

The Existential Crisis of the Protagonist in Ahmad Rabie's *Waswas*: A Logotherapy Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the forms of existential crisis and the process of the protagonist's search for meaning in Ahmad Rabie's novel *Waswas* by employing Viktor Frankl's logotherapy within the framework of humanistic psychology. The study adopted a descriptive qualitative method using a library research design. The research data consisted of narrative excerpts, dialogues, and monologues of the protagonist that represent various aspects of existential crisis and the search for meaning in life. The primary data source was the novel *Waswas* by Ahmad Rabie, while the secondary data were obtained from books, scholarly articles, and previous studies related to Viktor Frankl's logotherapy. Data were collected through close reading and note-taking techniques, whereas data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that, first, the protagonist's forms of existential crisis, based on the concept of *will to meaning*, are characterized by feelings of existential emptiness and inner dissatisfaction, leading to a loss of direction and purpose in life. Second, the process of discovering meaning in life (*meaning of life*) is manifested through the three value dimensions proposed in Frankl's logotherapy, namely *creative values*, *experiential values*, and *attitudinal values*. The findings further demonstrate that experiences of suffering, inner conflict, and existential emptiness are not merely negative psychological conditions but also serve as a means of self-reflection that guides the individual toward the discovery of meaning in life.

Existentialism; Logotherapy; Psychological Theory; Viktor Frankl; Waswas.

Introduction

Modern life has brought significant changes to people's ways of thinking and living. Technological advancements, increasing social competition, and the pursuit of success in economic and professional domains have contributed to increasingly complex standards of living. Amid these changes, individuals are often driven to meet social expectations that regard material success as the primary measure of happiness. However, reality demonstrates that achieving material success does not necessarily correspond to the fulfillment of individuals' inner psychological and existential needs (Aprilia & Nurhasanah, 2026).

Many individuals who appear socially and economically successful nevertheless experience a profound sense of meaninglessness in their lives. This condition reflects the emergence of an existential crisis, a state in which individuals lose their sense of direction and purpose while struggling to understand the meaning of their own existence. Such a crisis may give rise to various forms of psychological distress that adversely affect mental health, including stress, anxiety, and persistent feelings of emptiness. Frankl conceptualized this condition as the *existential vacuum*, referring to a state of meaninglessness that contributes to psychological distress and mental health problems (Ali, 2026).

This study is grounded in Viktor E. Frankl's theoretical framework, which views the search for meaning as the primary motivation of human existence. Unlike Sigmund Freud's emphasis on instinctual drives and pleasure and Alfred Adler's focus on the will to power, Frankl argues that human beings are fundamentally motivated by the will to meaning. The loss of meaning may lead to an existential vacuum, characterized by emptiness and psychological distress, including noogenic neurosis, stress, and existential anxiety (Frankl, 1985).

Logotherapy is relevant to this study because it interprets inner crisis as a problem of meaning rather than merely a psychopathological condition. Frankl identifies three pathways to meaning: creating or accomplishing valuable work, experiencing love and relationships, and choosing an attitude toward unavoidable suffering. These concepts provide an appropriate framework for examining existential emptiness and the protagonist's search for meaning in response to life's challenges (Frankl, 1967).

In the realm of literature, particularly modern Arabic literature, the novel frequently serves as a reflective medium that portrays the inner struggles of individuals confronting challenging social realities. Literature functions not only as an aesthetic representation but also as a space for articulating existential crises, alienation, and the search for meaning in life. Through its characters, the modern Arabic novel often depicts individuals trapped in anxiety, identity uncertainty, and inner conflicts resulting from the tension between personal values and social expectations. These characteristics make literary works a rich subject for analysis from

the perspective of existential psychology, particularly in understanding how individuals interpret suffering and construct meaning in their existence (Ayuningtyas, 2025).

One of the works of modern Arabic literature that profoundly portrays the issues of existential crisis and the search for meaning in life is *Waswas* by Ahmad Rabie. The novel presents a psychological portrait of its protagonist, who experiences profound inner turmoil as a result of internal conflicts and the realities of life that constrain his consciousness. The protagonist is depicted as an individual trapped in prolonged psychological conflict, characterized by anxiety, feelings of emptiness, and an inability to find a clear purpose in life. These circumstances drive him to withdraw from reality and question the meaning of his own existence amid an increasingly oppressive life.

The protagonist's inner struggle in *Waswas* not only reflects a personal conflict but also represents the phenomenon of existential emptiness that is highly relevant to contemporary human life. He is confronted with loneliness, a crisis of meaning, and a persistent desire to escape from a reality perceived as painful. This psychological portrayal demonstrates how the loss of meaning and purpose can give rise to profound emotional and existential distress. Therefore, *Waswas* provides an appropriate literary object for analysis through Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, enabling a deeper understanding of how existential crisis and the search for meaning in life are represented in modern Arabic literature.

Studies on humanistic psychology in literary works, particularly those examining trauma and the inner conflicts of protagonists in novels, have been extensively conducted by previous researchers. A study conducted by Puteri & Indarti (2026) examined the protagonist's inner conflict in the novel *Timun Jelita* through the perspectives of existential emptiness and past trauma in the process of searching for meaning in life, demonstrating a strong relevance to Viktor Frankl's concept of logotherapy. Furthermore, a study conducted by Waridin et al. (2025) examined the protagonist in the novel *Janji untuk Ayah*, portraying the protagonist's existential journey in the search for meaning in life. Furthermore, a study conducted by Saputri (2026) examined the forms of the protagonist's existential development from a passive state to an active and reflective one in the novel *Rahasia Salinem* based on Jean-Paul Sartre's existential phenomenological theory. Furthermore, a study conducted by Wintama (2024) examined the process of discovering meaning in life as a solution to the NEET phenomenon in the novel *Re*, based on Viktor Frankl's existentialist thought. Furthermore, a study conducted by Alfia & Syihabuddin (2025) examined the transformation of the protagonist's worldview through the three dimensions of consciousness in the novel *Seporsi Mie Ayam Sebelum Mati* from the perspective of Jean-Paul Sartre's existential concept of freedom. Furthermore, a study conducted by Pradipta (2025) and Elisia et al. (2025), examined the meaning of life within the dynamics of

the protagonists' existence in the novel *Jamila* and the poetry of Dea Anugrah through various forms of existentialism from the perspective of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy.

Previous studies have contributed significantly to literary psychology by revealing the psychological dynamics and existential conflicts of literary characters, including trauma, alienation, anxiety, and crises of meaning. They have also connected characters' psychological conditions with their life experiences, social environments, and interpersonal relationships, while the application of Frankl's logotherapy has provided insights into the search for meaning, the acceptance of suffering, and humanistic attitudes toward life.

However, previous research has largely focused on describing psychological conflicts or specific conditions such as trauma, anxiety, and existential emptiness rather than examining the dynamic process of discovering meaning in life. The integration of Frankl's *will to meaning*, *freedom of will*, and *meaning of life* also remains limited, particularly in studies of contemporary Arabic fiction. This study addresses this gap by examining the existential dynamics of the protagonist in Ahmad Rabie's *Waswas* through Frankl's logotherapy.

Waswas is relevant because its protagonist experiences self-disorientation, inner turmoil, existential emptiness, anxiety, and difficulty finding purpose amid life's pressures. These struggles are conveyed through inner reflections, conflicts, and narrative descriptions of anxiety and meaning-seeking. Thus, logotherapy provides an appropriate framework for examining the protagonist's existential journey and search for meaning.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify and describe the forms of the protagonist's existential crisis in Ahmad Rabie's *Waswas* based on the concept of *will to meaning* and to analyze how the protagonist's attitudes contribute to the process of discovering meaning in life (*meaning of life*) from the perspective of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy. In doing so, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of existential crisis and the search for meaning as represented in literary works.

Literature Review

Logotherapy is an existential-humanistic school of psychology developed by Viktor Emil Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist and neurologist. It emerged from both his academic reflections and experiences as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. Observing fellow prisoners endure extreme suffering, loss, starvation, and uncertainty, Frankl concluded that survival depended not only on physical strength but also on the ability to maintain hope and discover meaning despite suffering. These experiences became the foundation of logotherapy, which emphasizes the fundamental importance of meaning in human life (Frankl, 1985).

Based on these experiences, Frankl argued that human beings are fundamentally driven to search for meaning and possess a spiritual or existential dimension that enables them to choose their attitudes toward life circumstances. Even under severe restrictions, individuals retain inner freedom in responding to suffering. Thus, a fundamental principle of logotherapy is that life always has meaning, regardless of external circumstances (Frankl, 1985).

Frankl introduced logotherapy as a psychological approach that emphasizes the study of meaning in human life. The term *logotherapy* is derived from the Greek word *logos*, meaning *meaning*, while also referring to the spiritual dimension of human existence, whereas *therapy* denotes the process of healing or treatment. Accordingly, logotherapy can be understood as a psychological approach that acknowledges the existence of a spiritual dimension in addition to the physical and psychological dimensions of human beings. From the perspective of logotherapy, the meaning of life (*the meaning of life*) and the will to discover meaning (*the will to meaning*) constitute the primary motivation that drives human existence. Through this fundamental motivation, individuals strive to attain a meaningful life in accordance with their personal goals and deeply held values (Fatimah & Soleh, 2025).

Frankl identified logotherapy as the “Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy,” following Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis and Alfred Adler’s individual psychology. Freud viewed human behavior as driven by the pursuit of pleasure, while Adler emphasized the will to power. In contrast, Frankl proposed the will to meaning as the fundamental motivation of human existence, with happiness emerging as a consequence of a meaningful life rather than an end in itself (Anahdiah et al., 2025).

From the logotherapeutic perspective, suffering is an inseparable part of human existence and need not always be avoided or eliminated. It can acquire positive value when individuals discover meaning within their experiences, a process referred to as meaning in suffering. Thus, suffering can become an opportunity to develop courage, resilience, and meaningful attitudes toward life’s inevitable challenges (Frankl, 1967).

In literary studies, logotherapy provides a framework for examining characters experiencing existential conflict and crises of meaning. In Ahmad Rabie’s *Waswas*, the protagonist experiences anxiety, psychological distress, and existential doubt. Through Frankl’s perspective, these experiences can be interpreted as part of his search for meaning amid crisis and uncertainty, making logotherapy a relevant framework for examining his psychological journey (Wati, 2025).

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design using library research and a literary psychology approach based on Viktor Frankl’s humanistic-existential psychology (logotherapy).

The protagonist is conceptualized as an existential subject experiencing crisis and searching for meaning through two central concepts of Frankl's logotherapy: *will to meaning* and *meaning of life*.

The data sources consisted of both primary and secondary sources. The primary data source was the novel *Waswas* by Ahmad Rabie, published by Dar Al Shorouk in 2019 (Rabie, 2019). Meanwhile, the secondary data sources consisted of literature relevant to the study, including Viktor Frankl's major works, such as *Man's Search for Meaning*, *The Will to Meaning*, and *The Doctor and the Soul*, etc., as well as scholarly journal articles and previous studies addressing logotherapy, humanistic psychology, and literary psychology.

Data were collected using the reading and note-taking technique. The researcher conducted an intensive and repeated reading of the novel to gain a comprehensive understanding of its narrative structure, characterization, and the dynamics of the protagonist's existential conflict. Subsequently, textual passages relevant to the research focus were identified and documented, including dialogues, monologues, and narrative descriptions that reflected indications of existential emptiness, the search for meaning in life, the freedom to choose one's attitude, and the process of discovering meaning in life. The collected data were then classified according to the conceptual categories of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy.

Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman et al. (2014). The model consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and focused on data relevant to the research questions. In the data display stage, the selected excerpts were systematically organized and interpreted in relation to the key concepts of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy. Finally, the conclusion-drawing stage was conducted to develop a comprehensive understanding of the forms of existential crisis experienced by the protagonist and the process of searching for meaning in life as represented in the novel *Waswas*.

Result and Discussion

Forms of the Protagonist's Existential Crisis in Ahmad Rabie's Waswas

The forms of existential crisis experienced in the pursuit of the *will to meaning* are consistent with Viktor Frankl's concept of logotherapy, which posits that human beings are inherently driven to search for meaning in life. This process generally emerges when individuals experience an existential vacuum, inner turmoil, and the sense that life no longer provides emotional or spiritual fulfillment. In the novel *Waswas*, the protagonist, Adam, is portrayed as a man whose life appears ideal, characterized by stable employment, a home, and a harmonious marital relationship. Beneath this seemingly stable life, however, Adam experiences profound inner emptiness and a loss of purpose. This existential vacuum is manifested through various

forms of psychological distress that unfold throughout the narrative. The forms of the protagonist's existential crisis identified in this study are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Forms of the Protagonist's Existential Crisis in the Novel *Waswas*

No	Forms of Existential Crisis	Frequency
1.	Feelings of Existential Emptiness	10
2.	Feelings of Inner Dissatisfaction	6

Based on Table 1, the protagonist's existential crisis in the novel *Waswas* is manifested in two forms: feelings of inner emptiness, identified in 10 data, and feelings of inner dissatisfaction, identified in 6 data. The following section discusses each form of existential crisis through an analysis of the several textual excerpts.

Feelings of Existential Emptiness

Feelings of inner emptiness, also referred to as the existential vacuum, represent a condition in which individuals experience emptiness, alienation, and a loss of connection to the meaning of life, even though their lives appear outwardly stable and fulfilling. This condition often arises from the absurdity of human existence, in which individuals seek meaning in a world that lacks inherent meaning, resulting in feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and alienation (Apriliana et al., 2023). In the novel *Waswas*, this condition is reflected in Adam's growing sense of alienation from the world around him and his inability to attain inner peace. This is illustrated in the following textual excerpts.

Data 1:

"أقبل شفيتها الدافئتين لأستلهم منهما إحساس العوطن. فالعالم بالخارج موحش وغريب". (Rabie, 2019, p. 6)
"I kissed her warm lips to recapture the feeling of coming home, for the world outside felt so lonely and unfamiliar."

This data takes place when Adam returns home from work and is welcomed by his wife, Celine, in a warm and romantic atmosphere outside their house. Despite being in what appears to be a harmonious marital relationship, Adam perceives the outside world as unfamiliar and incapable of providing him with a sense of comfort.

The excerpt indicates that Adam views the outside world as a place of alienation. It reflects his inner psychological condition, which is characterized by increasing feelings of estrangement and discomfort toward his surroundings. This sense of alienation suggests that Adam has not yet found inner peace or meaning in his life, resulting in both emotional and existential emptiness. The feelings of emptiness and alienation experienced by Adam demonstrate an individual's inability to establish an emotional connection with the surrounding environment. An existential vacuum is characterized by boredom, a loss of life purpose, and inner dissatisfaction, all of which lead individuals to perceive their lives as lacking clear

meaning. Such conditions tend to give rise to psychological distress and a loss of inner peace in the course of life (Darojah, 2024).

Data 2:

"هذا العالم؟!".
"لا أراه يستحق أن يستمر , لا يعجبني العيش في حياة كتلك التي نحيها والحل من وجهة نظري للقضاء علي الامربرمته هو عدم أطفال و من ثم الإنقراض والفناء التام , بهذا فقط يتوقف كل شيء و تندثر المعاناة". (Rabie, 2019, p. 9)

"This world?!"

"I do not believe this world deserves to continue. I dislike living the kind of life we are living. In my view, the solution to ending all of this is to stop bringing children into the world, which would ultimately lead to humanity's extinction and complete annihilation. Only then would everything come to an end, and suffering would finally cease."

This excerpt occurs when Adam is talking to himself as he is about to fall asleep, reflecting on life and the possibility of having children. During this internal dialogue, Adam expresses a deeply pessimistic view of life. He perceives the world as being filled with suffering and believes that the continuation of human existence is no longer worthwhile. These thoughts indicate a significant shift in Adam's perception of the meaning of life, which had previously appeared stable and ordinary.

The excerpt demonstrates a form of existential emptiness, as Adam perceives both life and the world as being dominated by suffering and therefore unworthy of continuation. This perspective reflects the emergence of pessimism and a profound loss of life's meaning, leading him to believe that human suffering can only be ended through the extinction of humanity itself. Such a condition represents an existential crisis in which Adam loses both hope and a sense of purpose in life. This negative perception of life illustrates a state of existential pessimism within the individual. Individuals who lose their sense of purpose tend to perceive life as being filled with suffering and devoid of value worth preserving. Consequently, they experience a decline in hope and increasing difficulty in finding meaningful reasons to continue living (Malik, 2023).

Data 3:

"وقلت قلت في نفسي لو رأت (سيلين) ما حدث لكنت قد قتلتني , من الجيد أن الزوجات تلتزم المنازل ولا لأصيب نصف الرجال بعاهات مستديمة ليس منها شفاء !". (Rabie, 2019, p. 14)

"I said to myself, if (Celine) had seen what had happened, she would probably have killed me. Fortunately, wives usually stay at home; otherwise, half of all men would end up with permanent injuries from which there would be no recovery!"

This data takes place after Adam begins to develop romantic feelings for Olivia. Although he is still married to and living with Celine, Olivia's presence gradually evokes new emotions that disturb his inner peace. In this situation, Adam realizes that his feelings have crossed moral boundaries and conflict with his loyalty to his wife.

The excerpt reveals Adam's growing inner turmoil following the emergence of his attraction to Olivia. This is evident in the statement, *"If Celine had seen what had happened, she would probably have killed me,"* which indicates that Adam is aware that his actions and feelings have begun to violate his personal principles and marital commitment. This realization gives rise to feelings of uneasiness and reflects a psychological conflict that gradually disrupts his emotional stability. The guilt resulting from violating one's moral values may lead to psychological conflict within the individual. Inner conflict arises when a person experiences a clash between personal desires and the values or norms they uphold, resulting in anxiety, guilt, and emotional distress (Alwi, 2014).

Based on Excerpts above, Adam's existential emptiness develops progressively as his psychological conflicts become increasingly complex. It is reflected in his sense of alienation, pessimistic view of life, moral conflict, anxiety, fear of losing meaningful aspects of his life, insomnia, and persistent feelings of guilt. These experiences indicate an existential crisis that weakens his *will to meaning*. From the perspective of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, this condition reflects an *existential vacuum*, in which the loss of meaning, purpose, and direction in life intensifies psychological suffering.

Feelings of Inner Dissatisfaction

Adam's persistent sense of inner dissatisfaction reflects his ongoing inability to attain psychological peace and fulfillment. This dissatisfaction extends beyond external aspects, such as work or social relationships, and instead stems from his internal struggle to achieve emotional and existential stability. Throughout the novel, Adam experiences feelings of emptiness, restlessness, and dissatisfaction with himself, which drive him to search for something he cannot clearly define. This enduring dissatisfaction reflects an unfulfilled search for meaning, whereby neither his achievements nor his experiences provide lasting satisfaction. Consequently, his inner dissatisfaction constitutes an essential stage in his ongoing search for meaning throughout his existential journey. This condition is illustrated in the following excerpts.

Data 4 :

"خرج (البرت) بحركة بطيئة انتجتها شيخوخته , وغمر الأجواء بعد ذلك عبير أنثوي , حول المكان الي بستان من اللاقندر , تطلعت بفضول الي القادمة فوجدتها فتاة فاتنة في بداية العشرينات من عمرها , لها بشرة ناصعة البياض خضراء العيون , ذات شعر أصفر قصير ينسدل من تحت قبعة كحلية تعلو رأسها , شفتاها محلاة بدرجة مميزة من أحمر الشفاه , ترتدي بلوزة سماوية اللون وجونلة باللون الكحلي و كان صوتها ناعماً سلساً . " " كان لها جمالاً خاطفاً , أسراً , لا فكاك من إدمان التحديق فيه." (Rabie, 2019, p. 13)

"(Albert) walked away slowly, his movements burdened by old age. As soon as he left, the room was instantly filled with a delicate feminine fragrance that transformed the place into what felt like a lavender garden. Curious, I turned toward the newcomer.

She was a striking young woman in her early twenties. Her fair complexion was complemented by captivating green eyes, while her short blonde hair peeked out from beneath a navy-blue hat. Her lips were painted a distinctive shade of red. She wore a sky-blue blouse paired with a navy-blue skirt, and her voice was soft and gentle." "She possessed a captivating beauty, so enchanting that it was difficult for anyone to look away."

This excerpt takes place when Adam first meets Olivia at the bookstore where he works. Olivia's appearance is described in vivid detail, emphasizing her remarkable beauty and charm, which immediately capture Adam's attention. This encounter marks the beginning of Adam's growing emotional attraction toward her.

The excerpt reveals Adam's emerging inner dissatisfaction, as reflected in his growing attraction to Olivia. This is evident in the way he becomes increasingly captivated by her presence and finds it difficult to avert his gaze. His fascination suggests an inner longing to seek something capable of providing the emotional fulfillment that he has been unable to find in his previous life. Inner dissatisfaction often arises when individuals perceive that their lives no longer provide a sufficient sense of emotional fulfillment. Consequently, they may seek emotional refuge in new relationships or experiences that they believe can fill the sense of emptiness within them (Musfiqoh, 2024).

Data 5:

"شعرت بعطرها الأنثوي يملأ رئتاي وبجسدها اللين يدفيء ظهري , فاستحوذت علي قلبي بهجة غير متوقعة في أمسية كانت تخلو من الروعة و الاندهاش."
"بعد البهجة المشعة , تملكني شعور عجيب لم أفهمه , شعور بأنني و (أوليفيا) ننتهي لبعضنا لبعض ! احتضنتني أكثر فلم أقاومها , ولم أمنعها , كنا يمكن أن أوقفها ولكني لم أفعل , ذلك لأن النشوة التي تملكنتني سرت في كل جسدي كالخدر." (Rabie, 2019, p. 19-20)
"After that overwhelming joy, a strange feeling that I could not understand began to take hold of me a feeling that Olivia and I were destined for one another."
"She held me even more tightly. I neither resisted nor pushed her away. It all felt impossible"

This data takes place when Adam and Olivia's relationship begins to grow increasingly intimate, both emotionally and physically. Adam experiences an unusual sense of comfort and happiness in her presence, allowing their closeness to develop without resistance.

The excerpt reveals Adam's inner dissatisfaction, which leads him to seek emotional comfort from someone other than Celine. This is evident in his growing emotional attachment to Olivia and his willingness to accept her embrace without resistance. His response suggests that he has begun to derive emotional fulfillment from a new relationship, using it as an escape from the existential emptiness he experiences. The tendency to seek emotional comfort outside an existing relationship may indicate underlying dissatisfaction with one's inner life. Such dissatisfaction often makes individuals more vulnerable to forming attachments to new

experiences or relationships that provide temporary comfort, affection, or happiness (Musfiqoh, 2024).

Data 6:

"أمتغني دقء الإحتضان , وهيني شعوراً بأنها قصاصة مفقودة كانت غائبة عني ثم عادت لتكمل الصورة وتجعلها واضحة." (Rabie, 2019, p. 21)
 "The warmth of her embrace brought me comfort and made me feel as though she was the missing piece that had long been absent from my life, now returning to complete the picture and make it whole."

This excerpt takes place when Adam experiences a profound sense of comfort in Olivia's presence. Being with her makes him feel as though a part of himself that had long been missing has finally returned.

The excerpt reveals Adam's sense of incompleteness, reflecting his inner dissatisfaction with his life. This is evident in his perception of Olivia as the missing piece that has long been absent from his life. Such a perception suggests that Adam experiences an emotional void and seeks meaning and comfort through Olivia's presence. Feeling that something is "missing" in one's life often indicates unmet emotional needs. Consequently, individuals may become emotionally dependent on the presence of others whom they perceive as capable of completing them and providing lasting happiness and comfort (Dini et al., 2025).

The analysis shows that Adam's inner dissatisfaction stems from unmet emotional needs and an unfulfilled *will to meaning*, reflected in his attraction to Olivia, desire for emotional intimacy, and search for happiness through new experiences. His joy in interacting with children also reveals a longing for warmth, affection, and harmonious family relationships. From Frankl's perspective, these experiences indicate that Adam seeks emotional fulfillment through temporary relationships, making his inner dissatisfaction a manifestation of the *existential vacuum* that drives his continuing search for meaning without lasting fulfillment.

The Protagonist's Attitudes in the Process of Discovering the Meaning of Life

The protagonist's attitudes in the process of discovering the meaning of life are closely aligned with Frankl's concept of *meaning of life*, which posits that the fundamental human need is to discover meaning and purpose in life. According to Frankl, individuals are capable of enduring suffering, psychological distress, and existential crises when they possess a purpose that makes their lives meaningful. Meaning is not attained solely through happiness but also through the way individuals understand suffering, fulfill their responsibilities, and choose their attitudes toward life. Frankl identifies three primary pathways to discovering meaning: *creative values*, *experiential values*, and *attitudinal values*. *Creative values* are realized through productive work, meaningful actions, and personal contributions. *Experiential values* emerge through experiences of love, appreciation, and encounters with what is valuable in life. *Attitudinal values*,

meanwhile, are reflected in an individual's capacity to choose a meaningful attitude when confronted with unavoidable suffering. Consequently, individuals who succeed in discovering meaning are better able to overcome existential emptiness and develop a clearer sense of purpose.

In *Waswas*, Adam is portrayed as experiencing inner emptiness, anxiety, and psychological conflict that gradually cause him to lose his sense of direction. These conditions lead him into a prolonged inner struggle to understand the meaning of his existence. Nevertheless, through the various experiences he undergoes, Adam gradually begins to recognize his purpose in life, understand the significance of his suffering, and discover reasons to continue living. This process reflects the development of *meaning of life* as manifested in the protagonist's psychological growth.

Table 2 presents the findings of this study in the form of excerpts from the protagonist in *Waswas*. These excerpts are classified according to the protagonist's attitudes in the process of discovering *meaning of life*.

Table 2. The Protagonist's Attitudes in the Process of Discovering the Meaning of Life

No.	The Protagonist's Attitudes	Frequency
1	Experiential Values: Finding Meaning Through Emotional Attachment to Others	3
2	Creative Values: Finding Meaning Through Work and Meaningful Contributions	3
3	Attitudinal Values: Finding Meaning Through Self-Reflection and Personal Growth	3

Based on Table 2, the protagonist in *Waswas* demonstrates three attitudes in the process of discovering the meaning of life. These include *experiential values*, reflected in emotional relationships with others (3 data); *creative values*, reflected in work and meaningful contributions (3 data); and *attitudinal values*, reflected in self-reflection and personal growth (3 data). The following sections discuss each pathway to meaning in greater detail through an analysis of several excerpts.

Meaning in Life through Emotional Attraction to Others as Experiential Values

According to Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, *experiential values* refer to an individual's ability to discover meaning through emotional experiences, love, interpersonal relationships, and the appreciation of what is considered valuable in life. In *Waswas*, Adam's emotional experiences with the people around him represent one of the pathways through which he seeks meaning amid his psychological instability. The following excerpts illustrate this process.

Data 7:

(Rabie, 2019, p. 23) "كانت نبرة متضرعة و بها شيء سحري غير مفهوم يجذبني إليها."
"Her voice carried both a plea and a command at the same time a tone with an almost inexplicable magnetic pull that drew me toward her."

This excerpt takes place when Adam begins to experience a strong emotional attraction toward a woman he has just met. The attraction arises not merely from an ordinary conversation but from an affective experience that leaves a profound impression on him.

The data reflects *experiential values* as manifested in Adam's emotional experience toward the woman who captures his attention. According to Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, *experiential values* are realized through experiences of love, emotional intimacy, and the appreciation of what is perceived as meaningful in life. Adam's deep emotional attraction demonstrates that, despite his ongoing inner conflict, he remains capable of forming meaningful emotional connections with others. This experience represents one of his pathways to discovering meaning through interpersonal relationships and affective experiences. Frankl further argues that love enables individuals to perceive the deepest essence of another person while simultaneously discovering meaning in their own lives (Frankl, 1985).

Data 8:

"حبيبي .. تبدو متعرقاً بشدة..اهداً".
"كابوس لعين".

(Rabie, 2019, p. 31). "أنا بجوارك".
"My dear... you're sweating so much. Calm down."
"That cursed nightmare."
"It's the first time in a long while that you've had a nightmare. It's alright I'm here with you."

This data depicts Adam after experiencing a nightmare that profoundly affects his psychological condition. During this moment of distress, he receives emotional support and reassurance from someone close to him.

The data reflects *experiential values* through Adam's experience of love, care, and emotional support from a significant person in his life. According to Viktor Frankl, meaning can be discovered through experiences of love and interpersonal relationships that foster a sense of security and personal worth. The comforting words directed toward Adam demonstrate emotional care and companionship during a period of psychological instability caused by his nightmare. This supportive presence becomes a meaningful experience that helps him cope with his anxiety and inner suffering. This interpretation is consistent with Abraham Maslow's theory of human needs, which emphasizes that love, emotional support, and a sense of belonging are fundamental to maintaining psychological well being (McLeod, 2025).

Data 9:

"رفعت يدها لتودعني و انسحبت بهدوء الي الخارج, وتركتني غارق في تخیلات مسكرة من فرط استمتاعي بها, من الجيد أن أمانينا و تصوراتنا تبقي حبيسة عقولنا, ماذا لو كانت تخیلاتنا مرئية للجميع !.."
(Rabie, 2019, p. 33)

"She raised her hand to bid farewell to me and then left calmly, leaving me immersed in an intoxicating fantasy because of how deeply I enjoyed it. It is truly fortunate that our wishes and imaginations remain imprisoned within our minds. What would happen if our fantasies could be seen by everyone?!"

The quotation illustrates Adam's condition after his encounter with a woman who left a profound emotional impression on him. The encounter caused Adam to become immersed in his imagination and fantasies about this figure.

This data reflects experiential values through Adam's emotional and imaginative responses to someone who significantly affects him. From Frankl's perspective, admiration, attraction, and emotional pleasure can contribute to the discovery of meaning in life. Despite his anxiety, Adam remains capable of appreciating emotional experiences and seeking meaning through affective connections with others, which may help overcome feelings of alienation (Here, 2021).

The analysis shows that Adam discovers meaning in life through emotional experiences in his relationships with others, reflected in his attraction, the emotional support he receives, and his appreciation of these encounters. From Frankl's perspective, such experiences represent *experiential values*, through which meaning is found in love, affection, and interpersonal connections. Although these experiences do not always lead to morally appropriate decisions, they demonstrate Adam's capacity for attachment and connection as part of his search for meaning amid inner conflict and psychological instability.

Meaning in Life through Work and Contribution to Others as Creative Values

Creative values in Viktor Frankl's logotherapy refer to an individual's efforts to find meaning in life through works, occupations, contributions, and actions that provide benefits to others. In the novel *Waswas*, Adam attempts to discover meaning in life through his work, his concern for others, and his hope of building a more meaningful family life. This is demonstrated through the following data.

Data 10:

"كنت قد بعت اليوم روايتين لدستوفسكي و مسرحية لشكسبير، لا شك انني اسعد بالقراء و اساعدهم باقتراح الكتب التي تتماشى مع الذائقة الأدبية لكل منهم." (Rabie, 2019, p. 8)
"I have sold two novels by Dostoevsky and a Shakespearean play today. I am very pleased to help readers by recommending books that suit their literary preferences."

The quotation illustrates Adam's activity as a bookstore employee who feels happy when he is able to help readers find books that match their interests. In this quotation, creative values are reflected through Adam's work, which provides benefits to others.

The statement indicates that Adam does not work solely to fulfill his material needs, but also gains inner satisfaction from helping readers discover books that correspond to their

literary interests. His work becomes a form of positive contribution that provides a sense of meaningfulness in his life. In Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, meaning in life can be found through works and actions that are beneficial to others. This is supported by Frankl's view that individuals can discover meaning in life through work, devotion, and meaningful contributions to their surrounding environment (Pradipta, 2025).

Data 11:

"لا يجب ان نبخل عليه بهذه الزيارات لأنها من اهم أسباب سعادته او مات موافقة لكلماتي."
(Rabie, 2019, p. 15)

"We should not be reluctant to visit him, because our visits are one of the sources of his happiness."

The quotation demonstrates Adam's awareness of the importance of providing attention and visits to someone in order to contribute to that person's happiness. In this quotation, creative values are reflected through acts of care and efforts to bring happiness to others.

The statement indicates that Adam understands how simple presence and attention can have a meaningful emotional impact on an individual. This attitude represents a positive action carried out for the social and emotional benefit of others. From Viktor Frankl's perspective of logotherapy, showing care and bringing happiness to others are part of the human effort to find meaning in life through real contributions to other people. This perspective is consistent with Carl Rogers' humanistic theory, which emphasizes that interpersonal relationships based on attention and empathy play an important role in human psychological development (Sariri et al., 2024).

Data 12:

"هل سأشهد اليوم الذي أنجب فيه طفلاً مثلهم، له نفس ملامحي؟"
(Rabie, 2019, p. 25) "هل سأضيف كرسيًا جديدًا المصدة تناول الطعام في المطبخ؟"
"Will I ever witness the day when I have a child like them, someone who has a face resembling mine?"
"Will I add a new chair to the dining table?"

The quotation illustrates Adam's hope of having a family and a more complete domestic life in the future. In this quotation, creative values are reflected through Adam's desire to build a family and bring new life into his existence.

The image of "a new chair at the dining table" symbolizes Adam's wish to create a more meaningful life through his role as a father and a family figure. This hope indicates a life orientation toward continuity, affection, and responsibility for his future family. In Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, meaning in life can also be discovered through the responsibilities and roles that individuals undertake in their lives. This perspective is supported by Erik Erikson's

view that the desire to build a family and achieve generativity represents a human need to create meaningful continuity in life (Ayuningtyas, 2025).

The analysis shows that Adam discovers meaning in life through *creative values*, reflected in his work, concern for others, and responsibility for the future. His satisfaction in helping readers, efforts to bring happiness to others, and hope of building a meaningful family demonstrate his orientation toward creating and contributing. From Frankl's perspective, meaning is found not only through personal experiences but also through concrete actions that benefit others. Thus, despite his inner conflict and existential crisis, Adam maintains meaningful roles through work, social care, and responsibility for the future.

Meaning in Life through Regret and the Desire for Self-Improvement as Attitudinal Values

Attitudinal values in Viktor Frankl's logotherapy are related to an individual's ability to determine their attitude toward suffering, mistakes, and unavoidable life circumstances. In the novel *Waswas*, Adam begins to show regret, self-awareness, and a desire for change as part of his process of discovering meaning in life through the suffering he experiences. These aspects are demonstrated through the following data.

Data 13:

"أتمنى ذلك لأنني أشعر بالأسف لأنني تحولت إلى شخصية أنانية لا تمثلني، شخصية مليئة بالشك والجشع والانحراف. أريد أن أشفى". (Rabie, 2019, p. 141).
"I hope so because I regret having changed into a selfish person who does not represent who I truly am, a person filled with doubts, greed, and deviation. I want to heal."

The quotation occurs when Adam begins to recognize the negative changes within himself as a result of the psychological conflicts and suffering he has experienced. In this quotation, attitudinal values are reflected through Adam's regret and his desire to improve himself.

The statement "I want to recover" indicates moral awareness and a desire to overcome his damaged inner condition. His acknowledgment of selfishness, doubts, and deviations demonstrates that Adam has begun to engage in self-reflection regarding his life. From Viktor Frankl's perspective of logotherapy, individuals still possess the freedom to determine their attitude toward suffering and mistakes they encounter. This is supported by Frankl's view that suffering can become meaningful when individuals are able to adopt a positive attitude and transform themselves through their life experiences (Ayuningtyas, 2025).

Data 14:

"هذا أفضل من أن أصاب بالجنون". (Rabie, 2019, p. 33).
"That is better than becoming insane."

The quotation occurs when Adam begins to realize the psychological pressure and inner suffering he experiences, which makes him aware of his deteriorating mental condition. In this quotation, attitudinal values are reflected through Adam's attempt to endure his suffering and maintain control over himself.

The statement "That is better than going insane" demonstrates his awareness of his vulnerable psychological state and his effort to confront the difficulties he faces. This expression indicates that Adam is still capable of choosing his attitude toward suffering rather than completely surrendering to his circumstances. From Viktor Frankl's perspective of logotherapy, individuals retain the freedom to determine their attitude toward unavoidable suffering and life difficulties. This is supported by Frankl's view that suffering can become meaningful when individuals are able to adopt a positive attitude and transform their experiences into a source of personal growth (Ayuningtyas, 2025).

Data 15:

(Rabie, 2019, p. 118). "سأتحرك لفهم ذلك."
"I will move forward to understand."

The quotation demonstrates Adam's determination to seek understanding of various events and conflicts that occur in his life. In this quotation, attitudinal values are reflected through Adam's willingness to understand the suffering and life circumstances he experiences.

The statement indicates a conscious effort to seek understanding and meaning behind the inner conflicts he faces. This attitude shows that Adam does not completely surrender to his circumstances; instead, he attempts to find answers and interpret the meaning of his life experiences. From Viktor Frankl's perspective of logotherapy, the search for meaning through one's attitude toward suffering is an essential part of the process of achieving meaning in human life. This is supported by Frankl's view that self-awareness and the effort to understand personal experiences are important elements in an individual's process of confronting existential crises (Ayuningtyas, 2025).

The analysis shows that Adam discovers meaning in life through *attitudinal values* by changing his perspective toward suffering and inner conflict. His regret over his negative transformation, desire for recovery, and determination to understand the sources of his suffering demonstrate growing self-awareness and a willingness to seek meaning in his experiences. From Frankl's perspective, the freedom to choose one's attitude toward suffering enables individuals to find meaning even in difficult circumstances. Thus, regret, self-reflection, and the desire for self-improvement represent *attitudinal values* and mark Adam's existential development in his search for meaning.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study on Ahmad Rabie's *Waswas* through Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, Adam's life journey represents a gradual search for meaning amid psychological conflict, trauma, and existential emptiness. His experiences of suffering contribute to self-awareness, the discovery of life goals, and meaningful choices.

The study identifies two forms of existential crisis based on the concept of will to meaning: feelings of emptiness and inner dissatisfaction. The discovery of meaning based on meaning of life is manifested through experiential values in emotional relationships, creative values in work and contributions to others, and attitudinal values in regret, self-reflection, and the desire for self-improvement. Thus, Adam's meaning in life develops through the interplay of experiences, actions, and attitudes throughout his existential journey.

Future research may apply logotherapy to other Arabic literary works to broaden understanding of the representation of meaning in life. It may also combine Frankl's theory with other approaches, such as Freud's psychoanalysis, Jung's analytical psychology, or Maslow's humanistic psychology, to provide a more comprehensive account of character dynamics. Further studies could examine psychological trauma, defense mechanisms, mental health, and spiritual values in *Waswas* or other contemporary Arabic literary works.

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