

Meaning of Life

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Definition of ‘meaning’

- If we ask what a word means, we want to know what it represents, what it *stands for*.
- Life doesn't represent anything
- When looking from different point of views, the phrase ‘meaning of life’ can be defined very differently
 - I.e. from the question of whether or not if we are in a simulation, is life meaningful if that were true? If it is, then in what way life may be considered to be meaningful? (vice versa if life is meaningless)



Supernaturalism

- Supernaturalist theories are views that meaning in life must be constituted by a certain relationship with a spiritual realm.
- Life would be meaningless if a God or a soul does not exist, or rather if they do exist but one fails to have the right relationship with them.
- More based on religious beliefs
- In monotheistic traditions, supernaturalist thinkers are usually divided into those with God-centered views and soul-centered views



God-centered views

- Meaning in life is that one's existence is more significant, the better one fulfills a purpose God has assigned
- A reason for having God being a reason to life's meaning would be the only way that our lives could avoid contingency
- The root of your actions that is meaningful to you originated from God
 - Like the ladder thought experiment we did on the memory section
- Major problem: if God assigned us a purpose, then God would degrade us and thereby undercut the possibility of us obtaining meaning from fulfilling the purpose



Soul-centered views



- Meaning in life comes from relating in a certain way to an immortal, spiritual substance that supervenes on one's body when it is alive and that will forever outlive its death.
- If one lacks a soul, or if one has a soul but relates to it in the wrong way, then one's life is meaningless
- How can you determine if you “lack” a soul?
- Life's meaning is that a soul is necessary for perfect justice, which is necessary for a meaningful life
- Some view that what you must accomplish is something that will have an permanent effect on the world

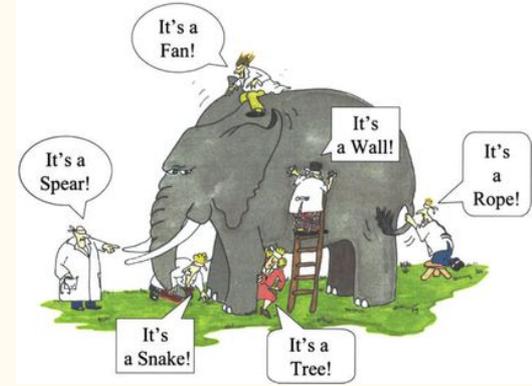
Naturalism

- Belief that a significant existence can be had in a purely physical world as known by science, but brings up a debate about two things: the extent to which the human mind constitutes meaning and whether there are conditions of meaning that are invariant among human beings
- Subjectivism- there are no invariant standards of meaning because meaning is relative to the subject
- Objectivism- maintaining that there are some invariant standards for meaning because meaning is mind-independent



Subjectivism

- Meaning in life varies from person to person
- First person POV
- Life is more meaningful if one seeks for what he/she wants strongly than if they don't care about it at all
- “Our own mental activity is the only unquestionable fact of our existence”
- Two common arguments for subjectivism
 - Is plausible since it is reasonable to think that a meaningful life is an authentic one
 - Meaning intuitively comes from losing oneself
 - Becoming absorbed in an activity or experience



Objectivism

- Meaning is constituted by something physical independent of the mind about which we can have correct or incorrect beliefs
 - Meaningful and worthwhile to a whole society
- To obtain meaning in one's life, one ought to pursue the former actions and avoid the latter ones for they lack significance
- Certain actions confer meaning on life regardless of the agent's reactions to them
- Third person POV



Nihilism

- What would make a life meaningful either cannot obtain or as a matter of fact simply never does
 - Nothing in the world has a real existence
- Combination of supernaturalism about what makes life meaningful and atheism about whether God exists
- Many nihilists have different standpoints that makes the phrase ‘meaning of life’ appear to be very foggy and imprecise

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Susan Wolf POV

- The question “What is the meaning of life?” is equivalent to “What is the purpose of life behind our existence?”
- Wolf’s account: a meaningful life is one that is actively and at least somewhat successfully engaged in a ‘project’ (or projects) of positive objective value
 - The ‘project’ must come out as a success or it will render one’s life meaningless
 - ‘Project’ represents any kind of ongoing activity or involvements
- Wolf’s answer: we should want our lives to be actively engaged with projects of positive objective value — as opposed to projects which are merely subjectively valuable — because to do otherwise is to fail to recognize that one is but a small speck in a vast, value-filled universe. It is to fail to recognize that many things besides one’s own life have objective value.

Thomas Nagel POV

- Our lives will not matter in a million years nor what happens in a million years will matter to us now
- Argues against thinkers for thinking that our lives are absurd
 - He does think that our lives are absurd
- Third person POV makes our values appear arbitrary and our projects appear absurd
- What should we do about the absurdity of our lives?

