi-cognitive aspect to the perception of meaning – Frankl would call it a perception of man's spirit apprehending the transcendence of meaning. That is, it is only when one takes seriously the spiritual dimension of human beings that one will realize that meaning is real, perceivable, and sense-able (but not in a purely empirical way). Because meaning is found and not given, individuals are thus responsible "for finding the *true* meaning of a situation" (Frankl, 1969/2014, p. 42, italics in original). In those moments when meaning(s) present themselves to

us, Frankl (1959/2006, 1969/2014) advises people to (1) listen to their own conscience and (2) attune it to be receptive to and perceptive of potential meanings that life presents to them.

Finally, Frankl was adamant that life was *always* full of potential meaning(s) even in the face of our finitude and/or suffering. Frankl (1959/2006, p. 137-154) was an advocate for what he called *tragic optimism* – the belief that one's life continues to have meaning, and that all human beings have potentials that allow them to fulfill those meanings – despite the *tragic triad* of life: (1) pain, (2) guilt, and (3) death. Because of his beliefs in meaning realism and free will, Frankl believed a person always had the capacity to transform any aspect of the tragic triad into a story of triumph and achievement, which will naturally ensue if one attends to and fulfills the meanings life presents to him or her.

It is particularly interesting that Frankl regards one's conscience as playing a crucial role in the perception of potential meaning(s). In his essay, *What is Meant by Meaning?*, Frankl defines conscience as "that intuitive capacity of man to find out, or scent out, the meaning of a situation" (Frankl, 2010i, p. 182). Frankl seems to be quite willing to treat the human "sense" that meaning and value are discovered, not invented, as what philosophers call *a properly basic belief*: a foundational belief that is rational to accept even if one is without recourse to evidence or arguments to justify their truth (Goldman & McGrath, 2015, p. 7-8, 13). Examples of basic beliefs may include (1) I exist/am conscious, (2) the external world is real, or (3) whoever is reading this thesis has a conscious mind like my own. Such beliefs are seldom argued for before a person believes them to be true, nor is it clear how one could argue for them in such a way that all skeptical doubt could be eliminated. Among epistemologists – philosophers who study knowledge and how beliefs are justified – it is common to regard basic beliefs as furnishing the foundations upon which all other intellectual inquiry must rest (Steup & Neta, 2020, sec. 4.1, para. 1), thus frequently called *foundationalism* (Goldman & McGrath, 2015, p. 7-8, 13).

To be sure, Frankl never explicitly states that he is an epistemological foundationalist or that belief in the objective existence of meaning is properly basic. However, Frankl can plausibly be

understood as viewing the meaningfulness of Being as properly basic – not something necessarily reasoned to or intellectualized about (i.e., inductively, deductively, or abductively argued for), but nevertheless rational to believe as part of the fabric of reality on the basis of one's ordinary experience, unless one is presented with an overriding defeater for that belief. In many of his publications, Frankl seems implicitly committed to the proper basicality of believing in the existence of meaning(s) in life, such as his famous quip, "*Logos* is deeper than logic" (Frankl, 1959/2006, p. 188; Frankl, 2010j, p. 192), or that the inherent meaningfulness of life is unable to "be grasped by merely intellectual means" and that one must have a "basic trust in Being" (Frankl, 2010j, p. 190).

Frankl (2010j) had a strong conviction that life was pregnant with meaning at every moment, in every possible circumstance. If people were attuned to the possibility that their lives had meaning, they would see that every situation, even the worst suffering, contained a potential meaning to either fulfill or let pass away (Frankl, 1969/2014, 2010d, p. 117-120, 2010h, p. 171-176). An individual must thus make the choice whether he or she will fulfill that meaning or let it pass away forever into the past, unfulfilled. This latter point will be important for the reader to remember, as it is directly relevant for how Franklian existentialism and Aristotelian virtue theory may be fruitfully integrated.

4.1.2.2. Aristotle's moral particularism. Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) was keenly aware that the right thing to do is often difficult to discern. Earlier, I discussed how the virtuous person is understood to be one who habitually and consistently thinks, feels, and acts in ways appropriate to his or her circumstances (see section 3.1. of this thesis, p. 51). For Aristotle, practical wisdom plays the most important role in guiding virtuous action. In other words, the virtuous person is one who exemplifies practical wisdom: demonstrating discernment about what is at stake and shrewdly pursues what is best, given the circumstances. In other words, it is a critical aspect of virtuosity is to be able to adapt one's behaviour to his or her specific situation(s). For Aristotle, practical wisdom is the master virtue: without it, one cannot properly behave virtuously, especially in morally complex situations.

4.1.2.3. The role of practical wisdom in finding meaning. As a person cultivates a given virtue, such as courage, he or she becomes skilled at enacting it adaptively in situations where that moral virtue is required (e.g., Annas, 2016). This moral skill is regarded as being a result of cultivating practical wisdom (*phronesis*), which Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) regarded as coextensive with moral virtue – to cultivate moral virtue is to simultaneously cultivate practical wisdom. Fowers (2003) emphasizes that practical/phronetic reasoning is *not* merely a means-ends reasoning process. Rather, it is a complex consideration of which actions align with the kind of life a person wants to lead while simultaneously addressing the important moral facets of the situation at hand. I believe Frankl (1969/2014) inadvertently summarized practical wisdom's vital role in identifying potential meanings when he wrote the following:

> "We live in an age of crumbling and vanishing [moral and religious] traditions… Universal values are on the wane… In an age where the Ten Commandments seem to lose their unconditional validity, man must learn more than ever to listen to the ten thousand commandments arising from the ten thousand unique situations of which his life consists. And as to *these* commandments, he is referred to, and must rely on, his conscience" (p. 44-45, italics in original).

Frankl's definition of the term "conscience" constitutes another independent parallel to how Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) described the function of practical wisdom. Frankl (2010i, p. 182) defines *conscience* as an intuitive perception that one's situation has a potential meaning to fulfill. This is consistent with what Fowers (2003) calls *moral perception*: that aspect of practical wisdom describing one's perceiving a situation as morally significant and calling for a particular response. If practical wisdom is the intellectual virtue by which a person perceives what is important and enacts moral virtue(s) appropriately in concrete circumstances, then this represents another fruitful area in which the ideas of Frankl and Aristotle might be integrated with each other.

In my proposed Franklian-Aristotelian synthesis, I think we can construe the relationship between moral perception, deliberation, and meaning(s) in the following way. Moral perception – constituted by whatever processes mediate the recognition of a situation's morally salient features – alerts us to the fact that a potential meaning exists to be fulfilled in the present moment. Next, deliberation is involved in planning how best to fulfill that meaning. To discern how best we might fulfill the meaning that life as presented to us, we must consider how best to embody the relevant moral virtue(s) at that moment, especially in cases where rules seem to be ill-fitting (Fowers, 2003). Thus, the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom might be said to mediate the recognition of potential meanings, while deliberation constitutes the process by which one discerns how he or she might best fulfill that meaning. Here we begin to see how morality and meaning may be thought to overlap. That is, we might integrate Frankl's and Aristotle's views by saying moral perception is how one intuits what is of moral significance, and that what is morally significant has direct relevance to the fulfilling or not-fulfilling of a potential meaning. In complex situations, we may need to recruit our slower, non-intuitive cognitive faculties to discern *how* best to fulfill a potential meaning in our lives.

The first two elements of practical wisdom do not involve taking action *to fulfill a potential meaning*. It also stands to reason that the fulfillment of a potential meaning will require one to, at least temporarily, act as a virtuous person would to bring a meaning from potentiality into actuality. Because acting rightly is one of the central criteria for possessing a given moral virtue (Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011; Fowers et al., 2021), moral choice (see Fowers, 2003) must comprise a crucial part of fulfilling any potential meaning.

4.1.2.4. The role of virtue in fulfilling potential meanings. Both meaning and virtue are integral to a eudaimonic life (Fowers, 2012; Huta & Waterman, 2014; Wong, 2011). Frankl's view that meaning arises from specific situations maps on well to the context-dependency of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. Therein lies a key insight Aristotle offers logotherapy. Amid the complexity of our lives, practical wisdom

is necessary to identify what is most important/meaningful, and moral virtue is necessary for fulfilling that potential meaning.

Considering Frankl's (1959/2006, 1969/2014) axiom that life always has a potential meaning, we can have a robust theoretical framework to inform how we encourage people to find and fulfill potential meanings in life, despite the difficulty of their circumstances. We can ask our clients to clarify their values or reflect what their affections indicate to them as most important to them, then encourage them to develop themselves toward those goods that promote connection and self-improvement. While this is certainly not easy – particularly for people embroiled in suffering and/or grappling with a feeling that their life is meaningless – it may be necessary for them to *find* the potential meaning(s) which exists in their lives and relationships, despite their adverse circumstances.

Encouraging the development of virtue as a pathway to discover meaning despite suffering, is not a novel suggestion by me (e.g., Fowers, 2017; Wong, 2011). In the seventh chapter of his book, *Emotional Schema Therapy*, notable clinical psychologist Robert Leahy (2015) has made similar comments to my own. He contends, consistently with Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011), that emotions play a central role in identifying or signaling what is important and meaningful to us in the world. Thus, the plausible connection between moral perception (Fowers, 2003; see also Annas, 2016) and emotion for identifying what is morally important finds therapeutic expression. Namely, our emotions alert us that something matters to us, and it is worthwhile to accept and attend to what our feelings may be revealing to us in the present moment.

With Frankl's writings in mind, Leahy (2015) exhorts therapists to encourage their clients to face their suffering nobly – committing themselves to values and meanings which sustain them despite their suffering. Such an approach is consistent with my proposed synthesis of Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) and Frankl's (1959/2006, 1969/2014) beliefs: that living in accordance with virtue is more important and meaningful than "mere happiness". A life dedicated to the cultivation of virtue and wisdom is more

meaningful than a life oriented *only* toward increasing subjective happiness. Leahy's remarks about the relationship between emotion, meaning, value, and moral virtue are worth quoting here at length:

> "A major objective of emotional schema therapy is to assist the patient in clarifying which values, goals, personal qualities of character or virtue are important, and to link emotions to these purposes… in an attempt to place emotions into a larger context of meaning, and to encourage the individual to accept the difficulties that emotions may [lead to] in order to live a more complete life. The goal is not necessarily a 'happy life'… the goal is not to live an easy life… the goal is not feeling good… *rather than aiming for feeling good, the goal is to be able to live a life where one is willing to accept feeling everything in order to achieve a more complete, richer, and more meaningful life. If suffering is part of that life, then the goal is to live a life worth suffering for*." (Leahy, 2015, p. 198-199, emphasis added).

Fowers and colleagues (2017) aptly observe that virtues are the qualities which we use to cope with and live well within our frailties and limitations. Given our finitude, virtues are those traits which enable people to bear their limitations with excellence, thus enabling people to fulfill the potential meanings that life presents to them. Practical wisdom is a useful construct to describe how we perceive the opportunities to fulfill a potential meaning, and it is via the embodiment of moral virtue that one fulfills specific life meanings. Meaning is a core element of a eudaimonic life (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Fowers, 2012; Wong, 2011) and requires commitment to cultivating moral virtue and practical wisdom, which are the characteristics that enable us to live well, both as an individual and *qua* human being. Furthermore, there are many therapeutic modalities – such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Compassion-Focused Therapy, Existential-Humanistic Therapy, and Narrative Therapy – which emphasize the importance of helping clients attend to their emotions, integrating their experiences in a coherent linguistic format, and/or putting clients in touch with deeper values that can sustain their

commitment to change. Thus, I believe that my proposed Franklian-Aristotelian synthesis has much to offer the world of contemporary counselling psychology.

Because the things we find meaningful also tend to carry a perceived moral significance, moral virtue and practical wisdom are vitally important for engaging in meaningful actions. My central contention for integrating Frankl and Aristotle in this area is as follows: *practical wisdom can be understood as the means by which one perceives potential meanings, and moral virtue as the characteristics necessary to (a) make those meanings a reality and (b) live a complete, rich, and meaningful life* (i.e., eudaimonia; see Fowers et al., 2017; Wong, 2011). Because many situations are morally complex, prescribing what is right (or meaningful) via rules, regulations, or algorithms is often futile (Fowers, 2003). Ultimately, ensuring one's moral compass and actions are properly calibrated requires developing character strengths, virtues, and having a clear understanding about the human good (Fowers, 2008; Fowers et al., 2017). Having an ethic grounded in what it means to be human illuminates what flourishing *qua* human being looks like, and a Franklian-Aristotelian approach fits remarkably well with Wong's (2011) definition of eudaimonia: as "meaning plus virtue" (p. 75).

4.1.3. The ontological status of meaning. Most existential philosophers are meaning antirealists/nominalists: They believe that there is no objective meaning outside of an individual's own subjective interpretations and/or projections (Aho, 2014). They regard existence as fundamentally absurd, because humankind is condemned to create meaning in the context of a cosmos devoid of *telos*, or purpose (Camus, 2016; Yalom, 1980). On this view, meaning can only be defined in terms of the choices and interpretations an individual makes – there is no essence, or nature, which constrains our choices or interpretations. We act first, then create meanings as we explain and interpret ourselves, others, and our circumstances (Sartre, 2016; Taylor, 2016). Unlike Frankl, most 20th century existentialists believe(d) there is no meaning "out there" in the objective world to be discovered.

Trapped within our own individual historical and perspectival horizons, meaning is created via one's interpretations of reality, rather than perceiving anything that is meaningful "in itself" (Aho, 2014).

In contrast to his existentialist contemporaries, Frankl explicitly (1969/2014) rejected the theme of existence preceding essence; that meanings are created rather than discovered. Contra Sartre, Frankl observed that his patients phenomenologically experienced meaning as if it is something *found*, not created (Frankl, 1969/2014, p. 48). Because he took phenomenological analysis of his patients seriously, Frankl believed meaning was somehow a perceptible part of the ontological fabric of reality, which he attempted to make sense of in terms of his dimensional ontology. Frankl's dimensional ontology, however, requires a commitment to a substantial interpretation of the self. Substantial or essentialist views of the self are not popular amongst psychologists today, who typically opt for more relational, dynamic, and/or reductionist views of the self. Thus, Frankl's substantial view of the self may be understandably difficult for many psychologists to "stomach" philosophically, presenting a barrier to appropriating his insights within their own theorizing about the ontological status of meaning in life. Many psychologists presume meanings to be mere *post hoc* psychosocial constructions (i.e., meaning antirealism), rather than truly discovered amid the ontological fabric of reality (i.e., meaning realism).

Aristotle's proposal for an "objective", mind-independent grounding for the human good in our nature as rational and social animals also conflicts with the meaning antirealism of 20th century existentialism. My Franklian-Aristotelian perspective on the ontological status of meaning can accommodate a variety of naturalist and non-naturalist beliefs. This perspective does not require commitment to transcendent/spiritual ontological entities or a substantial ontology of human beings, but neither is it mutually exclusive with such beliefs. In what follows, however, I will simply assume a naturalist version of the ontological status of meaning, as I presume this to be a more congenial metaphilosophical view among psychologists today.

One advantage of integrating Frankl's views with the neo-Aristotelian view of the human good is that it allows one to affirm meaning is ontological without necessarily being committed to a substantial ontology of persons or positing that meaning as "floating throughout" reality. My core argument here is that *if meaningful human activity ultimately has its foundations in human nature and those activities which are naturally most conducive to flourishing qua human being, then one can say meaning has a natural ontological basis.* That is, shared and constitutive human activities and goods can be construed as objectively meaningful *in the sense* that they are naturally best for human beings, given our nature as ultrasocial and rational primates. On a purely naturalistic version of my Franklian-Aristotelian synthesis, human meaning and flourishing can be understood as grounded in our ultrasocial and rational nature as human beings. Humans function best when they feel a sense of belonging in community with others. Humans also function best when their life narrative has a sense of coherence and their actions and pursuits in life are autonomously chosen for good reasons (Fowers et al., 2017). In other words, a thoroughgoing naturalist can endorse a neo-Aristotelian view of the human good and, in a limited sense, say that meaning in life has an objective ontological basis in human nature.

The neo-Aristotelian view I have defended here is inclusive toward naturalistically inclined psychologists who find substance ontologies philosophically untenable by (minimally) allowing them to appeal to our evolved human nature as the foundation for the human good. As Haidt (2006) aptly writes: "Only by knowing the kinds of beings that [humans] actually are, with the complex mental and emotional architecture that we happen to possess, can anyone even being to ask about what would count as a meaningful life" (p. 215). I think psychologists are in a good position to discuss the structure of a naturally meaningful human life. A good human life is one in which shared and constitutive goods are pursued foremost because they require the cultivation of virtue and connection with others. On the other hand, instrumental and individual goods are secondary in the hierarchy of goods, having value insofar as they promote the pursuit of shared and constitutive goods (see Fowers 2012).

4.1.4. Meaning and flourishing: A Eudaimonic synthesis. I propose Frankl's theory of meaning and Aristotle's articulation of eudaimonia can be fruitfully integrated. The eudaimonic structure of the evolved human good, as articulated by Fowers (2015), shapes and constrains those activities which human beings *naturally* find meaningful. Thus, Frankl's (1969/2014) rejection of the existentialist credo "existence precedes essence" (Aho, 2014; Sartre, 2016) can be defended anew by incorporating a neo-Aristotelian view of human nature preceding an individual's existence. Furthermore, this provides a new way of expressing the notion that meaning is part of the fabric of reality – namely, meaning emerges from the pursuit of goods which are naturally good for human beings, given our evolved nature as ultrasocial and rational animals. This achieves the same end that Frankl (1969/2014) sought, without requiring one to endorse his dimensional ontology and/or a substantial view of the self. A synthesis with Aristotelian philosophy renders Frankl's insights about meaning in life more amenable to a wider range of psychologists, who hold a variety of philosophical and worldview perspectives.

4.2. Aristotle's Contribution: A Naturalistic Account of Meaning and the Human Good

Among researchers who investigate eudaimonic well-being, Huta and Waterman (2014. Table 2, p. 1435) report that "meaning" is regarded as either a core or close-to-core element within all psychological definitions of eudaimonia, particularly in the model of eudaimonic well-being as articulated by Fowers (2012, 2015). In the previous chapter, I gave my own neuroevolutionary case in defense of Fowers' eudaimonic structure of evolved human goods (see Fowers, 2015, p. 337, Figure 10.1). Articulating the evolutionary roots of the natural human goods adds theoretical depth to Wong's (2011) insightful definition of eudaimonia as "[a life] characterized by the pursuit of virtue/excellence, meaning/purpose, doing good/making a difference, and the resulting sense of fulfillment or flourishing" (p. 70; see also Huta & Waterman, 2014). Thus, I agree with Fowers' (2012, 2015) general conclusions about the emergent structure of the human good, which is grounded in our evolved human nature as ultrasocial and rational primates.

The theoretical structure of the human good articulated in my third chapter is, in my opinion, the strongest candidate for a purely naturalistic account of ethics and the human good. It goes beyond the scope of this thesis to survey naturalistic alternatives for an "objective" ground to the human good and/or meaning. For the time being, I will simply state that I find a neo-Aristotelian perspective to be incredibly fruitful, providing genuine insights about what is naturally good and meaningful for human beings. Furthermore, because this theoretical structure of the human good is grounded in data from evolutionary, developmental, social, and neuroscientific areas of psychological study, the psychologist who is a metaphysical naturalist can feel satisfied that he or she does not have to appeal to Frankl's opaque talk of meaning being a transcendent or spiritual part of reality. Such a psychologist can feel free to endorse my theoretical proposal without having to accept any of Frankl's postulations that do not fit well with their naturalistic beliefs.

Another advantage of the neo-Aristotelian theory articulated here is that it does not narrowly prescribe particular actions for living well *qua* human being. In fact, there is nothing in the theory which states that living well *qua* human being is in any way morally obligatory. Rather, the theory only entails it is *naturally better* for human beings to cultivate our natural evolved potentials for virtue and to seek belonging in our respective communities. Thus, a psychologist can accept the natural structure of the human good while still maintaining a robust moral pluralism. On such a pluralistic view, the goals and ends conducive to eudaimonia will be particularized for each person in their local sociohistorical context(s), though these are constrained by and nested within the evolved eudaimonic structure of a good human life (see Fowers, 2012, 2015). This means that, in clinical and counselling contexts, a psychologist can adopt the logotherapeutic stance of helping clients discover their own particular meaning(s) while respecting their autonomy to choose to fulfill those potential meanings or not.

4.3. Frankl's Contribution: Metaethical and Metaphysical Issues are Left as Open Questions

While naturalism may be a pervasive metaphilosophical view amongst contemporary psychologists, it is certainly not the only view which to which psychologists can defensibly ascribe. To the best of my knowledge, there is no data available cataloguing the philosophical beliefs of professional psychologists (Canadian or otherwise). However, surely there are some Canadian psychologists who hold religious and/or spiritual beliefs – such as beliefs in souls, spiritual beings, gods, God, et cetera. While religious belief has been declining in Canada, most Canadians still regard religious belief to be an important part of their lives (PEW Research Center, 2013, 2018). Furthermore, it is currently the mainstream view in cognitive science of religion that humans possess evolved cognitive adaptations that naturally incline us toward religious and/or spiritual beliefs (e.g., Barrett, 2000; Barrett & Lanman, 2008), and that shared religious beliefs facilitate ingroup loyalty, thereby promoting the survival of our Pleistocene ancestors (e.g., Haidt, 2012). Of course, such data says nothing about the truth or falsity of such religious or spiritual beliefs, so I am not pronouncing any verdict on that point. My contention here is an attenuated one: that humans have a natural propensity to hold and accept religious and/or spiritual beliefs. For psychologists and clients whose religious and/or spiritual beliefs matter greatly to them, a purely naturalist account of meaning and the human good may not seem congenial.

Additionally, numerous philosophers have expressed discontent with purely naturalistic, evolutionary accounts of ethics. Some argue naturalism plus evolutionary processes are insufficient to explain important moral phenomena like moral knowledge or the moral value of persons (Linville, 2009, 2020; Street, 2006). Metaethically, equivocating what is good *qua* human being with moral goodness is presumptuous-at-best. Naturalism plus evolution entails there is no ethical *telos* to human nature. Given that evolutionary processes track differential reproductive success (Al-Shawaf et al., 2018; Gregory, 2009) but not truth, such philosophers consider it presumptuous to think that a robust moral realism or moral knowledge can be secured based on evolved human nature alone (see Street, 2006). Humans

could have evolved a nature which disposes us to prefer any number of different "goods" which we (in the actual world) might intuitively think reprehensible (e.g., Hunter & Nedelisky, 2018; Ruse, 2020). In other words, "naturally good" and "morally good" are, quite conceivably, very different things.

I have tried to carefully discuss human flourishing using phrases like "the human good", "naturally best", or "naturally good" to ensure I do not freight my theory with greater metaethical weight than I believe it can bear. My readers are not required to agree with my reservations about dissolving the is/ought distinction. However, those who reject ethical or ontological naturalism may find the neo-Aristotelian theory of the human good and/or meaning I have explicated here likewise incomplete. Nevertheless, it is not relevant to the central claim of my thesis whether the objections to a naturalistic neo-Aristotelian account of ethics and the human good are decisive. I do not intend to settle these metaethical and metaphysical disputes here. Nevertheless, I believe Aristotle gets us going in the right direction insofar as he accurately describes the *natural human good*. For those who find Aristotle's virtue theory promising but incomplete, my theory does not exclude non-naturalist metaphysical and/or religious/spiritual perspectives about ethics, meaning, and other ultimate questions of life. Exploring the territory of culture, myth, and religion are perfectly viable avenues of investigation for psychologists to consider in their quest to understand a meaningful, good human life (Wong, 2011, p. 73).

Engagement with my synthesis of Frankl's and Aristotle's ideas could contribute to the contemporary scholarly discussion about how science and religion/spirituality can dialogue with each other, such as the *Science and the Big Questions* project funded by the John Templeton Foundation (John Templeton Foundation, 2021). Given counselling psychologists' commitment to multiculturalism and diverse epistemological perspectives (Bedi et al., 2011, p. 130), it seems fitting for there be a theoretical framework of meaning and the human good that can accommodate a variety of worldviews and philosophies. This theory also affords firmer philosophical and scientific foundations for how

counselling psychologists discuss the human good, proposing a model of human flourishing and meaning that is consistent with our evolved human nature.

4.4. Chapter Summary

In this thesis, I have articulated a natural description of human flourishing that is (a) consistent with scientific data pertaining to human nature and (b) properly attenuated in its metaphysical claims. This theory should thus be amenable to a variety of psychologists who adhere to a diversity of worldviews and philosophies. Aristotle's (2011, 2013) prescient insights about human nature and a good human life illustrate the natural foundations of human flourishing and meaning. While the scientific enterprise is rightly constrained by methodological naturalism, psychologists should not feel this constrains them to embrace metaphysical or metaethical naturalism. Thus, the Franklian contribution to my theoretical proposal is that I leave subsequent philosophical questions open regarding the transcendence of meaning and the human good. Given Canadian counselling psychology's commitment to epistemological openness, diversity, multiculturalism, and client-centeredness (Bedi et al., 2011; CPA, 2009), I contend that this proposed theoretical synthesis has much to offer the discipline insofar as it affords "flex room" for psychologists, with a diverse range of beliefs, to have common ground for discussing and understanding human flourishing. My intent for this Franklian-Aristotelian theory to be as inclusive as possible to various worldview, philosophical, and/or faith-based perspectives.

Chapter 5. Practical Applications

In the preceding chapters, I have focused on philosophical issues surrounding how counselling psychologists discuss meaning and the good human life. While many psychologists may identify themselves as postmodern (Bedi et al., 2016), it is very difficult to live consistently with postmodern claims about the death of metanarratives and value hierarchies. The values of our discipline – social justice, multiculturalism, and respect for diversity (Bedi et al., 2011; Bedi et al., 2016; CPA, 2009) – are surely preferable to injustice, segregation, and discrimination. Likewise, it is difficult to believe that vicious qualities like avarice, selfishness, or closed-mindedness are just as valid as virtuous qualities like benevolence, compassion, and openness. I speculate that, despite whatever antirealist/nominalist philosophical beliefs they might *say they have*, Canadian counselling psychologists *live and talk as if* some values and goals are truly preferable to others (see Friedrich, 2012, for further reading).

My Franklian-Aristotelian framework offers a naturalistic explanation for how meaning and the good human life are connected: they are both grounded in objective features of our human nature. A flourishing life is about the pursuit of constitutive and shared goods, about finding meaning and cultivating virtue (see also Fowers et al., 2017; Wong, 2011). In this final chapter, my principal claims are threefold. First, I believe the stated values of Canadian counselling psychology are consistent with a neo-Aristotelian, naturalistic perspective of a flourishing human life (see section 3.3. of this thesis, p. 74-85). Second, I will demonstrate how the eudaimonic structure of natural human goods converges with the widespread recognition in psychology that human social behaviour can be categorized along two dimensions: agency and communion. Specifically, I will show how a eudaimonic perspective clarifies (a) the optimal arrangement of our agential and communal strivings and (b) the need for wisdom and virtue to achieve a proper balance between our strivings for agency and communion, both in the short- and long-term. Third, I will illustrate how the art of psychotherapy involves leveraging and developing our

clients' capacities as ultrasocial and rational creatures. Humans find healing and meaning through connection with others, who help them live more integrated, meaningful, and connected lives.

5.1. Aristotelian Insights for Canadian Counselling Psychology

The Canadian Psychological Association (2009) describes counselling psychology as "a broad specialization within professional psychology concerned with using psychological principles to enhance and promote the positive growth, well-being, and mental health of individuals, families, groups, and the broader community. Counselling psychologists bring a collaborative, developmental, multicultural, and wellness perspective to their research and practice" (para. 1). Counselling psychologists' emphases on (1) focusing on client strengths and positive growth, (2) multiculturalism and client social context(s), (3) social justice, and (4) taking a lifespan developmental perspective in our clinical and applied work (Bedi et al., 2011; Bedi et al., 2016) are quite consistent with a neo-Aristotelian understanding of the human good. A eudaimonic perspective clarifies (a) why these four distinctives of Canadian counselling psychology are valuable in our clinical and scholarly work, as well as (b) the central role that virtue and wisdom play in our efforts to foster client growth and promote the goods of justice, multiculturalism, and social harmony.

5.1.1. Focus on client strengths and growth. The affinity of counselling psychologists to take strengths-based, client-centred approaches in their clinical work fruitfully benefitted from the output of research programmes within positive psychology (Bedi et al., 2011). However, without a view of what kind of life is best for human beings, there is a lack of precision in articulating why maximizing client strengths is important. As Fowers (2008) aptly writes, "Personal growth sounds good until one asks, growth toward what?" (p. 635). I believe Canadian counselling psychologists can profit from Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) ethical philosophy to answer this question. That is, we are attempting to help our clients grow toward realizing their potentials as ultrasocial and rational primates, pursuing those things which are naturally meaningful and good for human beings (see section 3.3., pp. 74-85, this thesis).

It is a common instinct to try and promote the positive aspects of life and eliminate the negatives. Today, however, there is a growing recognition that *both* the positive and negative aspects of human life need to be appreciated and understood in a larger framework of human flourishing (e.g., Fowers et al., 2017; Wong, 2011). My Franklian-Aristotelian theory informs *why* focusing on client strengths is a necessary part of promoting the well-being of our clients: *helping clients cultivate moral virtue(s) equips them with the skills and characteristics that are necessary to flourish and find meaning as a human being, particularly amid human limitations and suffering*. Within a eudaimonic framework, well-functioning humans are committed to developing their strengths and improving their weaknesses, cultivating a well-rounded character. It attends to the fact that there are positive and negative aspects to being human, but that both aspects of life are necessary to understand human flourishing. Virtues are the qualities which enable us to flourish and live meaningful lives. We can view a good human life as one in which an individual seeks to grow toward becoming the kind of person who reliably pursues characteristic human goods such as justice, belonging, and friendship (see Fowers, 2015, pp. 307-315, for a summary)

5.1.2. Multiculturalism and attending to a client's social and cultural context(s). As ultrasocial primates, flourishing as an individual cannot be cleanly separated from the good of others – humans cannot develop their strengths or grow as people in a vacuum. Rather, we grow and discover our potential through our interactions with others (Fowers, 2015, p. 316). Given our nature as ultrasocial primates, it is axiomatic among developmental and social psychologists that an adequate understanding of an individual's identity requires knowledge about the social and cultural groups to which he or she belongs. Psychologists are expected to be reflective about how the values, beliefs, and attitudes from their own culture(s) influence their behaviour, as well as being sensitive to and knowledgeable about the cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes of their clients (Canadian Psychological Association, 2017, Principles I.2, II.10, II.14, p. 20). Given that attachment, dependency, and belonging are critical evolved

elements of being human, our sense of identity and the way we understand the world around us inevitably emerges from our social relationships and the groups we identify with (Fowers, 2015, p. 124-125, 256-258).

Aristotle (ca. 350 B.C.E./2013) understood that functioning well *qua* human being involved engagement in one's community. He also believed that a well-functioning community would likewise foster the development of well-functioning individuals. Canadian counselling psychologists believe that a community which values multiculturalism is optimal for promoting the well-being of Canadians (Bedi et al., 2016). *Multiculturalism* is defined by Berry (2006) as a societal arrangement in which non-dominant groups "*adopt* the basic values of the larger society, while at the same time the dominant group [is] prepared to *adapt* national institutions… to meet better the needs of all groups now living together in a plural society" (p. 36, italics in original). For a variety of reasons, however, those who are members of non-dominant cultures may struggle to find their place within the context of the dominant culture, struggling to negotiate their cultural and ethnic identities in a pluralistic society. When working with such clients, counselling psychologists must embody virtues of empathy, openness, and cultural humility as we seek to provide helpful services during their acculturation process.

Canadian counselling psychologists can understand their efforts to promote multiculturalism as pursuing the natural human goods of social harmony and belonging, which are described by Fowers (2015, p. 229-233) as shared *and* constitutive goods. In our efforts to promote the healthy development of a multicultural society, it is important for counselling psychologists to remember that all members of our society, whether part of dominant or non-dominant cultural group(s), are ultimately human beings, sharing a common human nature. As ultrasocial animals, human beings are deeply concerned about the social groups they belong to (Fowers, 2015, p. 203). Thus, in our efforts to promote multiculturalism (Bedi et al., 2011; Bedi et al., 2016), we help individuals and communities respect and appreciate the diversity that is characteristic of Canadian society. This focus is complemented by an awareness that we

all share a common human identity, sharing social and rational capacities that we hope to use in ways that promote respect for others in a multicultural society.

Within a eudaimonic, naturalistic perspective of the human good and meaning, psychologists can remain curious about how natural human goods are uniquely pursued and valued among different cultures and groups (Fowers, 2015; Wong, 2011). However, instead of conceiving of human beings as primarily products of culture and social conditioning, the Aristotelian aspects of my proposed theory reorients psychologists toward what is in common between human beings – our human nature. While profitable discoveries have been made in the study of individual and cultural differences, the notion of human nature is "a useful counterpoint to the widespread neglect of the similarities between humans [in psychology]" (Machery, 2008, p. 324).

Culture shapes the ways in which people behave, feel, and think. But humans are the most cultural creatures on the planet *because* we evolved to be the most social creatures on the planet. The *general structure* of a flourishing human life transcends the particularities of cultural expression. Just as two individuals from the same cultural background can flourish while pursuing a diversity of goods, two individuals from different cultural backgrounds can flourish while pursuing different kinds of goods. To flourish *qua* human being, however, is to cultivate the virtues that enable a person to pursue natural human goods – excellently expressing their nature as a rational and ultrasocial animal – in ways appropriate to his or her cultural context. Thus, while the general structure of eudaimonia is universal, it is important for psychologists to attend to the specific values and goods our culturally diverse clients pursue as part of a meaningful, complete human life (Wong, 2011).

5.1.3. Social justice. A naturalistic, neo-Aristotelian approach to ethics can also inform counselling psychologists' efforts to promote social justice. It is obvious that communities and social institutions can malfunction in numerous ways, becoming covertly or overtly oppressive. Effectively combatting oppression is an extremely complex matter: At what point do social institutions become

oppressive? How does one identify the best solutions to remedy the consequences of oppression? How should these solutions to rectify oppression be implemented? In our democratic and diverse society, there is a growing awareness surrounding social issues, and as a result, many counselling psychologists have rightly been vocal about the need for greater education and advocacy in these areas (e.g., Bedi et al., 2016; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). However, it seems ironic that social justice concerns are often advocated from postmodern theoretical perspectives, as such perspectives undercut their own moral proclamations because they entail the denial of moral realism (and realism *simpliciter*; see Friedrich, 2012). If counselling psychologists were *consistently* postmodern, we would admit that our proclamations about social justice are, ultimately, meaningless beyond our subjective and/or historical horizons. Given that the conclusions this commits one to are, frankly, difficult to swallow, I think a neo-Aristotelian perspective is a preferable theoretical starting point to postmodern antirealism because it is more consistent with the values presumed by Canadian counselling psychologists.

Rules and principles are useful guides to what is good, but wisdom is required to discern how one ought to act in particular situations. In our efforts to promote social justice, we must strive to cultivate virtue *and* practical wisdom so we can reliably find what Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) called *the middle term* or *golden mean* – the right way to embody the virtues that are relevant to the goods we are pursuing. We will always have to exercise wisdom in our efforts to promote social justice, discerning how best to confront injustice and raise awareness about the social issues we want to address. When engaging in activities to promote social justice, counselling psychologists are pursuing the natural human goods of social harmony and belonging. They are seeking to remove barriers that make it difficult for members of non-dominant cultural and/or social groups to "[act] as a group member in coordination with other group members and having a shared identity" (Fowers, 2015, p. 232). Pursuing social justice involves helping marginalized individuals and groups find a sense of belonging, while also seeking to promote social harmony. Social harmony and belonging are both constitutive *and* shared

goods, meaning that they cannot be separated from virtuous practices and collaborating with others (Fowers, 2015, p. 225-233). The excellent pursuit of social justice involves embodying qualities that are naturally conducive to a good human life (i.e., virtues and practical wisdom), hence are worthy ends for counselling psychologists to pursue in their research and practice.

5.1.4. Lifespan development and the eudaimonic life. Another distinctive focus of Canadian counselling psychology is its emphasis on taking a lifespan developmental perspective in our work with clients (Bedi et al., 2011; CPA, 2009). Counselling psychologists focus on "helping others successfully transition through developmental life stages and typical life events, conceptualising client concerns through a lens of growth and development" (Bedi et al., 2011, p. 131). The focus on client strengths and lifespan development for counselling psychologists is a good fit with Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) view of eudaimonia as a complete, well-lived life.

Wong (2011) pithily summarizes the eudaimonic life as "meaning plus virtue" (p. 75). A person with a eudaimonic orientation to life has a clear vision of (1) the goals and values that are worthy to pursue and (2) how their various pursuits and values come together as a coherent whole in their lives (Fowers et al., 2017, p. 221). People with a eudaimonic orientation are more fundamentally driven by a sense that (a) the goals and values they pursue are meaningful and (b) their actions are purposeful, not simply the pursuit of subjective happiness (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Wong, 2011). For example, parents endure their child's "terrible twos" because they believe that raising their children is a valuable and meaningful activity. Given our interest in taking a lifespan developmental perspective with our clients, those elements of eudaimonia that pertain to the perceived meaningfulness of one's daily pursuits and the coherence of one's life story are of special relevance for Canadian counselling psychologists.

5.2. Communion, Agency, and the Eudaimonic Life

A eudaimonic life requires that human motives and pursuits of agency and communion be balanced in appropriate ways that excellently expresses our potentials as human beings. The

interpersonal circumplex (IPC) model is another useful point of contact for psychologists to interact with my Franklian-Aristotelian theory of meaning and the human good. The core insight that both frameworks share is that human life is organized largely around two dimensions: agency/self-definition and communion/relatedness. Significantly, Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013) own understanding of a eudaimonic life can be organized along the dimensions of agency and communion (see Fowers, 2012, for a review). However, an Aristotelian point of view understands that eudaimonia is a dimension of life over and above those of community and agency. A eudaimonic life refers to how one's pursuits in the domains of agency and communion are organized, wherein the goods that require the embodiment of virtue (constitutive) and those that require cooperation with others (shared) are understood to be most important in a flourishing human life. The eudaimonic theory espoused in this thesis is consistent with the IPC model, illustrating how my theory converges with numerous other models of personality development and interpersonal functioning. This convergence counts significantly in favour of my proposed theory as a scientifically sound and viable framework for psychologists to conceptualize the human good.

5.2.1. Agency and communion: Two dimensions of human life. In their entry in the *Handbook of Interpersonal Psychology* regarding the IPC model, Blatt and Luyten (2011) state, "A remarkable recent convergence [across interpersonal, attachment, and personality theories] … emphasizes the developmental psychological dimensions of interpersonal relatedness and self-definition as a basic conceptual structure in both normal and disrupted personality development" (p. 37). The dimensions of relatedness/affiliation and self-definition/control have been expressed using various nomenclature in the social sciences (Fournier et al., 2011). However, the core idea of these dimensions is most aptly expressed by the terms agency and communion (Bakan, 1966). According to Smith (2013, p. 1103), *agency* refers to one's motivation to strive for status and achievement, becoming a differentiated individual, whereas *communion* refers to one's motivation to seek relationships with others.

Healthy psychological functioning requires balance between needs for agency and communion. When a person's personality has been maladaptively organized, there is an overemphasis on either seeking communion with others/attachment or agency/separation (Blatt & Luyten, 2011). When a person's personality has been adaptively organized, they demonstrate flexibility in moving along dimensions of agency and communion: exhibiting a healthy balance of (1) autonomy, agency, and self-definition and (2) intimacy, vulnerability, and dependency upon others.

Attachment theory is a useful framework to illustrate the differences between adaptive and maladaptive personality organization, along the dimensions of agency and communion (Blatt & Luyten, 2011, p. 38). Based on early interactions with caregivers, children construct internal working models that organize their perceptions of self, others, and their environment(s) (Fraley & Shaver, 2021, p. 644-645). If children have caregivers that are attentive to their physical and emotional needs, they are more likely to view the world as a predictable place to be explored and have greater capacities for taking risks, self-regulation, and articulating their emotional needs to others. Insecurely attached individuals, by contrast, are less likely to take risks and exhibit lower tolerance and understanding of distressing emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). Insecure-anxiously attached individuals are very uncomfortable with separation and are chronically afraid of abandonment by others.

Thus, anxious attachment impairs an individual's ability to act independently in the world, reflecting an imbalance of motives for communion over agency/self-definition. Insecure-avoidantly attached individuals are uncomfortable, in contrast, with intimacy. They have difficulty relating to others and prioritize independence and control over intimacy with others, reflecting an imbalance of agential needs over needs for communion. Avoidantly attached individuals are sometimes controlling in their relationships with others (imbalanced desire for agency/dominance over communion), whereas anxiously attached individuals tend to be more submissive in their relationships due to their fears of abandonment (imbalanced desire for communion over agency). In contrast, when a person is securely

attached, they strike a better balance between their motives for agency and communion. Secure persons are more comfortable being intimate and vulnerable with others and "can flexibly move along the closeness-distance dimension of the [interpersonal] circumplex without being afraid of losing autonomy or a partner's love" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 255).

5.3.2. Agency, communion, and the eudaimonic hierarchy of goods. The two dimensions of the interpersonal circumplex – agency and communion – have a striking, seemingly independent, parallel to the two dimensions of the evolved, natural human goods – agential and communal – as specified by Fowers (2012, 2015). To facilitate easy visual comparison, I have adapted the information from both the interpersonal circumplex model and the evolved eudaimonic hierarchy of goods below:

Table 5.1 Structure of Evolutionary Human Goods (see Fowers, 2015, Figure 10.1, p. 337)

		Communal Dimension	
		Individual Goods	*Shared Goods*
Agentic Dimension	*Constitutive Goods*	Expertise Prestige/Status	Friendship Justice
	Instrumental Goods	Wealth Dominance Status	Security through mutual defense Material goods through trade

Table 5.2. Tabular Representation of the Interpersonal Circumplex (adapted from Smith, 2013, Figure 1, p. 1103)

		Communion/Affiliation	
		Hostility	*Friendliness*
Agency/Control	*Dominance*	Cold-Quarrelsome	Ambitious-Dominant
	Submissiveness	Lazy-Submissive	Warm-Agreeable

Both Fowers' neo-Aristotelian model of evolved human goods (2012, 2015) and the IPC model of human social motivations (Blatt & Luyten, 2011; Smith, 2013) parallel each other insofar as they emphasize that there are two dimensions to human life, agential and communal. As can be seen above,

Fowers' model describes *eudaimonia*/flourishing as the highest-level description of a flourishing life, comprised of two dimensions: agentic and communal (Fowers et al., 2017, p. 44). The agentic dimension includes the pursuit of instrumental and constitutive goods, whereas the communal dimension includes the pursuit of individual and shared goods. The IPC model (see Blatt and Luyten, 2011; Smith, 2013) specifies how human social motivations can be categorized along the dimensions of agency and communion. The agency/control dimension ranges from dominant to submissive, whereas the communion/affiliation dimension ranges from hostility to friendliness. A eudaimonic perspective offers three important insights regarding the agential and communal dimensions to human life: (1) human goods are nested within the dimensions of agency and communion and are hierarchically arranged, (2) practical wisdom plays an important role in balancing one's motives for agency and communion, and (3) eudaimonia/flourishing involves balancing one's needs for agency and communion across time.

5.2.2.1. A eudaimonic hierarchy within dimensions of agency and communion. The first insight offered by an Aristotelian view of the human good is that there is a hierarchical arrangement of agentic and communal pursuits that describe a flourishing human life. All the natural human goods – individual, instrumental, shared, and constitutive (see sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3 of this thesis, pp. 77-79) – play a role in a good human life. Instrumental goods like wealth are necessary to obtain clothing and shelter. Individual goods like autonomy are valuable because, generally speaking, it is good for a person to be reasonably free to do what they want. But given our nature as ultrasocial and rational primates, goods that are constitutive and/or shared are naturally best and most meaningful for human beings, and the value of instrumental and individual goods is gauged by how one uses them to pursue shared and constitutive goods (Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011; Fowers, 2012; Fowers et al., 2017). Thus, a eudaimonic life involves seeking a harmonious balance between the various agential and communal goods one pursues in life, but the specifically shared and constitutive goods are most contributive to human flourishing.

***5.2.2.2. Practical wisdom and balancing our desires for agency and communion*.** An Aristotelian view of a flourishing human life illuminates the role of practical wisdom in appropriately balancing one's pursuits of agency and communion. Both the eudaimonic and IPC models emphasize that the appropriateness of one's agentic and/or communal behaviours is context-specific. Within the IPC model, the language used to describe the appropriate balance between motives for agency and communion is largely pragmatic. Adaptively functioning individuals are effective at balancing and integrating their motives for community and agency, across different contexts, enabling them to connect with others and adaptively pursue their goals and values. Whether one's behaviour and/or symptoms are indicative of psychopathology depends on "the degree to which these motives are satisfied and the methods by which they are satisfied in particular contexts" (Hopgood et al., 2021, p. 66). However, practical wisdom is required to determine how one's motives for agency and communion should be *best* balanced in any given circumstance.

From a eudaimonic perspective, there are no universal rules for how these motives should be satisfied for every person, in every possible situation. Recall that virtuous persons are characterized by having their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours consistently oriented to what is best and are skilled at doing what is right *in their specific circumstances* (Annas, 2016; Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011). A virtuous person reliably does what is best and most fitting to his or her circumstances. Described in terms of the interpersonal circumplex theory, a virtuous person would be able to consistently balance and satisfy his or her motivations for agency and communion with wisdom and flexibility. Psychologically healthy individuals can reliably discern how to (1) set boundaries vs. be vulnerable, (2) compete vs. cooperate, (3) antagonize vs. submit, and/or (4) connect vs. withdraw from others. This has a clear analogue to the Aristotelian idea that the virtuous person wisely and consistently finds the "middle term" – as Aristotle (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011) called it – between motives for agency and communion, wisely adjusting their behaviour across situations and contexts.

5.3.2.3. Balancing needs for agency and communion across time. An Aristotelian perspective offers a third insight, illustrating how a flourishing person must balance their pursuits along dimensions of agency and communion *across time*. A proper balance between agential and communal motives should be wisely sought in each situation, yes. But our nature as ultrasocial and rational animals dictates that human beings function best when their communal and agentic motives, goals, and values are clearly articulated, ordered, and pursued across time. That is, eudaimonia is not only concerned with finding balance, or doing what is right in the here-and-now, but also the extent to which a person lives a life in accordance with virtue (Aristotle, ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, 1103a5-6, p. 23).

Thus, a well-functioning human being finds short- and long-term balance along the dimensions of agency and communion. They are good at integrating their agential and communal motives and pursuits with their overarching values and goals. Flourishing persons demonstrate coherence and structure their daily activities that conforms to the natural eudaimonic structure of goods, and their higher-order goals and values come together as a coherent and harmonious whole (Fowers et al., 2017, p. 30, 33-34). Flourishing persons demonstrate virtuosity in discrete situations, as well as consistently across time and contexts (see Fowers et al., 2017, p. 33-45 for further reading).

5.3. Human Nature and Psychotherapy: Leveraging Human Ultrasociality and Rationality

In this third section of my last chapter, I will articulate how the art of psychotherapy involves leveraging and developing our clients' capacities as ultrasocial and rational creatures to find psychological wholeness and wellness. The overall view is that humans, being ultrasocial and rational primates, find healing and meaning through connection with others, who help them live more integrated, meaningful, and connected lives. The human brain evolved so that our rationality and ultrasociality are profoundly intertwined (see section 3.2 of this thesis, p. 53-74). The counselling and psychotherapy relationship provides a rich, illustrative example of the interdependence of our ultrasociality and rationality. We are wired to attach to and connect with others, and our capacities as

rational and ultrasocial beings are best nurtured in the context of secure social relationships. Given our nature as ultrasocial and rational animals, humans heal through connection with others who help us feel understood and give us language to make sense of our experience(s). Attachment dynamics are inextricable from the therapeutic relationship, further illustrating the central role that human ultrasociality plays in psychotherapy.

In this last section of my final chapter, I will illustrate how a neo-Aristotelian view of human nature and a good human life is implicitly present in our work as counselling psychologists. Counsellors leverage our client's ultrasocial nature to nurture their social and rational capacities as human beings: helping them (1) process emotional pain and clarify the nature of their presenting problem(s), (2) specify the kind of life they desire to live (i.e., what kind of person do I want to be?), and (3) cultivate new habits and live wisely as human beings (i.e., how do I become the person I aspire to be?).

5.3.1. The need for a secure bond. Based on research spanning decades, Charles Gelso (2014) proposes a tripartite model of the therapeutic relationship: the real relationship, the working alliance, and a transference-countertransference configuration. The *real relationship* refers to (a) how genuinely the client and therapist present themselves to each other and (b) the degree to which they accurately perceive each other. The *working alliance* refers to client-counsellor agreement on the goals and tasks of their therapeutic endeavours. Finally, the *transference-countertransference configuration* refers to the extent to which both client and counsellor's experience(s) of each other are influenced and/or distorted by past experiences from earlier significant relationships. Each of these components contains implicit attachment dynamics as clients learn to trust and be vulnerable with their counsellors.

Among clinical populations, clients who seek psychotherapy often present with insecure attachment styles (Van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2009; as cited in Slade & Holmes, 2018). The early social learning of such clients may have taught them to erect psychological defenses against negative emotion(s) and/or distort their interpersonal experiences to avoid feeling distressed in their

relationships. Such defenses and distortions often contribute to a client's presenting problem(s). A counsellor must mindfully communicate to clients – verbally and nonverbally – that he or she cares for them, will respect them without judgment, and will be there to support them in moments of emotional distress (Bordin, 1979; Gelso & Carter, 1985). A counsellor thus aspires to disconfirm any negative relational expectations that the client may have by congruently presenting him- or herself as an empathetic and warm person who can be trusted by his or her clients. From the foundations of a secure emotional bond between client and counsellor, a strong working alliance is likely to emerge. Within the felt safety of such a therapeutic relationship, clients can begin to successfully process difficult memories and/or emotions, gaining new insights that enable both client and therapist to collaboratively specify the goals and tasks of therapy together (Bordin, 1979; Gelso & Carter, 1985). Across multiple therapy sessions, client and counsellor may frequently activate and explore difficult memories and emotions pertaining to their past and/or present experience(s).

However, depth of experience and insight alone are insufficient to produce long lasting change for clients. Rather, a client's presenting problem and its attending affects must be processed experientially *and* have their content cognitively explored and given meaning (Cozolino & Santos, 2014; Whelton, 2004). Like an attentive caregiver who empathetically attunes to the emotional state(s) of his or her child, counsellors help clients move from a state of emotional distress to a place where they can cognitively explore and find language to make sense of their experience(s), often doing so repeatedly across multiple sessions. Emotions and memories that were once overwhelming for the client can now be tolerated, explored, and integrated into his or her sense of self.

As a client's emotions and memories are processed and explored over time, he or she becomes more capable of coherently integrating new insights and experiences into his or her self-understanding. When this occurs, the client "may feel that they have fully worked through the event and attained a sense of narrative closure" (McAdams, 2021, p. 131). From this place of increased integration, clients

can develop their capacities for identifying and autonomously choosing a new desired future, articulating who they would like to become, and specifying how they will eventually reach their goals. A therapist's ability to embody the characteristics of a secure attachment figure will influence the quality of the working alliance, thus setting the relational groundwork for therapy to be helpful for our clients (Slade & Holmes, 2018; Wampold, 2019).

5.3.2. Finding healing and meaning through connection. Human beings are ultrasocial and rational animals, and a good human life is characterized by the primary pursuit of constitutive and shared goods (Fowers, 2012). However, a person's ability to pursue such goods will be impacted by the quality of his or her early caregiving relationships. Securely attached individuals, for example, will find it easier to pursue the natural human good of friendship than insecurely attached individuals. The former were fortunate enough to have caregivers that scaffolded their potentials for emotional regulation and social interaction, whereas the latter were not. This is illustrative of Aristotle's (ca. 340 B.C.E./2011, ca. 350 B.C.E./2013) insight that quality of one's community – from households to local governments – impacts the quality of an individual's functioning. He also believed that parents had a special burden to educate their children in matters of virtue and vice. Thankfully, attachment styles are not set in stone and can be altered by peer relationships after the early caregiving period (Fraley & Shaver, 2021, p. 656). Counsellors can always hope to help their clients develop their ultrasocial and rational capacities to live a meaningful, flourishing life.

One practical way the interdependence of human sociality and rationality is reflected in clinical settings is when counsellors help their clients find language that structures and renders their emotional experience(s) more coherent. In doing so, we help our clients process emotional pain and co-construct a more adaptive and integrated narrative identity. McAdams (2021) describes *Narrative Identity* as one's autobiographical sense of self, which functions to linguistically integrate "a person's reconstruction of the past ("how I came to be") and imagined projections of the future ("who I will become") into a single

narrative arc, providing life with some sense of unity, purpose, and temporal coherence" (p. 123-124). Helping clients process their emotional pain allows the relationships between past events, present experience(s), and future aspirations be clearly understood, articulated, and connected. With a client's past and present understood and connected, counselling psychologists can effectively help him or her develop an understanding of the future they would like to pursue for themselves. This process mirrors how an attentive parent helps a child process their emotions by "getting down on their level", holding space for them to express their feelings and helping them identify alternative behaviours and ways of expressing their needs that are more prosocial and/or adaptive.

Fowers and colleagues (2017, Table 1.2, p. 33) specify that human beings' capacities for (1) higher-order rationality and language and (2) temporal awareness render (a) meaning and (b) temporal coherence characteristic human goods. These two capacities come together for individuals in the form of a coherent, adaptive, and growth-oriented life narrative. As ultrasocial primates, our sense of self emerges from our interactions with others (see Fowers, 2015, p. 96-102, for a review). Thus, given the interconnected nature of our evolved ultrasociality and rationality, narrative coherence is thus also a characteristic feature of a flourishing human life (Fowers, 2015, p. 124). As Fowers and colleagues (2017) summarize:

> "This ability to see our lives as coherent wholes is essential to the idea of a [flourishing] life. The good associated with human temporal awareness is *narrative coherence*. Narrative coherence refers to a cohesive, cumulative story that can be told about a life that makes sense of the various events and transitions that make up that life. *It is a way of tying the elements of your life together in a meaningful and cumulative way, with a beginning, middle, and an end*" (p. 30, italics added).

The narrative coherence of a eudaimonic life is not only about connecting the various events and transitions in one's life, but also about clarifying and ordering one's goals and values. I have put

forth the argument - consistent with Fowers (2012) - that constitutive and shared goods are naturally best and most meaningful for human beings because they require us to excellently develop our capacities as human beings (i.e., virtues) and cultivate rich connections with others. Importantly, these goods are naturally best for us *because* we are ultrasocial and rational primates. The arrangement of goods that is naturally best for human beings, given our ultrasociality and rationality, is when constitutive and shared goods are pursued foremost. Individual and instrumental goods, in contrast, contribute to human flourishing insofar as they facilitate the pursuit of shared and constitutive goods.

Psychotherapy – "the talking cure" – works for human beings because of our innate need to (a) connect and belong with others (ultrasociality), as well as (b) make sense of our experiences and the world around us (rationality) (Fowers et al., 2017). The process of helping clients become more integrated leverages numerous capacities intrinsic to our nature as ultrasocial and rational animals, including empathy, compassion, deliberation, and attunement (Cozolino & Santos, 2014; Cozolino, 2017). Counsellors leverage their clients' ultrasocial nature to help them develop their rational capacities to confront, understand, and overcome and/or cope with their presenting problem(s).

Overall, humans heal through connection with others who help us feel understood and give us language to make sense of our experience(s). As ultrasocial creatures, we depend upon others to help us develop our potentials as human beings. When people can depend upon others to meet their emotional and social needs, they likewise improve the linguistic integration of their experiences into a coherent narrative identity. A coherent sense of self is a key marker of a flourishing human being, as these individuals have an awareness of who they have been, who they are, and who they desire to become (Fowers et al., 2017). People who embody the qualities of secure and supportive others help us integrate past, present, and future elements of ourselves. In fact, this is at the heart of what counsellors do in psychotherapy: creating an emotional bond in which (a) presenting problems and emotions can be processed and (b) clients receive support from counsellors in pursuing their desired future(s).

Aristotelian ethics once again looks incredibly prescient in this regard: Human rationality is fostered through our dependency on others, as we engage with others to figure out how we can wisely live as frail, limited creatures in a complex and messy world (Fowers et al., 2017). Psychotherapists hope to embody the qualities of a dependable caregiver and trusted confidant, modelling interpersonal behaviours and virtues and to help clients gain insight and learn skills to function well *qua* human being.

5.3.3. Flourishing in the face of human limitations. Researchers who study well-being agree that an adequate understanding of human flourishing must not only account for life's positive aspects, but also its negative aspects, particularly suffering (e.g., Wong, 2011; Fowers et al., 2017). Suffering is endemic to the human condition due to the limitations of our physical bodies and inextricable features of our psychological makeup, and counsellors must frequently console, empathize with, and/or offer guidance to clients who are dealing with suffering. The evolutionary, patchwork development of the human brain renders us vulnerable to existential anxieties and mental pathologies unknown to the rest of the animal kingdom (Gilbert, 2019). For example, we have a unique sense of temporal awareness of ourselves, perceiving ourselves as beings with a past, existing in the present, continuously moving toward the future. When we feel integrated, we sense our present actions are purposeful and that our life story is coherent and organized around meaningful themes and values. In contrast, when we feel disintegrated, our actions feel purposeless and empty, and pieces of our life story feel disjointed and/or overwhelming. With anxious clients, this may be reflected in symptoms such as ruminating about past event(s) or a global sense that bad things will happen to them in the future (Aho, 2018). For others, intrapersonal disintegration might trigger an awareness of the existential givens of death, freedom/responsibility, isolation, and meaninglessness (Yalom, 1980). Overall, frailty and suffering are inevitable parts of the human experience, which gives rise to the question of how one can flourish and find meaning in the face of such limitations.

A significant strength of a Franklian-Aristotelian understanding of the good human life is that it does not ignore the difficulties of human frailties and suffering. In one's quest to live a meaningful and complete life, the question of how best to bear his or her suffering will inevitably arise. Viktor Frankl grappled with the problem of finding meaning in the face of suffering both theoretically and experientially. He believed there were three inevitable negative aspects of human existence, which he called *the tragic triad*: pain, guilt, and death (Frankl, 1959/2006, p. 137). Deep emotional pain and suffering can be psychologically overwhelming, not least because higher-level cognitive processing can be shut down by intense affect (Damasio et al., 2000). Coping with these grim realities of human existence can thus impair a person's ability to discover potential meaning(s) in his or her life.

Is it possible to find meaning and wholeness amid one's suffering? I believe nobly bearing one's suffering should not be understood as a Stoic withdrawal from others and developing a cold resiliency to the pains of existence. Rather, a superior eudaimonic answer can be given for how one finds meaning in the face of suffering and limitation. The first part involves the cultivation and embodiment of virtue. Virtues are the characteristics which enable us to bear our suffering nobly, connect with others richly, and live well despite the effects of our human limitations. Fowers and colleagues (2017, p. 213) poignantly observe – consistent with what I have argued in this thesis – that the virtues are how one bears the limitations of human existence, including suffering, with excellence. The second part of the answer is that, as ultrasocial creatures, humans depend upon others to nurture our capacities for excellently enduring hardship and suffering. Fowers and colleagues (2017, p. 174-177) argue healthy dependence on others nurtures the development of virtues like compassion, courage, and practical wisdom, which are necessary for helping people find the strength to (a) bear their own suffering or (b) sit with the suffering of others with excellence (see also Leahy, 2015, pp. 198-222).

Human beings are dependent upon others to help us find meaning in our lives, particularly in times of suffering when the affective sting of pain, guilt, and death feel overwhelming. Consistently with

Frankl (1959/2006, 1969/2014), I believe life events always have a potential meaning(s), even in the face of suffering. As I noted in chapter 4, I believe that the meanings of our sufferings are best discovered (1) in concert with other people and (2) by developing the virtues necessary to bear the suffering(s) of oneself and others with nobility and excellence. Others can best help us process pain by showing empathy and compassion, enabling us to explore the meaning of our experiences and identify new paths for action and growth. In the face of pain, guilt, and death, we best process suffering with close others who help us (a) feel safe and (b) find the meaning within our maladies.

5.4. Final Thoughts

In closing, I will summarize the philosophical and practical issues I have addressed in my thesis.

5.4.1. Philosophical issues. Canadian counselling psychologists commonly ascribe to various antirealist views of meaning and the human good, defining them as primarily products of social construction or self-creation. In contrast, my Franklian-Aristotelian theory provides a naturalistic framework within which meaning is (minimally) grounded ontologically in our human nature as ultrasocial and rational animals. Certainly, the ways in which a meaningful and good human life are understood and practiced will look different across cultures. However, the socially constructed elements of meaning and a good human life ought to be consistent with the eudaimonic structure that emerges from our human nature. As Richardson and colleagues (1999) write, "[O]ur nature or being as humans is not just something we *find* (as in deterministic theories), nor is it something we just *make* (as in existentialist and constructivist theories); instead, it is *what we make of what we find*" (p. 212). The specific activities which a person considers meaningful or good are "always partly defined by cultural and historical communities and therefore subject to ongoing debate and reinterpretation" (Fowers, 2015, p. 324). Nevertheless, the *kinds of activities and goods that are best and most meaningful for human beings are constrained and shaped by our human nature as rational and ultrasocial animals*.

5.4.2. Practical applications. The neo-Aristotelian elements of my proposed theory are consistent with the values Canadian counselling psychologists uphold. A person's strengths and potentials are developed through connection with others, which fits well with counselling psychology's emphasis on client strengths and sociocultural context(s). Practically, I believe counselling psychologists are implicitly neo-Aristotelian insofar as the outcomes they hope to promote for clients involve helping them develop their potentials as ultrasocial and rational beings, through a secure therapeutic relationship. A secure attachment relationship with a counsellor is the social environment necessary for helping a social brain to heal, learn, and grow (Cozolino & Santos, 2014; Slade & Holmes, 2018). By embodying the qualities of a secure attachment figure, counsellors attempt to leverage the ultrasocial nature of our clients to help them feel a sense of felt safety and improve their ability to connect with others. Counsellors also help clients develop their rational capacities to make sense of and understand their experience(s), which opens new possibilities for insight and action. Implicit in the therapeutic enterprise is that counsellors help their clients develop their capacities as ultrasocial and rational animals, so they can realize their potential as individuals.

Counselling psychologists help many clients manage the difficulties that arise in everyday life, such as finding meaningful work, cultivating deep relationships, and/or pursuing their desired goals or values. While the evolutionary, patchwork development of the human brain renders us vulnerable to existential maladies and mental pathologies unknown to the rest of the animal kingdom, it is by leveraging the capacities of our human nature that we can discover wholeness, connection, and meaning despite the frailties of human existence (Cozolino & Santos, 2014; Fowers et al., 2017; Frankl, 1959/2006, 1969/2014; Gilbert, 2019). By helping clients become more integrated, virtuous, and wise persons, counsellors simultaneously are equipping them with the resources and skills necessary to live a complete and meaningful life. It is through the cultivation of virtue, wisdom, and a healthy dependency on others that one can flourish in the face of human limitations and suffering.

Reflecting our evolved dependency as human beings, individuals rely on others to help them process and connect their experiences, emotions, and thoughts so that they crystallize into an integrated narrative identity. A coherent narrative identity helps people feel like their lives have meaning and their activities are purposeful: their (a) past experiences have meaning, (b) present goals, values, and identity are clarified, and (c) desired future is clearly specified (Fowers et al., 2017; McAdams, 2021). This is consistent with an Aristotelian understanding that humans are ultrasocial and rational animals. Humans find psychological healing through connection and discover meaning(s) through the pursuit of constitutive and shared goods (Fowers et al., 2017). Counsellors leverage human ultrasociality to help our clients by creating an environment where a safe, secure attachment relationship can occur. We help our clients make sense of their experiences and process difficult emotions by creating the attachment conditions where their potentials as social and rational beings can develop. Ultimately, we hope to enable our clients to function more adaptively, connect more deeply with others, cope better with the intrinsic maladies of existence, and identify and fulfill the potential meanings that exist in their lives.

Overall, my Franklian-Aristotelian theory provides a coherent naturalistic view of the human good and meaning, without closing off the possibilities that there are larger metaphysical aspects to both. Aristotle does not answer all the questions we would like to ask about these issues, but he gets us going in the right direction, as his insights are incredibly prescient in light of contemporary psychological science. Thus, I believe that integrating Frankl's and Aristotle's insights about meaning and the human good provides common ground for counselling psychologists coming from a variety of worldview, philosophical, and cultural backgrounds to discuss how we can best flourish together, as human beings, in our increasingly complex world. There are few conversations worth having more than how best to promote the human good in our time and place. With common ground about the good life established around the facts of our human nature, what are we waiting for?

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