Preface

The origins of this book stem from my attempt to understand how Western culture went from Freud’s postulation of a death instinct in 1922 to the contemporary Kervorkianism or medicalization of death. Influenced by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, I originally aspired to write a genealogy of the last of the human sciences—thanatology. My friend, the late Lawrence Birken, suggested I investigate Viktor Frankl. Since Frankl had been influenced by Freud, and late in his life had made critical comments on Kervorkian, I thought his intellectual production might be the anchor for the study that I was then formulating as the desublimation of the death instinct in Western civilization. Although embers of that initial quest remain, I quickly realized that an intellectual biography of Viktor Frankl was an ideal stand-alone topic.

This book project has left me indebted to a plethora of family, friends, and institutions. It is impossible to acknowledge them all so I will attempt a short list. I am grateful to Günter Bischopf for suggesting I contact Marion Berghahn. The good people of Berghahn Books are producing top-notch and groundbreaking historical works. I am honored to be a part of the team.

Over the years I have received a great deal of institutional support. A Mellon Foundation grant provided initial seed money. Social science research grants provided by Colorado College allowed me to further my understanding of Holocaust survival issues. I presented my initial research to the Richardson History of Psychiatry Seminar at Cornell University in New York, and I am particularly grateful to George Makari, Aaron Esman, and Joseph Reppen for both the opportunity and feedback. Participation in the Silbermann Seminar and participation in the Hess Seminar at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum led by Mark Roseman, Jurgen Matthaus, Donald Bloxham, and John Roth were the most profoundly rewarding professional development experiences of my career. The museum’s mission of Holocaust education, genocide prevention, and advanced research is being achieved at the highest level because of the exceptional people working there. The world owes them gratitude.
For the last twelve years my home institution of California State University San Bernardino has provided both financial support and a working environment that was central in bringing the book to fruition. I am especially appreciative of the warm welcome offered by Professor Lawrence “Laurie” Baron upon my arrival in California and subsequent support and friendship over the years. I also owe my “immediate” family a word of gratitude. My mother Honora and her late husband Wayne Anzick opened their home for the initial writing. Similarly, my sister and brother-in-law, Katie and Mike Boone, loaned their alpine retreat, and also discussed issues relating to the history of psychology. Finally my great friend John Rice provided recreation time as we four-wheeled and biked around Colorado when I was taking breaks from writing. For the last twelve years my wife Lucy and our two children Alexandra and Sebastian have kept life full of reward and emotion. Thanks for giving me the time away to finish this project!

I owe a special acknowledgement to Alexander Batthyány. In the famous Viennese cafés “Sperl” and “Schwarzenberg,” amid coffee and clouds of smoke, Alex took me through a page by page critical reading of my manuscript. I did my very best to incorporate his opinions and criticisms, and the manuscript is the better for it. Although his training as a philosopher and Logotherapist, in contrast with my training as a European intellectual historian, led us to some perhaps “irreconcilable” disagreements, I appreciate his good humanity and his willingness to agree to disagree.

My circle of close comrades in Vienna, Wolfgang Maderthaner, Siegfried Mattl, Karl Fallend, and Gerhard Benetka, made this book possible. Thank you! My research was also enhanced by Wolfgang Neugebauer, Elisabeth Klamper, Gerhard Botz, Oliver Rathkolb, Karin Holzer, Joachim Widder, Wilfried Pototsnig, Ernst Kreishler, Richard Mitten, Walter Manoschek, Rüdiger Stix, Judy Podilipnik, Peter Malina, Karl Pfeifer, Ernest Seinfeld, Lydia Marinelli, Helwig Leibinger, Anna Hájková, Camilla Nielsen, Peter Mauer, and Herbert Kuhner. In New York, my colleagues at New York University, Ed Zupcic, Nicole Dombrowski-Risser, and John Savage helped me survive the ups and downs of graduate school. At Cooper Union, Peter Buckley and David Weir kept my spirits and humor up while I was working as an adjunct. Along with being a great friend, Mark Durkin provided generous editorial assistance with my writing. Other close friends and patrons in New York include Roger Mullarkey, Tom Howes, Scott Driggers, Andrew Collins, Barry Pailet, and Rob Morea, along with Barbra Dixon, Tom and Jeanne Hill, Alice Geller, Lorig Yekhairparin, and David Rentschler. So many others have had a profound impact on my life. Thanks for enhancing the ride.

The stars literally aligned for me at NYU in the late 1980s and early 1990s. NYU already had an excellent faculty that included Molly Nolan when three outstanding European intellectual historians, the late Tony Judt, Anson Rabinbach, and Jerrold Seigel, arrived on the scene. Each in their own unique way
made a profound impact on me, and made my life so much more worth living. Early on I came in contact with the work of Geoffrey Cocks. We became friends and the reader will easily see the debt I owe him. The late Lawrence “Larry” Birken spent countless hours discussing not only Frankl but intellectual life in general and was a great “intellectual” friend to me. I miss him. I am deeply appreciative of the direction of Jerry Seigel. He forced me to become a better writer, thinker, and scholar. Finally I owe my greatest debt to Andy Rabinbach. I learned to teach under his tutelage at Cooper Union, he established all my initial contacts in Vienna that made the research for this book possible, he read the initial draft, and most importantly he has been the ideal mentor, steady, inspiring, and the epitome of a “gut mensch.” He has my and many other students’ deepest admiration and appreciation.

It has been my great fortune in life to have encountered exceptional teachers. From the nuns in my grammar school that first sparked my interest in the past, to the exceptional group of extraordinary professors at Colorado College that gave me the foundation and confidence to pursue a Ph.D., to the brilliant minds I encountered at NYU, I owe my deepest gratitude. The oft-quoted line from Yeats that “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire” is undoubtedly true. But to teach is in essence nurturing and coaxing that “fire” into form through writing, speaking, and critical thinking. Subsequently, to the teachers and especially “Susan” Ashley at Colorado College, who taught me to never stop asking “so what,” this book is dedicated.

Finally for those who find Viktor Frankl’s Search for Meaning disturbing for any reason I offer “all apologies.”

Timothy Pytell
So-Cal February 2015