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Is Life Meaningless?

What is the meaning of life? What does meaning even mean?

The meaning of a word is the idea people intend to express by it. But when we ask whether life has meaning, we mean more than that. We're thinking of purpose, intention, even design. We could say the designer of a car means for their design to be used to transport people, so cars have a meaning to them - they're not random, accidental collections of metal, glass and plastic.

So what about life?

Secular thinkers are beginning to come to terms with the possibility that life may be meaningless. If the existence of life is accidental, can it possibly have meaning? Can an unintentional by-product of chemistry + physics + chance + who knows what confer purpose? In response to this bleak reality, many have responded "*Oh well, who cares if life has no meaning, it can have whatever meaning you choose to give it.*" So those who think life has no meaning nonetheless continue to live as if life does have meaning in-order to find satisfaction in life.

But hang on, can you see the inconsistency?

No amount of wishful thinking can undo reality; if life is meaningless then we can't just invent a meaning to it and then believe in it. Is that really meaningful at all or just a *crutch* to help us cope? Doesn't that demonstrate the very essence of self-delusion: deliberately living in a way contradictory to what you think in order to satisfy your desires? So if you really do believe life is meaningless, then shouldn't you live accordingly to be consistent? The issue is that to live like this is not quite that easy, it's actually unlivable.

But we also have another contradiction to contend with: to say life is objectively meaningless is illogical.

C.S Lewis said, "*If the whole universe has no meaning, how would we ever have found out that it has no meaning? Just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we would never know it was dark. Dark would be a word without meaning.*" So if life is objectively meaningless, then ask yourself: Is this a meaningful statement? How can one debunk meaning and value while making a meaningful statement against life itself? Because if what you said is meaningful then everything is not meaningless, on the other hand, if everything is meaningless then what you say is also meaningless so you can basically make no point. If life itself is meaningless why would yours or any philosophy be meaningful? I hope you can see the contradiction.

So we are not going to escape the reality of meaning so quickly. Why? Because we can't actually live

without it. Meaning is the substance that guides us, it's what drives us, what wakes us up in the morning, what compels us to achieve and aspire towards. It's like the blood in our veins. Without meaning, we die. Reality shows that we are dependent on meaning to live. Take the simple habit of eating, for example:

1. Why do we eat?
2. Because we get hungry
3. Why do we get hungry?
4. Because our bodies are programmed to ensure our survival
5. Why must we survive?
6. So we can reproduce and continue the human race
7. Why must the human race continue, why does that matter?
8. And so on...

There is a constant demand for a reason, a hierarchy. Now this process of thought can be applied to anything, including morals and human value. For example, use the same process for a moral stance:

1. Why is it wrong to murder?
2. Because it takes life
3. Why does it matter if we take life?
4. Because life is valuable
5. Why is life valuable - what is the basis for life's value?
6. And so on...

There is a pattern. From the simplest of lifestyles to the most complicated of decisions we depend on a pyramid of meaning, where the decision on one matter is dependent on the basis of something else. Now unless there is an ultimate cause or foundation of meaning from which all other meaning is derived, then everything is ultimately meaningless.

So why can't we create our own meaning? Let's try rewriting one of the examples above:

1. Why is it wrong to murder?
2. Because it takes life
3. Why does it matter if we take life?
4. Because life is valuable
5. Why is life valuable - what is the basis for life's value?
6. Because I say so
7. Why is your opinion valid?
8. Because my life is valuable
9. Why is your life valuable? And so on...

Any attempt to create our own meaning is self-referential. It begs the question as it relies on its own foundation to justify itself. It makes as much sense as saying unicorns exist because unicorns say so.

What's more, even if self-referential meaning is valid, no self-referential justification of meaning can ever establish a *magnitude* to its claimed meaning. If humans have value, is that value little or great? This approach accepts no external scale against which we can compare our level of value. Do we have more value than a beetle? What if the beetle insists it's more valuable than you and I? Who are we to contradict it?

Everything that goes on in the natural world can only have meaning or value in reference to

something else. Take a £20 note, it's certainly not valuable in its material. If all humans disappeared, it would have no value as its value is only based on the value we consider it to have. The conclusion is solid: there can be no ultimate meaning to reality unless there is an ultimate meaning giver, without referring to anything, without beginning or end. As minds are the only things that we know possess meaning and intention, this ultimate meaning-giver must be an ultimate mind, which we can call God.

Yet what happens if we remove God from the equation? Let's say we go back to that question, "why is it wrong to murder?" We would go an infinite loop of 'yes but why...' until it all loops back, it is all groundless and therefore not true. If you remove a transcendent meaning giver then you remove all meaning, and in the meaningless of life, you must also accept the meaningless of all that we live for. Love, human value and ethics cannot be objectively justified in a world where matter alone exists.

Thankfully, though, most of us live as though it matters whether justice is done, whether we survive and whether human rights are upheld. We are living as if there is a meaning to life and so as if there is an ultimate purpose that is valuable in its own right. This is where our sense of moral conviction comes from. Morality is a 'why' question, it requires meaning. We understand moral fairness and insist that our idea of fairness, right and wrong are meaningful. We pursue love, we cherish relationships, we value, we insist on equality. We're living our lives as if moral claims are objectively true and there is an ultimate meaning to our lives. We do not live as if nihilism is true. For example, when someone believes in an atheistic worldview devoid of an absolute moral framework while maintaining a belief in a definite moral code to justify the way we live, then what they are doing is selectively borrowing from the biblical view of justice and value while ignoring that fact it is only truly justified if there is a transcendent basis, a God, for it to gain its purpose.

Everyone is religious

If you think life has no meaning but live as if it does, am I to be convinced of what you believe by how you think or by how you live? In other words, many may confess not to believe in God, but that doesn't change the fact that you will still live according to the idea of God, as if there is a purpose and meaning to life. So when one militantly says, "*I don't believe in God, it's all pointless*", well sorry, it's just not that simple. The reality of life offers too much evidence.

We don't face the horror of the 20th century, in which millions were slaughtered, tortured, in which Nazi Germany buried thousands alive, castrated children, gassed entire families, and then say there's no such thing as good or evil, that it's all just pointless particles reacting in a meaningless universe. If you really believe everything is meaningless you have no right to say the Nazis did evil. None of us act as a nihilist when they look down at their child filled with love or hear their first words "Mum" or "Dad" or the simple words "I love you". Our words, actions, precious friends and family have more meaning than accidental atoms can account for. A belief in God means the origin of morality, love and human value is founded upon a transcendent reality. In this view, we therefore have a definite responsibility to express love and follow the truth, and to not live in moral truth is a sin, an offence against the One who purposed us and what He intended for us to be. In this view, the hierarchy of meaning, and therefore reasonable living, is justified. Man cannot reasonably live without God, and the ramifications of society holding the full view of God's denial, if consistently lived (which it's often not), ultimately is the blind destruction of reasonable living.

Christianity challenges the worldview of modern man.

According to the Christian view, God exists and life doesn't end at the grave. Life is objectively and truly meaningful, purposeful and valuable. Therefore I can live consistently according to what I believe. So when people ask the question: does it matter whether God exists? Nothing could matter

more. I fear that one day the modern man will realize the implications of denying God and this realization, if lived consistently, will usher in an age of nihilism with the destruction of all meaning and value in life. I think most people still do not consider this consequence: that in killing God, we have inevitably killed ourselves.

The answer introduced himself

So let me finish with a comforting thought on what the meaning of our lives is all about. I'll start with the Greeks. In general, they believed that the universe had a rational and moral order to it, and this "order of nature" they called the *logos*. For them, the meaning of life was to contemplate and discern this order in the world, and they defined a well-lived life as one that conformed to the *logos*. The Gospel writer John deliberately uses the philosophical term *Logos* and says this about Jesus:

"In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made. Without Him, nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and in that life was the light of all mankind... And the word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory."

This statement from John fell like a thunderbolt onto the world of the ancient philosophers. Like the Greek philosophers, and unlike many contemporary ones, John affirms that there is a *telos*, or purpose, to our lives - something we were made for, that we must recognize, pursue and honour. This is our responsibility. But then the scriptures go on to insist that the meaning of life is not a principle or some other abstract rational structure, but a person, an individual who even walked this earth. It led to a revolution. If Christianity is true, a well-lived life is not found primarily in just philosophical contemplation and intellectual pursuits, which would leave out most people of the world. Rather, it can be found in a person who can be known, in a relationship that is available to anyone, anywhere, from any background.