

Abstracts for the Third International Conference on Philosophy and Meaning in Life 2020

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Aaron Donald Brooks
Durham Technical Community College
The Meaning of Life: What We Mean By 'Meaning'

There are two common types of arguments found in the literature on existential meaning: (1) debates over existential meaning as a concept; and (2) debates over different conceptions of existential meaning. Concepts are what make a question possible – i.e. they are the more-formal notions assumed by a question. In discussing existential meaning as a concept, philosophers are primarily concerned with asking what we mean by ‘meaning.’ Conceptions, on the other hand, are like answers to questions. Offering a conception gives the formal concept substance.

Two basic types of proposals for elucidating the concept of existential meaning have been made in the literature: monist proposals and family-resemblance proposals. Monist proposals attempt to give one overarching concept to which all competing conceptions of existential meaning answer. Family-resemblance proposals, on the other hand, claim that the question of existential meaning is not exhausted by any one concept of existential meaning; rather, there is a cluster or family of closely-united concepts which exhausts the possibilities of what we mean by ‘meaning’, even though no particular one does so on its own.

Metz (2014) examines three monist proposals and concludes that no single one entirely captures our notion of existential meaning. At the conclusion of his analysis, he argues that because they each touch on important aspects of meaning, they should be united into a ‘family’ of closely-related concepts. For Metz, only the family – rather than any particular member – does a sufficient job of making the question of meaning intelligible. I argue in this paper that Metz’s embrace of a family-resemblance view is too quick. Certainly, family resemblance may be the only way we can characterize certain concepts, like games (Wittgenstein). But, as Metz himself acknowledges, if we can find an underlying concept shared by concepts in the ‘family’ of existential meaning, then that would be preferable.

In this paper, I claim that the three concepts offered by Metz, along with various conceptions in the literature, share the following concept of meaning in common: existential meaning is a valuable connection between a life and something valuable. I draw this concept mainly from the work of Robert Nozick, with some modifications to account for objections raised by Metz. Nozick thinks meaning arises as a person seeks to connect to external values. I contend that ‘meaning’ denotes valuable connections to value(s), period.

I further claim, as an upshot of my thesis, that ambiguity in the question of meaning, viz. “what is the meaning of life?”, arises precisely insofar as we fail to specify the relevant values and connections in which we’re interested. Notice that my thesis necessitates normative judgments about the value of the

connection and the value of the thing to which a life is connected. These values will need to be cashed out when discussing meaning. I argue that many disagreements in the literature on meaning arise precisely because philosophers fail to make clear their presuppositions about the values and connections upon which answers must rely in order to satisfy their inquiries into life's meaning.

Angel On Ki Ting

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The 'Best Life' by the Principle of Procreative Beneficence is not necessarily A Meaningful Life

The Principle of Procreative Beneficence (PPB) advocates that parents should choose the child with 'the best possible life', where 'the best life' is interpreted as 'the life with the most well-being' by Julian Savulescu. It is believed that through selecting various desirable traits (physical or psychological) possessed by the child, the child would live a life that is on the whole good (with reference to the hedonistic, desire-fulfilment or objective list theories of well-being). This paper argues that such decision would be detrimental to the child in finding meaning in one's life for two reasons. First, while the idea of PPB places an emphasis on individual autonomy (or self-determination), it excludes the significance of relational autonomy, where the availability of choices for a person and one's exercise of autonomy are intertwined with the others and are rendered possible only within a social context. As a result, although a child chosen through PPB may attain a life that is most pleasurable/fulfil most desires/attain most worthwhile things in life, one's life may still be deprived when it is evaluated under the capability approach, where a good life is determined by the kind of life one comes to value and chooses to live (the subjective requirement of meaning in life). Second, the idea of PPB promotes the recognition of 'self-made man' and diminishes one's sense of vulnerability, a view that humans are born vulnerable because of their human condition and are interrelated and dependent on each other. Without acknowledging one's vulnerability, one fails to recognise the needs of the others. The result is the erosion of the value of solidarity which in turn prohibits one from living a life with objective value.

Annemarie van Stee

Radboud University Nijmegen

Not Altogether Meaningless Lives

In this paper I argue that the question of meaning in life is (at least) two questions: one about existential choice and one about existential crisis.

When discussing meaning in life, contemporary philosophers mostly take meaningful living to depend on the central activities in an individual's life. Pablo Picasso, Marie Curie, and Nelson Mandela are held up as examples of particularly meaningful lives, given the quality of the activities they devoted themselves to. But also in less 'perfectionistic' examples such as visiting a brother in hospital or helping a friend move (the term is Iddo Landau's, the examples are Susan Wolf's), it is the activities individuals develop that provide meaning to their lives.

Such views on meaning in life implicitly assume that people live under circumstances allowing them to develop activities of their own choosing. The question about meaning in life these views primarily address is a question about the basis for deciding what to devote oneself to, in order for one's life to be meaningful. I call this the existential choice question of meaning in life.

I argue that the existential choice question is different from what I call the existential crisis question of meaning in life. This is a question about reasons to go on living, or in other words, about what makes someone's life not altogether meaningless. The crisis question is discussed less often in the contemporary literature, and where it is, it is mostly conflated with the existential choice question.

Often indeed, the two questions do not come apart. When all is relatively well, an answer to the existential choice question will assure an answer to the existential crisis question; or it ensures, to paraphrase Bernard Williams, that the crisis question is given its best possible answer by never arising at all. And when circumstances make it hard to develop meaningful activities, it is not strange if the crisis question arises as well.

Yet, some people live under circumstances in which it is next to impossible for them to develop worthwhile activities of their choosing and they still find ample reason to go on living and claim to experience meaningfulness. Vice versa, individuals exist who actively contribute to many worthy causes and yet they still wonder what the point of it all is and whether they have reason to go on living. In both types of cases, the existential choice and existential crisis questions of meaning in life come apart.

Discussing such cases, I argue the crisis question deserves more attention, as it is not exceptional, more urgent and more fundamental than the choice question. I argue too that contemporary views on meaning in life that focus on individuals and the central activities they devote their lives to cannot adequately address the crisis question. I end with a sketch of the alternative view I am developing, building on Søren Kierkegaard's 'Sickness unto Death'.

Anton Heinrich Rennesland
University of Santo Tomas
Creating Meaning after the Death of God

I argue an interplay between the individual and his community that creates meaning qua a will to power. My position banks on a naturalistic reading of Nietzsche stemming from his appreciation of the Greeks that an individual is naturally situated in a community.

Nietzsche writes: "God is dead, and we have killed him." The statement ought not to be read in a religious sense but in an epistemic-ontological one. The death of 'God' is the death of a 'quasi-transcendental' truth that governs one's beliefs and actions. Killing this truth equates a re-questioning of truths and morals, a probing beliefs and actions—a transition from epistemology to ethics, a movement from thinking to doing. Rather than a nihilistic adage, this statement stands as an epistemic-ethical challenge to each individual to actively create meaning.

Hollowing out the previously held belief makes room for passion, for eros, for self-creation. In confronting her beliefs can she reorient her action towards the betterment of both self and community; she realizes more of herself through engagement in community, in one's own agora. This of course necessitates struggles—the agon of engagement, of self-creating, of finding meaning.

This drive, this will, is a power, a will to power. A crude interpretation of this signifies a domination over the other in a competition or a struggle, yet this is something Nietzsche outrightly objects. These agons – struggles, contents, competitions – are needed for a dynamic self-creation. Finding meaning in this sense equivocates to hollowing out false idols and identifying to one's role in society. It requires 'killing' the belief, distancing oneself from it, and creating meaning through self-creation.

Aribiah David Attoe
University of Johannesburg
Passionate Yearning Theory as an Alternative to African Theories of Meaning in Life

In African philosophy, some work is now being done to ascertain what African conceptions of the meaning of/in life would look like. From the growing literature, theories of meaning in life, like the African god-purpose theory, the vital force theory, the communal normative function theory, the consolationist theory of meaning, etc., have been shown to be, at least, plausible accounts of meaning. However, deciphering how defensible or attractive these theories of

meaning are is another matter altogether. In this work, I converse with these theories of meaning. Finding them inadequate – mainly because of my scepticism about the metaphysical framework in which they are built and/or the fact that they are too narrow to account for some important intuitions we have about meaning – I propose and motivate a novel alternative to the African theories of meaning in life, which I have called, “the passionate yearning theory”. Inspired by Ada Agada’s consolationist approach, meaning is understood, within this framework, as the intrinsically derived yearning, and passionate striving, for something (an ideal, a state of affairs, etc.) that possesses some plausible objective claim to value and truth or facticity, which makes it worth pursuing.

Asheel Singh

University of Johannesburg

What if God was All of Us?: Why the Definition of ‘God’ Matters in Analytic Discussions of Meaning in Life

Contemporary analytic treatments of meaning in life in the English-speaking tradition have largely proceeded from the atheistic and naturalistic assumptions common to the natural sciences. With the recent publication of T.J. Mawson’s ‘God and the Meanings of Life’ (2016) and Thaddeus Metz’s ‘God, Soul and the Meaning of Life’ (2019), more analytic philosophers might be drawn to (re)examining what role, if any, God might play in life’s meaning. These rigorous and stimulating attempts to understand why the dialogue should, or should not, be broadened to include theistic considerations ought to be welcomed, though it is not a trivial fact that these treatments of the issue limit their focus to an understanding of ‘God’ that is derived from the Abrahamic faiths. This is of course a reasonable place to start, but the question of what role God could play in life’s meaning should not be considered settled until other salient conceptions of ‘God’ are thoroughly considered, for it is reasonable to believe that such comprehensiveness could lead to further insights. One such conception of God has been discussed in great depth over the course of millennia, and is familiar to billions of individuals in various Eastern religions and intellectual traditions. I have in mind the understanding of God most clearly described in the Advaita Vedanta school of Indian philosophy.

According to Advaita (literally: ‘not-duality’) Vedanta (literally: ‘end of the Vedas’), ‘God’ is not some external entity, nor is it intelligible to speak of God as bestowing meaning upon your life. Rather, God is *you*. This idea is perhaps most succinctly expressed via a famous Sanskrit phrase in the Chandogya Upanishad: ‘tat tvam asi’—‘thou art that’. Briefly, unlike in the Abrahamic faiths, there is no ‘soul’ as such in Vedic thought; what appears instead is the notion of ‘Atman’, or ‘Self’ (in uppercase). All living beings are thought of as manifestations of this one all-pervading Self, which is described as identical to God (‘Atman is Brahman’), and directing one’s efforts toward the possibility of ‘Self-realisation’—that is to say, coming to apprehend oneself as God—is the most meaningful orientation one can have as a human being. Further, those activities that we encounter as ‘meaningful’ are in degrees meaningful in relation to how closely they take us toward this goal of realising the Self. I have two principle aims in this talk. First, I advance a new framework through which this Vedic conception of God can best be understood by analytic philosophers in the English-speaking world. Second, I offer a novel case for why and how this conception of God could fruitfully contribute to analytic discussions on God’s possible role in life’s meaning. To translate and summarise this all too crudely for the purposes of this abstract, the ontology that will be espoused here can be thought of as a kind of ‘cosmopsychism’, and within this metaphysical framework, nihilism (of the secular Western and not Buddhist kind) is incoherent, for meaning pervades existence and is thus inescapable.

Benjamin Edmund Murphy

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Meaning and Mistakes in Philosophy and Life

The history of philosophy is easily perceived as futile: one philosopher contradicts another and hopes of establishing a consensus are short-lived, leading to the conclusion that the history of philosophy is nothing more than a history of mistakes. In that case, one might conclude that the only worthwhile lesson one

can draw from the history of philosophy is that to become a philosopher is a waste of time, since this path will almost certainly lead to more mistakes. The life of the typical professional philosopher would therefore be without meaning.

In Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day*, the central character says that the tragedy of his life is that he did not even make his own mistakes. This suggests that a life in which you make your own mistakes, while it may be a failure, is at least a meaningful failure, whereas not making your own mistakes renders life meaningless. This, in turn, implies a rationale for studying the history of philosophy. The person who fails to understand the history of the tradition that shapes them will blindly follow the mistakes of others, whereas the person who understands that history will not be a blind follower but, by self-consciously reflecting on the tradition, and selecting what to retain, what to reject, and what to modify, they may at least ensure that the mistakes they make are their own.

This optimistic conclusion about the value of philosophy rests on the idea that certain mistakes are meaningful mistakes, and that this is the kind of mistake philosophers can expect to make.

To make a mistake of any kind, you must be attempting to be right about something – the aimless wanderer is never lost. A meaningful mistake must surely be a mistake about an important matter – there must be a risk involved, such that the mistake has negative consequences. Ishiguro also seems to be suggesting that the mistake must be your own mistake – a mistake that reflects something of your best qualities. In the novel, the character who makes meaningful mistakes is Lord Darlington. He is a generous, merciful man, and these good qualities are what lead him to make his mistake – sympathy for a defeated nation becomes support for the Nazis. As a result he loses something particularly valuable to him – his reputation as a decent man.

So, the idea that a life in which you make your own mistakes is meaningful can justify the study of philosophy, but only if certain conditions are met. There must be some definite goal to such studies – the hope to make a discovery of a kind that seems to be, in principle, achievable (no aimless wandering). The philosopher must feel that their best qualities particularly suit them to the pursuit of philosophy. There must be some kind of risk involved – if making a mistake carries no personal price, then the mistake was not a significant one.

Bernice Brijan

Tilburg University/University of York

Religious experience and existential feeling. Retrieving divine encounter through the ritualization of text: an exploration

It has been noted by various scholars that a number of texts written after the historical Babylonian exile (597–538 BCE) still seem to demonstrate a deep awareness of exile and destruction, contributing to the view that the exile and destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE were never really overcome. This view has become a central matter in the so-called 'enduring exile thesis'. One of the main claims in this discussion is that existing modes of divine encounter suffered rupture. While some practices ended, others transformed. There is, e.g., a development of scribal practices in the Second Temple period which has been addressed in terms of the 'ritualization of text'. This concept casts light on the increasing textualization of Israelite religion in Early Judaism through the writing and rewriting of traditions, related to ritual. However, this development has been addressed particularly in terms of innovative scribal practices and the growth of biblical traditions, instead of in terms of the underlying question of why these scribal practices developed in this particular way. Moreover, the linkage between ritualization of text and enduring exile remains largely undiscussed. This is particularly striking, given the fact that the discussions seem to evolve around common texts.

In this paper presentation, I will look into this matter and address how ritualization of text was one of the ways in Early Judaism in which texts came to function as a means to retrieve divine encounter. In order to understand the shift from a loss of intimacy with the divine to a retrieval of divine encounter it is necessary to, in a sense, move beyond the development of scribal culture and the writing and rewriting of traditions and understand as well as possible the existential dimension of what was to be retrieved. I will therefore introduce a phenomenological concept, 'existential feeling', as a philosophical lens from which the experiences of exile and destruction can be interpreted. Existential feeling concerns the sense of reality and belonging; it is the way in which one finds oneself in the world, while a shift in the feeling is felt accordingly as a changed relationship to the world as a whole. One can feel "at home" in the

world, at “one with nature”, “disconnected” or “slightly lost”. It has been suggested that the concept is relevant in understanding religious experience, in the sense that ‘belief in God’ sometimes consists in the expression of a type of existential feeling, a way of inhabiting the world that lends itself to religious interpretation. Until now, this has for the most part been left unexplored. The concept has been taken up particularly in philosophical analyses of psychopathological experiences and in broader accounts of affective phenomena. This paper will be a first attempt to apply the concept to ancient religious texts, taking a non-biblical psalm from the Dead Sea Scrolls named the Apostrophe to Zion as a case-study. In doing so, my aim is as well to get to a deeper understanding of the relationship between religious existential feeling and ritual in a more general sense.

Bryony Pierce

Independent

Meaningfulness without Freedom of Action

Setting aside the question of what meaning any particular life, or life in general, may have, I address the specific question of whether having a meaningful life is compatible with leading a life devoid of (both libertarian and compatibilist) freedom of action and moral responsibility, a life in which one’s goals, motivations and ensuing acts unfold as part of a broader causal process rather than as a result of one’s freely made choices and decisions. I also consider the implications of my conclusions – that freedom of action and moral responsibility are not necessary for a meaningful life – for our understanding of meaning, and meaningfulness, in this context, and how the concepts might then be applied, to our own species and others.

Presenting empirical evidence from the literature on possible functions of consciousness, I argue that consciousness, and in particular, the capacity of sentient beings to experience the qualitative character of affective responses to actual or hypothetical states of affairs, is necessary for the capacity to discover meaning in life. This capacity is key to a sense of meaningfulness in which freedom of action and moral responsibility for one’s actions are redundant or, arguably, merely illusory. My account defends a view of meaningfulness as arising within the individual in the form of the subjective salience of a fluctuating set of motivated goals, directed either towards future courses of action or, when considered retrospectively, relating to past events. These give rise to behavioural responses that need to be sensitive to stored and/or new information about (a) anticipated outcome values and (b) the expected probability of a successful application of any means implemented to achieve ends that satisfy one’s goals. This requires two functions: the ability to form judgements about affective valence – derived ultimately from physiological responses to stimuli – and the ability to process information about causal relations in the external world, i.e. it requires the capacity for goal-directed action. Furthermore, these criteria for being capable of finding meaning in life have the consequence that many animals can also be considered to lead meaningful lives, as the higher cognitive processes associated with human reasoning, although they might enable humans to categorise certain features of their lives as meaningful in a way that could not easily be applied to the lives of other animals (e.g. the pursuit of abstract ideals in science, the arts, ethics, religion or politics), are not essential, in my account. A modest awareness of and responsiveness to causal relations, in conjunction with the capacity to form basic subjective evaluations of anticipated outcomes, both of which many animals may be deemed to possess in virtue of their problem-solving capabilities, would be sufficient for the capacity to lead a meaningful life as defined here.

Carien Susan Smith

Johannesburg Institute of Advanced Study

A New Existential Absurdity: The Apocalypse and Value

I argue that an imminent apocalypse in the form of climate change is very likely and that Samuel Scheffler’s Doomsday Scenario is unlikely to capture many of the aspects of value that changes. My proposed Apocalyptic Scenario captures not only the badness of the extinction of the human race and the

destruction of the planet earth in the form of climate change, but also the negative impacts and complications thereof on value, which Scheffler's Domsday Scenario does not capture. There would be a significant loss in the values of meaningfulness and worthwhileness, even beyond the point of the values as discussed by Scheffler. The distinctness between the Domsday and Apocalyptic Scenarios is in the fact that Scheffler's Domsday Scenario is merely an extinction of the human race, whereas an Apocalyptic Scenario is the complete annihilation of the human race as well as the planet to the point of it being uninhabitable. A further contrast is that Scheffler's Domsday Scenario is hypothetical, while my Apocalyptic Scenario is concrete, based on the likelihood of an apocalypse in the form of climate change. This Apocalyptic Scenario, in a tangible form such as climate change, with its implications on value, has not been considered before. I believe that it is essential to consider an Apocalyptic Scenario in the form of climate change and its implications on value, which is becoming increasingly plausible. Scheffler's Domsday Scenario considers how we value and stresses that we require the existence of people continuing to live after we have passed individually (an "afterlife") for our lives to matter. Shiffrin adds to this point by arguing that it is the arbitrariness of loss that is what is especially bad, while Wolf and Frankfurt show that even without such an afterlife there could still be value. Metz argues that we have a particular attachment to our projects that would make a Domsday Scenario bad. I believe that all of these arguments have valuable insights, but that there would be differences in an Apocalyptic Scenario as there would be no humans left to their activities of valuing as well as the loss of all other things of value (objects, projects, states of affairs, etc.). I will first consider the argument as set out by Scheffler in the form of the Domsday argument. After that, I will consider a further scenario in which another intelligent species inhabits the earth and what implications that would have on our valuing, much like Shiffrin proposes in her response to Scheffler. Finally, I will extend the argument by proposing an Apocalyptic Scenario and considering (1) how some things will cease to be of value and (2) how some things will be of less value by specifically considering the values of the meaningful and worthwhile.

Charles Potter
University of Keele
Sense and Sublimity in Relational Theories or Meaning

In this presentation I will separate three broad ways in which meaning can motivate us. Each motivation involves thinking about meaning - or more accurately 'life' - in a different sense.

The first way that meaning can motivate us, is when we are driven to understanding the purpose or significance of all life or existence in general (Tartaglia 2016; Waghorn 2014; Cooper 2005). I argue that this is an extremely fundamental question that has interested people stretching back at least as far as the axial age, but that it is not something that acts as a particularly sustained motivation for the majority of people, whereas the other two senses I will consider are.

The other two kinds of motivation involve regarding our lives as the sum total of our actions, and wanting those actions to be something that we can draw either self or social respect from, or regarding our lives as the sum total of our experiences, and wanting to draw some kind of understanding or significance from them. The former more 'agential' sense of life corresponds much more closely with the conception of meaning that is either presupposed or defended by the majority of analytic philosophers working on meaning of life (Wolf 2010; Metz 2013; Bramble 2015; Evers 2017). The latter sense, exemplified by phrases such as people being 'in our life' or 'life is tough' (for more examples see Repp 2018), is a sense that is much better represented in continental philosophy, empirical psychology and subjectivist accounts of meaning (Heidegger 1967; Ayer 1990; Calhoun 2018). I argue, that although respect is a very healthy, deep and common-place motivation for people (Taylor 1989), that once we reach a level at which we can very reasonably and comfortably justify our lives to ourselves, pursuing respect begins to lapse into unhealthy forms of pride, to the detriment of engaging with the things we value more directly. Conversely, the experiential sense of meaning - much more neglected within analytic philosophy - I argue, leads to engaging with our values in a much more direct and uncompromising way.

Getting clearer on the way that meaning motivates us, will also involve denying Wolf's contention that meaning comprises a third and distinct kind of motivation next to morality and self-interest (Wolf 2010). Wolf's view on meaning as a motivation disintegrates, I argue, when we make a distinction between

the motivations that people have, and the motivations they should have. When we look at the motivations people do have, I argue, meaning is only one of many different disconnected motives that cannot be reduced to three categories. When we look at the motives that people should have, then most of the examples she gives can be explained by either moral or self-interested motivations. As Christopher Woodard has argued however, if we identify meaning motivations with moral ones, meaning loses its distinctness (Woodard 2017), and so it is better understood as a kind of enlightened self-interest (Thomas 2019).

Charles Nkem Okolie

Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike

Ndubuisi as a Principle of Meaning in Life: Beyond the Is-Ought Dichotomy in Ethical Theory.

I argue that if life is an inherent value, then life is priceless. Ndubuisi is a principle in African relational ethics; It simple states that life is supreme and is also priceless. The question that suffices are: Do all animate beings have equal moral worth? Should human and non-human animals be allowed to procreate as much as they can just because life is priceless? I intend to examine these and similar questions as it relates to the ethics of procreation. My hunch is that to be is to be in a relationship with other earthlings. The quest for meaning is primarily interpersonal and ethical. This view undermines the debate on whether it is possible to move from what is the case to what ought to be the case without a logical jump. I maintain as follows: on the one hand, that the principle of Ndubuisi does not suggests that all animate beings have equal moral worth. It specifically rejects the destruction of any life in so far as one does so because one have the capacity to destroy and that powerful individuals who use their powers to oppress their earthly neighbours are irresponsible persons. For instance, all animate beings have equal moral worth but not equal moral status. Cats are as valuable as human beings, but no cat is equivalent to a human being. On the other hand, the principle of Ndubuisi is primarily concerned with optimal flourishing of all life on earth. The question of procreation is secondary. Preservation and procreation are two distinct concepts. Thus even if both are two sides of a coin, they are not identical. I intend to analyze how the attempt to conflate this divide tend to create confusion in the debate on meaning in life as well as procreation ethics. My analysis will focus on relevant debates in contemporary African philosophy. The essay is analytical and argumentative.

Christophe de Ray King's College London You Shouldn't Believe Philosophical Theories that Make your Life Meaningless I want to live. Practical rationality requires me to act accordingly, i.e. in such a way to as to stay alive. Theoretical rationality requires my wants and actions to cohere with my beliefs about the world. Since I cannot rid myself of my desire to live, this means that my 'web of beliefs' ought to include the belief that my life is good and worthwhile, that is, meaningful – otherwise I will be left in the rationally dubious position of desiring something which I do not believe to be good. Further, my other beliefs about the world must be coherent with my belief that my life is meaningful. Hence, rationality forbids me from believing any philosophical theory which entails that my life is not meaningful.

Or so I will argue. If my argument is sound, it could form part of a case against atheism from the meaningfulness of life. Indeed, theists sometimes argue that if atheism were true, life would be meaningless. A typical atheistic rejoinder concedes that life is meaningless on atheism, but that this is no reason to reject atheism. However, if the theistic argument is advanced in conjunction with my argument above (and each is sound), the arguments would jointly yield the conclusion that, if I desire to live (and cannot get rid of that desire), I have a conclusive reason to reject atheism.

I begin by laying out my argument and motivating its premises, before addressing objections. Though I shall saw a few words about why atheism is thought to entail that life is meaningless, I will not seek to defend this position. Rather, my aim is to show that, if atheism (or any other philosophical theory) entails that life is meaningless, this is reason enough to reject it (at least, for someone who desires to live and cannot get rid of this desire). The central objection to my argument consists in the charge that it is never rational to adjust our beliefs to make them cohere with our desires (even ineradicable ones), because this amounts to an objectionable sort of 'wishful thinking'. For example, it would not be acceptable for a heavy smoker to withhold his belief that smoking is

harmful so as to make his desires cohere with his background beliefs.

I respond that, on the contrary, revising one's beliefs can be a perfectly legitimate means of achieving belief-desire coherence. Alleged counter-examples, such as the above smoking case, only show that not all such revisions will be acceptable. In particular, revisions which result in new instances of belief-desire incoherence will not be acceptable.

Charles Brandon Repp
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A Problem for Interpretivist Accounts of Life Meaning

Contemporary philosophers typically think of meaning in life as a property that adds final value to individual human lives. Recently, however, several philosophers, including Joshua Seachris (2009), Alan Goldman (2018), Charles Repp (2018), and Joshua Lewis Thomas (2019), have urged a new understanding of the concept. Although their views differ in detail, all three agree in seeing a close connection between meaning in life and meaning in the more ordinary sense that applies to (e.g.) language and art. More specifically, they all share the idea that life, like a sentence or a novel, is made meaningful by being grasped or understood under some appropriate form of interpretation. What unifies them might thus be described as an 'interpretivist' approach to the concept of life meaning.

The interpretivist approach is at odds in various respects with the standard contemporary paradigm, as established particularly in the work of Susan Wolf (2010) and Thaddeus Metz (2013). For example, whereas the contemporary paradigm assumes that human choices are the only or primary bearers of life meaning, some interpretivists hold that life meaning can also inhere in non-human animals or even inanimate objects. Even more radically, some interpretivists deny that life meaning is a source of final value. On their view, while a meaningful life is valuable, its being meaningful does not make it so. Rather, the existence or recognition of value in life is a prior condition on the realization of meaning.

In breaking with the decades-old paradigm of Wolf and Metz, some interpretivists see themselves as recovering an older philosophical tradition, tracing back to Novalis's original use of the phrase "meaning of life" in the 18th Century and including some of the key existentialist writings of the 20th. Yet this same tradition, I will argue, poses a serious challenge to the interpretivist view in as much as it takes the modern age to have suffered a profound loss of meaning on account of the 'death of God' and the spread of a scientific worldview. For this perceived loss seems to imply, contra interpretivism, that how meaningful life is does not depend merely on how intelligible and coherent an interpretation we place on it. Were it so, then it would be hard to explain why a modern scientific view of life would preclude or diminish its meaningfulness.

In this paper I expose this problem for the interpretivist approach, contrasting it with some objections to interpretivism that Metz has recently raised, before going on to consider how interpretivists might defend against it. I suggest that while a solution to the problem lies within a broadly interpretivist framework, the problem puts pressure on interpretivists to recognize some normative constraints on the kind of interpretations that can yield life meaning.

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Is the Human Predicament a Fate Worse than Death?

I argue that Benatar's anti-natalism entails pro-mortalism because the human predicament as he describes it is a fate worse than death. Thus, continued existence in such a predicament is not preferable to an exit from it. I revisit my earlier argument for the claim that Benatar's asymmetry between pleasure and pain paved the way for pro-mortalism unless Epicureanism about death is ruled out. I reply to Benatar's response to that argument. I then move to Benatar's characterization of the human predicament and suggest that that also leads to pro-mortalism. I respond to three arguments from Benatar which seek to block the move from appalling lives to pro-mortalism. Finally, I turn to what work the deprivation account of death could do in reducing the number of people who are better ending their lives. I conclude that if Benatar is right about the predicament we find ourselves in, it is better for most people to end their lives.

Eri Mountbatten-O'Malley

Edge Hill University

Mitigating the Joke of Happiness & the Meaning of Life

In this paper I aim to explore the various uses of 'meaning' (truth, interpretations, intentions, purposes, reasons etc.) and related concepts, in order to question whether the notion of either a single, unifying meaning of life, or by contrast, a subjectivist account of personal 'meaning of life' in the context of happiness, has any sense. This will be explored in the context of Wittgenstein's insight regarding the regular problems that arise as a result of the bewitchment of our senses through language (PI §109) and the urge to be captivated by misleading impressions of metaphysical depth.

Because questions regarding 'meaning' are most often of a philosophical or religious nature, the praxis of asking such questions is closely related to concept of 'wonder', curiosity, awe and exploration. As such, in seeking epistemological insight, we are concerned with the concepts of questioning and understanding, knowledge and doubt. However, the tension between subjective experience and objective truth remains problematic. These connections suggest that in our search for meaning and in raising the primacy of private sense 'experience' over 'understanding' (which is in fact subject to public-criteria) and we are left with an in-articulable and non-sensical conception of 'meaning' despite the veneer of a worthy mystery. Until we are set free from such a grip on our senses, we are tragically left bewildered and lost in misapprehension. Therefore, using 'Ramsay's maxim', the problems and tensions between subjectivist and objectivist conceptions of meaning will be explored and clarified in the context of normativity.

However, the purpose of this paper is not wholly critical or negative; a sketch of happiness and meaning will also be offered in the context of what we know about perception and aspect-seeing at particularly salient and epistemically transformative moments of our lives – whether emotional, intellectual or spiritual etc. (e.g. Damascus experiences). In order to elucidate the nature of the philosophical questions and problems to hand, the primary concern here is the dissolution of misconceptions (cf, Hacker, 2007: 14) so that our urge to misunderstand (PI §109) may be revealed to us and what was formerly thought of as a philosophical problem 'should completely disappear' (PI §133). Thus, in the positive mode, the work involves liberation from deceptive 'pictures' or forms of thinking that often grip us in the way we see the world or indeed how we philosophize. By way of an analogy with the therapeutic process, the result of good philosophy is then a shift in aspect in the patient and a liberating re-orientation in the 'way of looking at things' (PI §144). I will show then that although happiness is largely used in banal and narcissistic senses, through the practice of wonder and questioning, and being willing to seeing things differently, we

can mitigate the absurdity of our human condition, or confusion, by developing mastery over the purposeful language-games of happiness, human flourishing and the meaning of life.

Fionn Barnsley O'Donovan
University of Southampton
The Early Wittgenstein's Dissolution of the "Problem of Life"

In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein attempts to dissolve the problem of the meaning of life (or, as he puts it, the "problem of life") by attempting to make the problem "vanish". In my paper, I try to make sense of this attempt by investigating and developing a contrast made by Cora Diamond. Diamond contrasts Hume's stance on what makes a life worth living (in "Of Suicide") with the early Wittgenstein's views on the matter (as expressed in his World War One Notebooks and the *Tractatus*). Developing Diamond's thought further, I distinguish between conditional and unconditional commitments to life, arguing that Hume endorsed the former commitment, while Wittgenstein endorsed the latter sort. I spell out what each commitment involves by discussing some relevant examples from Dostoyevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov" (which we knew the early Wittgenstein was reading during World War One). I then argue that Wittgenstein's attempt to dissolve the problem of life makes more sense once we see that his "unconditional commitment" view plays a role in it.

I begin by showing how the distinction between conditional and unconditional commitments to life helps us explain, and understand, the early Wittgenstein's remarks that "only that life is a happy one which is able to renounce the comforts of the world" (Notebooks, 13.8.16) and that a happy person "needs no purpose other than to live". It also helps us explain, I argue, why the early Wittgenstein considered suicide "the elementary sin" (Notebooks, 10.1.17), in stark contrast to Hume. I then try to show the implications of this unconditional commitment to life for the problem of life's meaning. The basic idea is that if one comes to see the value of one's own life as unconditional (for example, not conditional on a certain level of wellbeing), then one will stop thinking that anything must be "added" to one's life to render it meaningful. Rather, to paraphrase Michael Kremer, one will wake up to the meaning that was there all along. If one achieves this, then according to Wittgenstein, the "problem of life" dissolves.

Although I primarily focus on explaining, rather than defending, the early Wittgenstein's dissolution of the problem of life, I shall also comment on certain advantages and implications of his view. For one thing, the unconditional commitment to life promises a certain psychological relief from the pressures and stresses that, I suggest, inevitably burden us if we have a conditional commitment to life. Second, I shall argue, the debate between conditional and unconditional commitments to life has important consequences for how we should address certain life-and-death matters in moral philosophy. Many turns of phrase and assumptions in moral philosophy literature take for granted that the conditional commitment is the only game in town. For example, the oft-used distinction between lives that are, and are not, "worth living" makes little sense from the unconditional commitment point of view, on which all lives are worth living.

Francesca Brencio
University of Seville
Mind the gap: psychiatric diagnosis and meaning-making process

The profound impact of a psychiatric diagnosis can cleave one's life into a distinct "before" and "after". This division can affect people's life and the related meanings. In this context, clinical and existential meanings often differ and the need to recover a sense, when life appears irrevocably altered, is urgent. Through the hermeneutic phenomenological method, this contribution aims to explore these fundamental questions in three sections:

- Firstly, I will explore the paradigm shift from a third-person, disease-centered perspective, into a first-person approach, and the consequences of this. This entails re-assessing the notion of “expertise by experience” through first-person report and in how to inform clinical and social services, particularly in the field of mental health.

- In the second section, I will scrutinise the gap at the core of the modern understanding of diagnostic procedures and treatments in psychiatry: the chasm between the validity of diagnostic constructs and the measurement of a disease status. In other words, the incongruity between the medicalized classifications and the more nuanced complexity of human suffering witnessed in practice. In this sense, this section will be devoted at discussing the so called “illnification” of mental distress (Szasz 1960) from an epistemological point of view.

- Lastly, I will explore the meaning-making processes undertaken by the clinician and by the patient. I will show that it is vital for clinicians to overcome the idea of fixing something broken in people. The inflated “brain mythology” (Jaspers 1997) warrants challenge, and this will be explored alongside the notion of monilinear physical causality in bio- and neurosciences in favour of a circular causality between brain and environment (Fuchs 2018) - bracketing the causal and ontological assumptions that accompany the biomedical model (Carel, 2017).

For patients, the experience of illness can be a radical interrogation about who they really are, what their lives are about, what genuinely matters in their existence. By attacking the integrity of the self, illness makes it difficult and sometimes impossible to grasp the initiatives which underlie the work of interpretation and thereby the very process of the construction of sense is jeopardized. This is why a non-reductionist approach to mental health is cardinal in the recovery process and in regaining meaning in life. Appreciating this can contribute to the formation of a more humane psychiatry.

Heidi Chantelle Cobham

University of Sussex

The Meaning of Life is the Pursuit of Love

What is the meaning of life? I reject theories that try to answer this question by looking toward unhelpful abstract ideals to which we cannot easily relate. Instead, I wish to defend the claim that love is, either in part, or in full, the answer to the question of ‘what is the meaning of life?’ As love occupies such an overarching and central position within human existence it seems somewhat obvious to me that it plays a vital role in understanding life. In this paper, I set out to elucidate the grandeur of love. I then go on to argue that regardless of the differing beliefs each of us hold, there is one belief that we can all share, and this belief is love. To my mind, that love is a central and universal belief certainly confirms that it is a phenomenon central to life itself. I set out to show that irrespective of our differences, whether we are theists, atheists or more mechanistic in belief, there is one central belief that all of humanity shares. I begin by arguing that for the theist, love is the grounding of existence because belief in God is essentially belief in love. I then move on to show that even for the atheists, while there is no belief in God, there is belief love and love, consequently, has become their God. I then end the paper by showing that even those of us who adopt a more mechanistic view of the world can also agree that love is the meaning of life because love is seen as the principle force that fuels life. I set out to argue for this from a philosophical standpoint - after all, not only is philosophy’s etymology translated as ‘the love of wisdom’ but philosophers, in particular, have had a long-standing interest in the study of love and what it can tell us about humanity.

Hirotao Nakayama

Keio University

Moral Perfection and the Meaning of Life in Kant's Transcendental Idealism

Where should we seek the meaning of life? Should we seek something in the world existing independently of us, rational beings? Should we rather put up with the merely subjective projection of personal interest to the world as the only accessible meaning of life? As David Wiggins points out in 'Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life', neither the naive cognitivist nor the naive non-cognitivist theory of value hardly account for what we investigate. In order to explain

the meaning of life properly, according to Wiggins, we require some harmonious coordination between our aim and the world. His doctrine of cognitive underdetermination is one of the attempts to describe such a possibility as a sophisticated non-cognitivist theory. However, this is not the first endeavor to find it. There was a great pioneer in the history of philosophy. I insist that Immanuel Kant seeks the account of such harmony in his conception of the highest good. It is often emphasized that the Kantian practical philosophy is nothing other than the ethics of autonomy of our will, and the spontaneity in our ability forms the value of our life as morality. It appears that Kant's position does not require any support from the world, and the meaning of life can be reduced to our spontaneity. Some contemporary Kantian philosophers, especially constructivists, emphasize this active and controllable aspect of the good. Surely, autonomy and morality based on it are the necessary and central components of the theory of goodness in the Kantian framework. However, it is half of the story. According to Kant, the moral perfection which he calls the supreme good is not the ultimate end of rational beings. "But it [the moral perfection, namely the supreme good] is not yet, on that account, the whole and complete good as the object of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings; for this, happiness is also required" (Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, AA V:110). In order to present the comprehensive account of the good, we have to elucidate his account of the highest good characterized as the proportional combination between morality and happiness. In this paper, I suggest a novel interpretation of the conception of the highest good in Critique of Practical Reason, and claim it forms Kant's philosophy of the meaning of life as the harmonious coordination between rational beings and the world. The happiness in the highest good is neither the optional rewards for the morality, the fulfillment of morally permissible sensible desires nor what is indirectly introduced through the duty of benevolence. The realization of the actions which the good will aims at causes the happiness which immediately consists of the highest good. The proper interpretation of the conception of the highest good leads us from the Kantian ethics of autonomy to the Kantian philosophy of the meaning of life in the hope for the highest good.

I will especially focus on the necessary condition of the highest good, namely moral perfection in relation to the meaning of life. This investigation specifies what kind of tasks to achieve moral perfection in Kant's transcendental idealism is, and how it forms the meaning of life, combined with happiness in the highest good.

Iddo Landau
University of Haifa
Externalism, Internalism, and Meaningful Lives

The subjectivism/objectivism/hybridism debate in meaning in life research has drawn much attention in the last two decades. I argue that part of the debate is based on confusing two senses of "subjectivism" and of "objectivism" about meaning in life. Subjectivism is sometimes employed to connote a certain type of relativism, the view, roughly, that the truth of claims is relative to the individual standpoints of the claimers. Objectivism is, roughly, the view that the truth of claims is independent of claimers' standpoints. But another sense of subjectivism is what might be called internalism, the view that what makes life meaningful is in the internal sphere—one's sensations, feelings, thoughts, decisions, etc. And another sense of objectivism is what might be called externalism, the view that what makes life meaningful is what we do in the external sphere.

We can see that the subjectivism/objectivism distinction and the internalism/externalism distinction differ because they can cut across each other. I present examples of objectivist externalists, objectivist internalists, subjectivist externalists, and subjectivist internalists. One can be, then, a subjectivist without being an internalist (and vice versa), as well as an objectivist without being an externalist (and vice versa).

It is important to distinguish between subjectivism and internalism because some people's anti-subjectivism leads them to reject also internalism, although the latter isn't guilty of anything that might be wrong in subjectivism. For example, a common argument against subjectivism is that it leads to strongly unintuitive results such as that life could be made meaningful by, e.g., counting bathroom tiles (Wolf). However, this common argument against subjectivism doesn't harm internalism. Likewise, those who support objectivism (that is, anti-subjectivism, anti-relativism) needn't therefore also support externalism or reject internalism about meaning in life.

In this paper I do not at all discuss the subjectivist/objectivist debate about meaning in life; I focus only on externalism and internalism. I examine whether the meaningfulness of lives resides in the external sphere, internal sphere, or both. I argue that there are no sets of factors in the external sphere that are sufficient for having a meaningful life but that there are such in the internal sphere or in the internal and external spheres together. There are no sets of factors in the external or in the external and the internal spheres together that are necessary for having a meaningful life but there are such in the internal sphere. And there are no sets of factors in any of the spheres that are both sufficient and necessary for having a meaningful life. Further, meaningfulness most often results from internal and external factors together. However, although the higher the combined value of factors is, the more a life is meaningful, sometimes increase in value in relevant internal or external factors decreases rather than increases meaning since factors occasionally interact dialectically. Moreover, the internalist-externalist hybridism I espouse, unlike Wolf's, allows for cases in which people aren't engaged in, attracted to, etc. an external action; the internal and external factors needn't be at all related.

Ikuro Suzuki

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Thick and Thin Selves Reconsidered

The deprivation theory is the most popular account of the harm of death. According to it, death is bad for us because it deprives us of good things, and earlier death is worse because it deprives us of more. However, it faces a problem called as "the symmetry problem." The problem is this: the deprivation theory says that earlier death is bad. However, we do have no reason to believe our later birth is bad, and there is no significant difference between earlier death and later birth. If we have no reason to believe that later birth is not bad, because of the symmetry between death and birth, we must accept that earlier death is not bad too. Therefore, the deprivation theory must be false.

For this problem, Frederik Kaufman has defended a solution, which is originally suggested by Thomas Nagel. Nagel's basic idea is that it is impossible that we were born earlier than our actual date of birth, while it is possible that we would die later than our actual date of death. Therefore, later birth cannot be bad for us, because there is no possibility that we were born earlier and enjoyed more goods. This solution has been called as "the impossibility solution". However, some philosophers have criticized it, because it seems possible that we were born earlier by, say, certain reproductive technology.

To counter the criticism, Kaufman distinguished the thick and thin selves. According to him, we, qua thin selves, could have been born earlier, but the possibility does not show that we in the more important sense (i.e. qua thick selves) could have born earlier and enjoyed good things. However, as Jens Johansson convincingly argues, Kaufman's solution confronts serious metaphysical problems because of the difficulty to understand the relationship between these two kinds of entity.

The aim of this talk is to propose a new interpretation of Kaufman's distinction. According to it, the distinction between thick and thin selves should not be understood as the distinction between different kinds of entity, but rather different kinds of identity: numerical identity and identity in a broad sense. With this interpretation, I shall show that we can avoid the metaphysical problems, while keeping Kaufman's original intuition. However, my aim is not to provide a full defense of the impossibility solution as the solution to the symmetry problem. My defense is partial on this regard. Rather, my aim is to show that the distinction is useful to understand important aspects of our personal values in our life and its relation to our identity in a broad sense.

Jag Mikael Williams

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Merleau-Ponty and Brandom: Articulating the Necessity and Limits to a Philosophy of Meaning

Philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Robert Brandom's related yet differently-focused theories of meaning indicate the finite, embodied, and socially-embedded origins of human meaning which demonstrates both the crucial elements of meaning that necessarily permeate our lives but also shed doubt on

the possibilities for discovering objective theories of meaning.

Merleau-Ponty's theory of meaning begins with a re-location of the Kantian Cogito within the confines of lived embodiment. That is, for Merleau-Ponty, the origins of meaning in general as well as the histories of meanings for linguistic judgements are not found in some detached or abstracted realm of "universal consciousness" but in the lived interaction between an agent's bodily "motricity" and their "intersubjective" world. In fact, rather than beginning with language as the first origins for content, language springs up from the already instituted world of primordial embodied and intersubjective meaning and sense-making. The springing up of language reshapes our meaning-oriented embodiment but does not exclude it. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "I do not primarily communicate with 'representations' or with a thought, but rather with a speaking subject with a certain style of being, and with the 'world that he aims at.'"

It is here that Robert Brandom's neo-pragmatist rendition of the "space of reasons" fills in the rest of Merleau-Ponty's story about meaning's ultimate grounds in a body's "motricity" and what that means for language domains. The space of reasons is the normative dimension that keeps score of the available inferential moves between concepts. It is in virtue of this socially emergent norm-governed dimension that an individual rational agent is able to articulate what entitlements, entailments, and incompatibilities certain concepts afford them. Thus, it is not vocal acts, sensory stimuli, bodily motions, nor states of affairs in themselves that confer content onto concepts, but, as Brandom writes, "[a community's] practice of treating what is expressed by some noises as reasons for what is expressed by other noises that makes those noises express conceptual contents in the first place." Brandom explicitly develops the "space of reasons" in relation to a more fundamental understanding of world-oriented embodiment which he does using the American Pragmatist vocabulary of "practical intentionality." As he writes, "the most fundamental kind of intentionality (in the sense of directedness towards objects) is the practical involvement with objects exhibited by a sentient creature dealing skillfully with its world." It is from this original grip on the world that an individual can move towards the more complex and language involving skill of linguistic intentionality which arises with the development of utterance skills and certain cognitive capacities.

The goal of drawing attention to both Merleau-Ponty and Brandom's respective theories of rationality and meaning is to articulate 4 crucial conclusions for the discussion of the philosophy of meaning (1) Meaning is enacted through lived communal embodiment and linguistic interaction (2) Meaning has finite history and elusively multi-constituted physical and social origins (3) The search for an objective origin or truth to meaning is inherently limited due to the previous considerations (4) Meaning, nonetheless, necessarily permeates and is inseparable from human existence.

Jairus Diesta Espiritu

University of the Philippines Diliman

The Existentialist Badiou: Deriving a Badiouan Theory of Meaning in Life

In his seminal work, *Being and Event*, Alain Badiou (2005) sought to reground metaphysics from philosophy to mathematics. There he shows that the science of being qua being has always been mathematics. Together with Heidegger, Badiou holds that Being is Nature by showing that mathematics is able to schematize all possibilities that beings in Nature take. For example, the atomization of Nature is schematized by ordinals in set theory where bigger sets with more information dominate smaller sets until the smallest, the first ordinal: the Two which contains the void and the singleton of the void. Therefore, the ontology (or following his own parlance, metaontology) of Badiou is undoubtedly materialist and unaccommodating to change. The upshot of such rigid and materialistic ontology is the question of the possibility of the Kantian transcendental subject: how is it possible? Can a freely willing agent be allowed? Badiou locates the subject in the opposite of Being, Event. The Event is a radically new happening that gives way to truth, conceived by Badiou as a "hole in knowledge." A subject, in this conception, is that which remains faithful to what Badiou calls a "truth procedure," or the process through which an event snowballs into a truth in a certain situation. For Badiou, there can only be four situations where truth can be found: art, science, love, and politics.

Consequently, a subject can only be one among the four: artistic, scientific, amorous, or political.

On the other hand, in his work, *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study*, Thaddeus Metz (2013) defends a pluralist analysis on the concept of meaning in life. According to Metz, a theory is a theory on meaning in life if it sufficiently answers one of the following questions: (1) which ends are worth pursuing, (2) how to transcend our animal nature, and (3) what merits esteem or admiration. I argue that answers to all three questions are immediately derivable from Badiou's conception of the subject, creating a defensible Badiouan theory on meaning in life.

First, the Badiouan subject remains a subject insofar as it remains faithful to a truth. Therefore, artistic, scientific, amorous, or political truths are ends worth pursuing, the pursuit of which renders a life meaningful. Secondly, the Badiouan subject can only be a human being since an animal is incapable of being faithful to truths. This capacity to fidelity gives a life its meaningfulness. Thirdly, in a separate work, Badiou calls the political figure who stands for "generic" truths a "hero." The subject, therefore, in its fidelity to political truths, becomes a hero, someone worthy of esteem and admiration. The preceding answers, therefore, would comprise a Badiouan theory on meaning in life.

James (Drew) Chastain
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Deep Personal Meaning: A Subjective Approach to Meaning in Life

Much has been written about what makes life in general or individual lives meaningful or meaningless. But meaning judgments are aimed not only at life and lives, but also at things in life. I want to explore what elicits the judgment that things in life are meaningful, whether tangible or intangible things, such as a relationship, an item, a place, a calling, a memory, an idea, a symbol, etc. Such judgments admit of degrees, and I want to account for the deeper judgment that something is very meaningful or means a lot or so much. I'm most interested in personal meaning judgments of things in life, unlike what is typically intended in calling a piece of legislation or a gesture meaningful – these could be meaningful without meaning a lot to me personally. After presenting my account of deep personal meaning judgments of things in life, I indicate how this provides a critical perspective on theorizing about what makes individual lives meaningful.

My basic account for what makes things in life deeply personally meaningful is that they provide a sense of connection for the one making the judgment. But then, the term "connection" needs further clarification, which is probably best pursued by considering its opposite. When disconnected or alienated, we may feel ungrounded, disoriented, empty, fake, bored, depressed or unenthused. Deeply personally meaningful things counteract these problems for meaning. You would be lost without your deeply meaningful things in life, and they are also your rock. They help you to see the point of living, and they help make living worth it. At one and the same time, your deeply meaningful things in life help you to feel more connected to yourself, to others and to the world, enabling you to experience meaning in life. That is, meaningful things don't just give you an objectively meaningful life, they influence your subjective experience, and that's what you are reporting when you judge such things deeply meaningful to you.

I think that this account of meaning judgments about things in life provides an interesting critical perspective on detached or impersonal meaning judgments about individual lives. A detached meaning judgment is one that is supposed to be relatively objective, not involving idiosyncratic subjective elements or a special connection that the person making the judgment has with the life judged. Also, detached meaning judgments serve the social aim of judging the worth of individual persons or the lives they are leading. Recent theorists such as Susan Wolf and Thaddeus Metz provide theories of meaning in life that prioritize detached meaning judgments. But detached meaning judgments about whether an individual life is sufficiently worthy do not reliably predict whether that individual will experience connection in life. This is problematic, because the deepest payoff of meaning in life would be that one experiences

life as more meaningful. The payoff wouldn't be that one's life can be judged meaningful in a detached way, or at least this would be a less deep, and so less desirable, payoff.

Jordi Fairhurst
Universidad de las Islas Baleares
The Meaning of Life: Ethics and God in Wittgenstein and Spinoza

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it analyzes Wittgenstein's ethical proposal in the Notebooks, in correlation to his understanding of God. Wittgenstein argues that ethics, good and evil are not facts or characteristics of the world (NB 5.7.16). Conversely, they are predicates of the subject: good and evil only enter through a non-worldly subject (NB 2.8.16, 5.8.16). Within Wittgenstein's proposal being ethical or unethical is dependent on two cornerstones. First, having a good ethical will. Wittgenstein states that our ethical will seems to be powerless, we feel that we are dependent on an alien will, on fate. Thus, to master the world and have a good ethical will we must renounce any influence on the world and adopt the alien will: God's will (NB 6.7.16, 8.7.16). This encompasses viewing the world *sub specie aeternitatis*: viewing the world from God's perspective where all objects are conceived as equal. This life is the life of knowledge that allows us to overcome the miseries of the world (NB 13.8.16). The second cornerstone concerns the meaning of life. The resolution of the problem regarding the meaning of life consists in its disappearance. Since ethics cannot be expressed in propositions, we cannot provide an answer to this problem nor can the problem be formulated, thus this question ceases to exist (NB 6.7.16). Once this problem is resolved, happiness is simply attained by living.

Second, and on this basis, it studies the relation between Wittgenstein's proposal and Spinoza's Ethics. For Spinoza the happiness and well being associated to ethics are the result of a life of reason that gives meaning to our life. This is the third kind of knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics, where objects are seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, i.e. in relation to God and abstracted from all considerations of time and place. Instead of controlling the objects and passions, we control our evaluation of these objects and passions in order to minimize their value. We must understand "that we are a part of the whole of nature, whose order we follow" (Ethics, IV, Appendix). Mastering the world consists in renouncing any influence on it and understanding that we are one with God.

Wittgenstein and Spinoza, consequently, adopt similar strategies when approaching ethics and its relation to God. Firstly, they both understand ethics as connected to the transformation of the evaluation of the objects and happenings of the world, since we cannot necessarily alter them. Second, to master the world, and therefore change our evaluation of it, we must renounce to any influence on the world. Mastering the world must be accomplished through a life of knowledge and viewing the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, which entails a certain connection with God. Finally, in order to fully master the world we must understand that we follow God's orders, that our will is God's will. In sum, attaining ethical happiness is tied to renouncing to the amenities of the world and understanding our relation to God.

Joshua Tepley
Saint Anselm College
The Meaning of Life in Classic Science Fiction

Science fiction enriches philosophy in a variety of ways. It offers us fresh perspectives on ancient philosophical questions and raises a host of new philosophical questions that are just as interesting and important as the old ones. Science fiction also provides richly detailed thought experiments against which we can test our philosophical theories, and some science fiction even offers what amount to philosophical theories and, sometimes, even arguments for (or against) such theories. Science fiction is no substitute for philosophy, but it can be an invigorating supplement to it.

A number of classic science fiction stories deal with philosophical questions about the meaning of life. As far as I can tell, there has been no engagement with these stories in the philosophical literature. The purpose of this paper is to introduce to contemporary philosophers a number of classic science fiction stories that deal with the meaning of life. Some of these stories address old philosophical questions from a new perspective, while others raise entirely new questions that have not yet entered the mainstream. In both cases, these stories have the potential to enrich contemporary debates in philosophy about the meaning of life.

The stories I discuss fall into three groups:

Stories in the first group address the question of whether the meaning of human life could come from something outside itself—such as God. The stories I address in this section include Arthur C. Clark's "The Nine Billion Names of God" (1953) and Isaac Asimov's "The Last Answer" (1980). In the former, Tibetan monks use a computer to transcribe in a few months the nine billion names of God, a task which would otherwise have taken them over 10,000 years. Could something as arbitrary and absurd as this really be the purpose of human existence? In the latter story, a man is kept alive after his death by a God-like entity who wants him to come up with new ideas for his (i.e., God-entity's) entertainment. Can this man's life be meaningful? He and the God-like entity discuss this question in some detail.

Stories in the second group address the question of whether the existence of creatures vastly superior to us in intelligence, knowledge, and creativity would cause our lives to become meaningless. Suppose we discovered creatures that could do in a matter of minutes what it takes us years accomplish, and suppose they could do these things far better than we ever could. Would there be any point in our continuing to engage in such activities? Stories to be discussed in this section include Arthur C. Clarke's "Childhood's End" (1953) and Poul Anderson's "The Martyr" (1960).

Stories in the third group address the question of whether technology that makes our lives easier could eventually make our lives meaningless. Would a world without any work, obstacles, or danger be a world in which humans could still find meaning? Stories to be discussed in this section include E. M. Forster's "The Machine Stops" (1909) and Jack Williamson's "With Folded Hands" (1947).

Joshua In Sung Chang
University of California, Irvine
The Humanity Theory of Life's Meaning

My purpose is twofold: (1) put forward an account of the concept of life's meaning as one that primarily concerns ultimate understanding and superlative value and (2) develop a new account of how to aim at life's meaning through contouring oneself towards conditions of human life that make humans distinct from other forms of life. These are features that are generally understood to be not only distinctive of humans but important to being one (thus, something like bipedality is not considered since although it is distinctive of humans, it is not important to being one).

In putting forth a concept of life's meaning as primarily concerning ultimate understanding and superlative value, I contend that this characterization adequately accounts for competing conceptions of the concept of meaning while also providing a satisfying framework for how clusters of questions and issues traditionally thought to be relevant to life's meaning can be organized under the concept. I also posit that the concept of life's meaning (rather than being a constituent of the good life) is a useful practical and theoretical method in achieving a good life.

With regards to substantively aiming at the meaning of human life (both collectively and individually understood), I categorize three features that are particularly important in distinguishing human beings from animals: rationality (faculties of reason), morality (values broadly pertaining to right and wrong, good and bad), and spirituality (e.g. notions of transcendence). In proposing these characteristics, I do not mean to imply that animals fail to possess them at all; however, whether in degree or kind, humans importantly and exceptionally differ from animals in these three ways. Thus, by channeling oneself towards these conditions, I argue that the meaning of life is better understood and valued. In other words, by contouring one's life towards those features of human life that significantly compose the distinctive nature of human beings, one accrues meaning.

My hope is that this theory of the meaning of specifically human life can account for a wide variety of facts that any position on life's meaning should strive to explain. It accounts for why luminaries such as Einstein, Mandela, and Jesus are typically thought to have lived eminently meaningful lives (answer: because they are paradigms of profound engagements with rationality, morality, and spirituality, respectively). It accounts for why truth, love, and religion are often seen across time and culture as powerful elements within the meaning of life (answer: because these are among the most important aspects that constitute the three main facets, respectively). I also hope that my proposal can appropriately make sense of and integrate the virtues of other understandings of the meaning of life that center around rational, ethical, and supernatural conditions.

Joshua Lewis Thomas
The Open University
Life's Meaningfulness and the Destruction of Cultural Heritage

The destruction of material cultural heritage – such as historic buildings, ruins, artefacts and artworks – can make us worse off. Some have even suggested that, if our cultural heritage were entirely destroyed, we might no longer find our lives meaningful. In this paper, I examine the extent to which this claim is plausible. First, I grant that perceptions of meaningfulness are primarily determined by three factors: personal significance, purposefulness, and coherence. I then outline a variety of ways in which the destruction of cultural heritage could negatively impact each of these factors in turn. Overall, I am sympathetic to the notion that heritage destruction could undermine our perceptions of meaning in life quite radically, at least in the worst-case scenarios. Nevertheless, I also offer several disclaimers which undercut the likelihood and seriousness of this threat.

Kalpita Bhar Paul
Krea University
Beyond Death: Indian Philosophy and meaning of life

Life exists until death takes it over. When death is seen as the destiny of life, one wonders, what is the meaning of life; isn't death the ultimate reality where all meanings collapse. However, Indian philosophical schools offer us a way out of this nihilism. I argue, according to these schools, death provides the meaning to life. I further explain what happens when death becomes the driver that shapes life. In Indian philosophy, the afterlife of death delineates how individuals should live their life. Life in Indian philosophy is seen as a path of attaining moksha—that can free us from existential suffering and the cycle of birth and rebirth. Attaining salvation (moksha) from the cycle of birth and rebirth becomes the driver for guiding one's life. Action or karma of an individual according to her dharma, is considered an ethical principle that guides one to attain salvation. Living life becomes synonymous with preparing oneself for an endeavor after death. Thereby, death is not the end of life. In Vedas, death has an ontic meaning associated with the destruction of mind and body, as well as an ontological meaning which is the desire of the soul for eternal bliss. This ontological meaning of death that Indian philosophical schools uphold emerges from the cyclical notion of life which says the death of an individual is only the death of the body and mind, and not the soul. The soul traverses through many lives until it unifies with Brahman—the highest spirit and free soul. Thereby, the life of an individual is merely a mediator that guides the soul to

unite with the free soul, and death is a necessary condition for that. Individual life is seen as an exploration of the path which can direct the soul to prepare for that unification. This relationship between life and death modifies one's relation to the world or even with herself. A person having this knowledge does not get caught up in attaining bodily pleasure and mental satisfaction; rather, mind and body are just the containers of the soul. Appropriately nourishing the containers become immensely important to the nourishment of the soul or preparing the soul to unify with Brahman. Restraining oneself from worldly desire is only one of the ways of doing that and mostly recommended by various Indian philosophical schools that are aligned to religious sects. Some of the modern philosophers like J. Krishnamurti offer a secular path for nourishing the soul. These philosophers do not talk about salvation; however, the path they describe I argue, nourishes the soul in such a manner that it helps one in that journey. Krishnamurti's philosophy does not ask one to restrain from worldly affairs; rather, it urges one to be observant of one's relation to her mind, body, and world. It helps one to understand her motive and intention and thus prepares the soul to be out of worldly bondages. This liberated soul can ultimately traverse the path to become one with the Brahman.

Kiki Berk

Southern New Hampshire University

Beauvoir on Meaning in Life

Despite a recent resurgence of interest in her work, Beauvoir's view on meaning in life has not received much attention in the contemporary analytic debate. This paper aims to change that. Not only are Beauvoir's ideas interesting in their own right, but they are directly relevant to a number of popular, current discussions. Engaging contemporary analytic philosophy about existentialist themes (i.e., analytic existentialism) with the works of "true" existentialist philosophers by drawing insightful connections is mutually beneficial. It shows the continued relevance of Beauvoir's work and, at the same time, enriches and potentially furthers the analytic debate by infusing it with new ideas.

In this paper, I summarize Beauvoir's general view on meaning in life and position it within the theoretical framework of analytic existentialism. I then explore three particularly fruitful points of connection between Beauvoir's thought, on the one hand, and Wolf's, Nagel's and Setiya's, on the other.

First, Beauvoir thinks that a meaningful life consists in the pursuit of projects, which is clearly reminiscent of one of the most prominent views of meaning in life today, namely Wolf's view that meaning consists in subjective engagement with projects of worth. Beauvoir's view is even stronger than Wolf's because Beauvoir doesn't consider pursuing projects as optional but rather as an essential feature of our "being."

Second, there is a remarkable similarity between Beauvoir's and Nagel's accounts of absurdity. Both philosophers think that the absurdity of life consists in the fact that we cannot help but take our projects seriously even though we recognize that they are ultimately arbitrary. Beauvoir and Nagel both argue that the first-person perspective from which our pursuits are so important and our ability to step back and recognize that they really aren't are equally essential to being human and so impossible for us to give up. Third, Beauvoir is very concerned with the way in which completed projects appear to lose their value as they are immediately replaced by new goals and projects. This sense of futility is one of the phenomena described by Setiya as contributing to a mid-life crisis, which, properly understood, is a crisis of meaning. Setiya describes this sense as "the suspicion of something hollow in the sequence of accomplishment" (Setiya 2017: 129), which is precisely what Beauvoir is getting at with her famous example of Pyrrhus and Cineas. Interestingly, Beauvoir and Setiya solve this problem in very different ways, which I compare and contrast.

Kunle Oluwafemi Olalere

The Polytechnic Ibadan, Nigeria

The meaning of Life: An Afro-Pantheistic Reading of Albert Camus

"Conceptualising the meaning of life is often attempted within a context that underscores discourses on its inception and termination, that is, when life begins and when it ends. The debate on the meaning of life presumes the existence of varying codifications of its essence. For existentialists however, the purpose

of philosophy is the reinvention of the meaning of life through the resolution of questions on essence, existence and its absurdity. Albert Camus argues that like Sisyphus we should embrace the meaninglessness and absurdity of life rather than finding its meaning. Like Soren Kierkegaard, this paper attempts situating the meaning of life in the divine. It however differ in its pertinent proposition of a pantheistic Yoruba worldview that explains the meaning of life as a relationship between Olodumare and the orisas. It utilises Bolaji Idowu's 'Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief' as a framework in the explication of the cogent role of destiny in the determination of the meaning of life.

Lisa Bortolotti

University of Birmingham

Mental health, rationality and the meaning of life: the case of delusions

It is commonly believed that marks of madness are *incomprehensibility* and *loss of agency*: when we are mentally unwell, our behaviour cannot be easily understood or predicted, and we no longer behave as competent and coherent agents, failing to effectively pursue the goals that are thought to be valuable in our society or even the goals that we set for ourselves. The idea is that by compromising rationality, poor mental health also strips our lives of meaning. However, that is not a psychologically realistic picture of the relationship between mental health and either rationality or meaningfulness. Even when it qualifies as symptomatic of a mental disorder, our behaviour can often be understood if sufficient information about our life events is shared, can contribute to our sense that our lives are meaningful, and can support (as opposed to undermine) our agency. I will discuss the case of epistemically innocent delusions to illustrate this point.

Margaret Kamitsuka

Oberlin College

The Afterlife and Liminal Bodies

This paper looks at two seemingly unrelated issues—the afterlife and reproductive life—and poses the question: How should one think about the afterlife of those who die before birth? My presupposition is that how one thinks about a Christian concept such as the resurrection of the body has implications for how one thinks ethically and politically about bodies that procreate in this life. The important connection between the two issues is evidenced by a growing phenomenon in some U.S. prolife circles: post-abortion memorialization rituals. One post-abortion counseling group describes one of their rituals in this way: “The Memorial Service is a special ceremony where you can give dignity to the eternal life and memory of your child in heaven.... It is also an act of entrusting the soul of your lost child to God” (<https://www.rachelsvineyard.org/weekend/memorial.aspx>). In the long history of debate about who will attain eternal life, the majority opinion of church theologians was that those who die before being born or before being baptized do not go to heaven. This historical view contrasts with the belief shared by most Christians today that the unborn and born infants will be welcomed into God’s presence in the afterlife. Prolife groups take this belief further, claiming that aborted fetuses go immediately to heaven and await the repentance of their abortive mothers. This essay offers a philosophical model that addresses the afterlife of liminal bodies like fetuses but without stigmatizing pregnant women for their reproductive decisions.

After a brief survey of the cultural phenomenon of post-abortion memorials, I will critical evaluate some recent debates in in philosophy of religion addressing the issue of how to account for personal existence in afterlife. I focus on two streams of thought: substance dualism (i.e., a person is a composite of body and soul) and materialism (i.e., a person is a material body that sustains the properties of higher consciousness). A growing number of philosophers who intersect with both streams promote what is called an emergentist view of the person (William Hasker; Timothy O'Connor). Emergentism, informed by

scientific theories of evolution and human development, sees mind or consciousness as a property supervening on or emerging out of physical existence. I propose how the emergentist model can be adapted in ways that cohere with the central Christian tenet of “the resurrection of the body” (Apostles’ Creed) and can better account for how any being, even one whose organismal form is rudimentary or whose life ends prematurely (from miscarriage, abortion, or stillbirth), can attain the world to come. This viewpoint offers solace to those who grieve reproductive loss and avoids mythological thinking about aborted or miscarried fetuses appearing instantly in heaven as chubby-cheeked babies. This eschatology also contributes theologically to a reproductive justice framework that strives not just to secure women’s reproductive choice but also supports a broader justice-oriented vision of procreative life in the modern world.

Markus Rüter

Research Center Juelich

Is it Important What We Achieve? The Role of Consequences in the Meaningful Life

Initially, the debate about the meaningful life focused on meta-ethical questions concerning semantical, epistemological and ontological preconditions. In the meantime, however, the overall interest has been extended to content-related aspects. Consequentialism of meaningfulness represents a much regarded normative theory: It states that a life becomes meaningful only due to certain consequences of action or state of affairs. In this talk, various versions of consequentialist theories of meaningfulness are presented in more detail and are examined for their overall plausibility. In the end, it will be shown that their representatives face a dilemma: either they stick to their initial theory and carry the burden of defending a highly counterintuitive theory of meaningfulness; or they systematically broaden their own theory and run risk of giving up the "spirit" that motivates consequentialist thinking in the first place. Given this dilemma, however, it does not follow that the consequences of action cannot play any role in a meaningful life at all. In the last part of the talk, I will show some ways in which a theory of meaningfulness can integrate consequentialist thinking apart from being a necessary part.

Martijn Janssen

Radboud University

Conditions For the Question of A Meaningful Life

The modern Western subject might be puzzled why someone puts a given activity in the category of a ‘meaningful life’, but this puzzle only exists because the modern subject recognizes what it is to feel something as meaningful and is able to contrast it with other non-meaningful matters. The modern subject has a sense of how a given activity makes our lives worthwhile. The question concerning a meaningful life takes up a central place in modern Western society, even though the question only became popular in philosophical writings in the 20th century.

In this article, I want provide a rough sketch of which changes in the cultural background of modern Western society had to occur in order to create the possibility in which the modern subject can ask the question concerning a meaningful life. Based on 'Turning Pro' (2012), written by best-selling author Steven Pressfield, three crucial conditions come to light that allow the question of a meaningful life to come into existence: secularization, the emphasis on human capacities, and individualism. The understanding of the process of cultural change employed is in line with the notion of cultural change that Charles Taylor argues for in his 'The Language Animal' (2016). The process of secularization, the shift from a situation in which a belief in God was axiomatic to a situation in which a belief in God was an option among other options of equal value, created the possibility for the modern subject to consider other life options. The consideration of other possible life options allows room for examining which life option should be understood as more worthwhile, and is closer related to one’s understanding of the good life.

The emphasis on human capacities, especially rationality, relocated the ethical source of the modern subject from an external point, God, to an internal source, humanity’s rationality. The idea that humanity is capable of determining for itself what is the proper way to give shape to their lives created

opportunity for an understanding of the self that no longer related to anything outside humanity. Enacted modern individualism does not mean to stop belonging to a community, but it does alter the way the modern subject relates to the whole of society. The altered background conditions, the process of secularization and the emphasis on human capacities, have persuaded the modern subject to develop their own psychological narrative. In other words, to express their authentic self. Technological improvements, such as improved infrastructure and the internet, have created plenty of opportunities for the modern subject to escape the moral horizon of the environment in which they grew up, and to express their unique self in a way that is meaningful to them.

Masahiro Morioka

Waseda University

What Is Birth Affirmation?: The Meaning of Saying 'Yes' to Having Been Born

In the First International Conference on Philosophy and Meaning in Life, held at Hokkaido University in 2018, I proposed a new approach, a “solipsistic and affirmation-based approach to meaning in life.” (A summary of this approach can be found in *Journal of Philosophy of Life* Vol.9, No.1 (June 2019):82-97.) In my presentation in Birmingham, I will investigate the concept of “birth affirmation” in detail and make clear what exactly this concept means in the context of meaning in life. Birth affirmation means to be able to say that I am really glad that I have been born, in other words, it means to be able to say “yes” to my having been born. An affirmation-based approach interprets a “meaningful life” as a life in which I can say that I am really glad that I have been born. Birth affirmation can be interpreted as the following two propositions.

1) Never to think, at the bottom of my heart, that it would have been better not to have been born. (Anti-anti-natalistic interpretation)

2) Even if there were a possible world in which my ideal was realized or my grave sufferings were resolved, never to think that, at the bottom of my heart, that it would have been better to have been born to that possible world. (Possible world interpretation)

And these two propositions appear in two dimensions: the psychological dimension and the philosophical dimension. In the psychological dimension, the anti-anti-natalistic interpretation can further be interpreted as this: birth affirmation means to be able to believe that even if having not been born had been better, it is actually not realizable because I have already been born, hence what I should do is to continue to live my life and try to live an unregrettable life as a whole. (The possible world interpretation does not have to be reinterpreted in the psychological dimension.) In the philosophical dimension, we should note that the comparison between the state of my having been born and the state of my not having been born is impossible (anti-natalistic comparison is impossible) and the comparison between my actual life and my possible life is also impossible (possible worlds comparison is impossible). The reason of incomparability is that with regard to my actual life, there is nothing but the one and only actual life, and there is nothing comparable to it in its actuality. Birth affirmation in this dimension means to be able to think that what I should do is to live my own life, fully accepting these two incomparabilities. Birth affirmation can be understood as the integration of the four interpretations: an anti-anti-natalistic interpretation in the psychological dimension, a possible world interpretation in the psychological dimension, an anti-anti-natalistic interpretation in the philosophical dimension, and a possible world interpretation in the philosophical dimension. In my presentation, I will make a more detailed analysis of this argument and connect it with broader topics in the meaning in life.

Matthew James Dennis

TU Delft

Reimagining Digital Well-Being: Better Ways to Design for Meaningful Activity Online

Over the last decade there has been increasingly voluble calls for developers to design online products in ways that promote what is now termed our ‘digital well-being’. Given the pace of progress of many emerging technologies, such calls have not tended to come from users who wish that online technology can

do more, but from those that desire that it can do less – or do what it does in way that better aligns with what they most value in their lives. For these users, the route to better digital well-being is the development of new technological products that allows us to express our most cherished values, as well as those that attend to the strict conditions that allow these values to be expressed. Not only does the empirical literature continue to show that there is a direct link between screentime and our well-being in general (Happiness Research Institute, 2015), many of us worry first-hand about the impact of the time we spend online on the quality, richness, and vividness of our lives. Persuasive personal accounts of the liberation of logging off are now a staple of broadsheet newspaper articles, not to mention the collective concern that many of us feel about perceived excess online use by children and adolescents. In this article I argue that the creeping unease that many of us feel about our immersion in the online space has not always been attributed to the right cause. Of course there are associative problems with sedentary behaviours that involve staring at a screen for extended periods, but these problems are attendant on (and are often reinforced by) a deeper problem that has so far been immune to analysis with the current conceptual resources that have been employed to analyse digital well-being. I diagnose two reasons for this. First, tech developers who have tried to design their products with digital well-being in mind have primarily done so by seeking the assistance of those within the positive psychology and self-help traditions. While these traditions have excellent conceptual resources to help us understand digital well-being, I argue that there is a more disruptive and troubling aspect of flourishing online – the engaging in meaningful activity – that these traditions tend to neglect. The second reason why this key component of digital well-being is neglected is because it is extremely resistant to quantification. It is highly subjective, and is not easily assimilable (or is actively at odds) to the hedonistic economy that those developers who ostensibly promote digital well-being use to sell their products. It would be beyond the parameters of this article to explain how the first-personal experience of meaningfulness can be measured or quantified (Metz 2016: 295), although I provide some pointers as to how this can be done in the final section. Instead, my aim is to open up a new frontier in discussions of digital well-being, one that focuses on the how highly valued the first-personal experience of meaningfulness is to the quality and richness of our lives.

Michael Prinzing

UNC Chapel Hill

Meaningfulness as Mattering: A New Kind of Theory

It is a platitude that a meaningful life is a life that matters. Indeed, some have claimed that, when applied to life, “meaningful” is synonymous with “matters”. Such a lack of controversy is unusual in philosophy. Perhaps the consensus is to be explained by the fact that mattering is itself quite an ambiguous notion. Thus, equating meaningfulness with mattering may uncontroversial only insofar as it is uninformative. In this paper, I develop the view that meaningfulness is mattering by providing an intuitive definition of “matters” and exploring its implications. The proposed definition is that X matters iff X makes a noteworthy difference. When a person asks why something matters, they are asking why they should care about it. When an accountant says that it doesn’t matter which tax deduction one takes, what they’re saying is that it won’t make a noteworthy difference to one’s tax return. One implication of this definition is that meaning is context-relative—a life can make a noteworthy difference in one context but not others. A second implication is that meaningfulness is not always good. Noteworthy differences can be bad ones. However, the primary upshot is that this “mattering theory” is not a subjectivist, objectivist, or hybrid theory. Respectively, such theories claim that lives are meaningful when they meet a subjective criterion, an objective criterion, or both kinds of criteria. The mattering theory claims that lives are meaningful when they meet either. Something can matter in a psychological sense (i.e., it matters to someone), or in a simpliciter sense (i.e., even if it doesn’t matter to anyone, it simply matters). Thus, subjectivists can be seen as claiming that meaningful lives are those that matter to the people living them. Objectivists claim that meaningful lives simply matter, regardless of whether they matter to the people living them. And hybrid theorists claim that meaningful lives matter in both ways. Another possibility, however, is that meaningful lives are those that matter in either way. Both are forms of mattering, and since meaningfulness is mattering, both are forms of meaningfulness.

I find the implications of this view intuitive. Unlike subjectivist and hybrid theories, it allows us to say that an unfulfilled Nelson Mandela would still have had a meaningful life. Even if he were not fulfilled by his life, it would nevertheless have mattered (to others, and perhaps simpliciter). The view also entails that

fulfillment would have enhanced the meaningfulness of Mandela's life. On the other hand, unlike objectivism, this view entails that the life of a person who finds fulfillment in something that lacks objective value (e.g., wine connoisseurship) has some meaning. However, it also entails—plausibly—that they could be living more meaningfully if they did something that mattered to others too. The paper concludes with a summary of a series of recent experimental philosophy studies, which provide evidence that non-philosophers hold a pluralistic theory like the one described.

Mirela Oliva

University of St. Thomas – Houston

Causality and the Narrative Meaning of Life

My paper argues that the narrative meaning of life is primarily constituted by causality. Every time we recount our life stories, we refer to causal relations that make up the intelligibility of our life narrative. I classify three types of causality at work in human life: (1) causality of personal intentions and actions, (2) causality of events, and (3) causality of persons.

The first part of the paper will clarify the concepts of life, meaning, narrative, and causality. I will address the apparent contradiction between the definition of life as self-movement and the search for narrative meaning in our lives. Second, I will show that a full-blown account of causality in human life must not be limited to efficient causality but must include other causes from the Aristotelian framework (formal, final, material). I will then discuss the relation between causality and value, showing that causal relations that underpin narrative meaning must also carry value and significance.

The second part of the paper will analyze three types of causality advanced by contemporary theories of narrative. While each theory develops only one type, I think that a robust theory of the narrative meaning of life should take all types into account.

(1) causality of personal intentions and actions. I will focus on Alasdair MacIntyre's narrative model. In MacIntyre, the narrative of life is a teleological order of personal agency. This order unfolds through intentions and actions that are causally related to each other and that are embedded in a historical and social setting. I object that although it makes room for historical conditioning and social belonging, this model conceives their role as contextual and decorative, rather than active and formative in regards to our understanding and free-will.

(2) causality of events. I will discuss the narrative model of Noël Carroll. For Carroll, the narrative connection has a causal nature. A narrative recounts a series of events that have a unified subject and are temporally ordered and causally linked. I object that this model limits the causality of events to efficient causality; some events cause our life also in the mode of formal or final causality.

(3) causality of persons. I will focus on Eleonore Stump's model, which defines narrative in terms of a second-person experience. In Stump's model, a relation between two persons entails a sort of agency in which one person influences the life of the other through direct and unmediated causal contact. While Stump recognizes that efficient causality is not the only causal mode in personal relations, she does not fully spell out in which way personal presence, mutual closeness, and internal integration of the psyche function as formal, final, or material cause.

In conclusion I will raise further questions: How does the causal view deal with the part-life and whole-life conceptions of life's meaning? For those defending a theistic account, how does the divine Providence relate to the three types of causality?

Nino Kadic

King's College London

Meaning and Consciousness: A Comparative Study of Possible Worlds

Firstly, I will argue that consciousness is the crucial factor for the category of 'meaning'. That is, there can be no talk of meaning without mention of consciousness. Consider two possible worlds: one with consciousness and one without. The latter is barren with regards to meaning - the question does not even arise! It might as well not exist since there is no one to confirm its existence. So, to fully exist, something has to exist for someone. The former,

however, at least involves the possibility for an answer to the question of what is meaningful, which implies that consciousness - the relationship between subject and object - is the *conditio sine qua non* for any category of meaning.

Secondly, I contend that consciousness is thus the only source of meaning that we can confidently postulate, regardless of whether it is our consciousness or that of a higher being such as God. For the sake of discussion, I will assume that there are no higher beings considering that finding meaning without them is the more problematic case. This leads to the conclusion that conscious beings - humanity, in this context - are the ultimate arbiters of meaning. The world of consciousness simply is the world of meaning.

Thirdly, this means that (the possibility of) meaning persists for as long as consciousness persists. As long as we sustain humanity, we sustain meaning as a category, including whatever is denoted - subjectively or intersubjectively - as meaningful. In fact, that is the only way in which something can be meaningful at all - if it is meaningful to someone.

Finally, the ultimate goal of meaning becomes apparent: immortality; the inability for the perishing of meaning; for the perishing of consciousness. My conclusion is thus that there can be no meaning without consciousness, that conscious beings have full authority when it comes to denoting what is meaningful, and that our priority should be self-preservation for the sake of preserving meaning.

So, by answering the question of what the conditions for meaning are, I have hopefully provided answers to the question of what the meaning of existence is: consciousness, experience, the self and others, self-determination, self-preservation, society, posterity - immortality.

Nobuo Kurata
Hokkaido University

A Judgment: "Even if We Live According to Objective Norms, the Meaning of Life will not be Lost "

We might feel that if we always try to live following moral or objective norms, or always seek to maximize the utility of society as a whole, we lose the meaning of life. Because if we try to live such lives, we will have to give up all our pleasures, the satisfaction of desires, and little pleasures. In other words, living according to objective norms and for the utility of society as a whole causes a divergence between the objective self who seeks to live in such a way of life and the subjective self who considers the satisfaction of her needs. However, to think about these problems, we need to keep in mind the ambiguity of the meaning of the term 'meaning of life.' It is sometimes used to mean subjective happiness and fulfillment. On the other hand, it is sometimes understood from the points of its contribution to society and the net utility in the world. This problem can be interpreted to mean whether the pursuit of the latter "meaning of life" (contribution to the world) will deprive the former (happiness and fulfillment).

We have two possible answers here.

First answer: The pursuit of these two "meanings of life" does not create any conflict. Objectively trying to contribute to the world can also provide subjective satisfaction. The joy gained by contributing to the world is more "meaningful" than personal satisfaction and pleasure. Trying to live to contribute to the world might change preferences. Here is no <dissociation> between the self who tries to produce objective values and the self who seeks subjective satisfaction.

Second answer: it is the balance of the two that matters, and we do not have to make significant sacrifices so that we feel our lives meaningless, even if we aim to contribute to the world.

However, the former answer has the difficulties that it is not so easy to change one's preferences and values. In the latter case, it is not straightforward to achieve such a balance.

However, the judgment that "this life is meaningful (or meaningless)" is a kind of value judgment and more of a non-cognitivist / expressive, rather than a

cognitivist one. We are also responsible for judging whether this life is worthwhile to live. We are held responsible for making judgments if we judge that "if we live according to objective norms, we will not lose the meaning of life." We have a duty to judge that "even if we live according to objective norms, we will not lose the meaning of life."

Ramon Nicolas Harvey
Ebrahim College

The Meaning in Life as Recognition of God's Wisdom: A Supernaturalist Argument Inspired by Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī

Themes in the philosophy of religion, including the question of the meaning in life, have been enriched in recent decades by a critical return to the arguments of the great theologians of the Christian tradition. Study of major Islamic theologians not only offers a similarly rich vein of philosophical material, but also the opportunity for new comparative insights and collaborations within the field.

In this paper, I argue for an original supernaturalist theory of the meaning in life inspired by Kitāb al-tawḥīd, a work of the Transoxianan Islamic theologian Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944). Though well known as the eponym of one of the major schools of Sunnī kalām, the philosophical aspects of al-Māturīdī's system have been understudied in contemporary literature, partly due to the difficulty of his major text. One of the most distinctive aspects of his theological thought is his foregrounding of an eternal divine attribute of wisdom (ḥikma), distinct from omniscience, and use of this concept to deal with God's relationship with the creation.

I will propose that constructive use of al-Māturīdī's concept of God's wisdom as the ultimate ground for purposeful action can make a significant intervention into modern discussion of the meaning in life. The argument that I will develop combines two main aspects of contemporary supernaturalist-theist theories, purpose and relationality (Metz 2019), to claim that meaning in life is the recognition of God's wisdom and that religious ethics follow logically from it. I will show that positing God as non-simple and in possession of an eternal attribute of wisdom can undercut the objections to supernaturalism that a simple God cannot properly ground human purpose and that divine attributes such as an arbitrary will are unsuitable for this role. I will then explore al-Māturīdī's approach to the meaning in life as the basis for articulating important consequent issues: religious obligation grounded on gratitude to the divine for providing the blessing of life; divine commands and prohibitions given in the light of the natural ability to know good and bad within the world; and ultimate eschatological reward and punishment predicated on acceptance or rejection of God's wisdom

Richard Thomas Allen
Retired

Some Possible Meanings of 'the Meaning of Life' and of 'the Meaninglessness of Life'

Discussions of 'The meaning of life' have often been distorted by the very wording of the topic, which wrongly assumes that life can have only one meaning. Obviously many different accounts of the meaning of life have been suggested, and these can be classified as, for example, secularist and theist. But the very wording of the question suggests that these types of meaning, and the particular versions of each, are all mutually exclusive. This paper aims to show that, there are also categories of meaningfulness and meaninglessness; that these can be, and usually are, combined; and that this is a necessary feature of any type of meaning and the particular instances of them. This will be shown by first listing the categories and then giving examples of how different particular examples combine at least some of these categories, either explicitly or implicitly, so that they envisage human existence as having one or more aspects that are meaningful in one way and others that are meaningless in another way.

It builds on some recently acknowledgements of some of the ways in which world-and-life-views are structured. For example, the meanings of 'meaning'

have been differentiated: e.g. signifying what will follow, intentions, intended signifying, and value. The last is clearly implied in any answer to the correct formulation of the question, 'What are the meanings and lacks of meaning in human life?', which asks for what is of value and what lacks value, but without indicating what those values may be and what embodies or could embody them. Another set of categories have also been distinguished: 'cosmic', of the whole universe, and 'individualist', of or for individuals. In turn 'generic' meanings, those applicable to all persons, and individual ones, applicable just to one person, and that a generic one, such as to develop one's talents, admits individual ones. Furthermore it has been acknowledged that several meanings can be attached simultaneously to human life and that there are questions of why do the universe, human beings, and oneself exist, and for what purpose, if any. To these further categories will be added and exemplified, to give a more comprehensive and systematic account of the possible meanings and meaninglessness of human life.

Rosa Ritunnano

University of Birmingham

Delusion and Meaningfulness: a Phenomenological and Narrative Analysis

Can delusions emerging in the context of severe mental illness (such as schizophrenia) enhance the sense that life is meaningful? Here I define meaningfulness in line with a tridimensional model proposed by Martela & Steger (2016). This consists of a) coherence: a sense that our experiences make sense, b) purpose: a sense of directedness in life related to a person's future goals, and c) significance: a sense that our lives matter and are worthwhile.

When a person displays delusions in the context of mental illness, this involves her expressing ideas commonly regarded as false beliefs. She may be viewed as incapable of interpreting reality 'correctly' or objectively. In psychiatry, this core psychotic feature has been variously described as "lack of insight", loss of touch with reality, or deficient "reality testing", and is considered to underpin a subsequent breakdown of communication and understanding. One weighty consequence of this view, in its strong interpretation, is that the person has lost the capacity to create a coherent narrative of herself and the world; delusions are "empty speech acts" (Berrios 1991) that have no bearing on the person's self-constitution. Ultimately, this amounts to a loss of self, negation of narrative and hermeneutical marginalisation.

In rejecting this view, I defend the thesis that some delusions can enhance any of the three aforementioned dimensions of meaningfulness by functioning as identity-constituting self-narratives. In addition, they may provide a sense of communication with other people, enhancing the feeling of belonging and connectedness. To support my argument, I consider two interrelated dimensions of delusional experience: 1) experiential: referring to the pre-reflective or felt experience of the self and the world within the delusional reality (Gallagher 2009); 2) narrative: resulting from the creative role of the person, who acts as a meaning-making agent and narrates a story that (although regarded by others as inaccurate) might contribute to shaping a new sense of identity situated in time, and also in the shared social reality.

Firstly, I draw on first-person accounts from the phenomenological literature (e.g., Sass & Ratcliffe 2017) to provide a perspective that is otherwise inaccessible, and that reveals major atmospheric disruptions in the overall sense of reality, familiarity, vitality and meaning (referred to as "delusional mood"). Although often associated with negative meanings and persecutory themes, this experience is interpreted by some as highly illuminating, enlightening and self-enhancing. Moving on to the second dimension of delusional experience, I argue that the emerging individual narrative can – in some cases – function as a sense-making tool and afford a stronger sense of significance and belonging.

Delusions may be inaccurate (i.e., they do not reflect the truth about reality), yet they may influence the agent's self-understanding and contribute to meaningfulness. I conclude by arguing that examining delusions as identity-constituting self-narratives deepens our understanding of meaning in life as a dynamic and creative process where the person is actively changing and becoming in relation to her world (or worlds), rather than just being.

Sandy Koullas

John Hopkins University

Relationships as Basic Constituents of Meaning in Life

I take it that among the constituents of meaning in life are some things that are good for some subject, and that are reason-giving for some subject in virtue of that goodness. For example, the production of a grand artwork is good for the artist (whether or not its goodness is to be explained in terms of well-being), and it therefore gives the artist reasons to respond to it in particular ways. Appropriate responses may include protecting and preserving the work of art, refraining from destroying it, or simply feeling proud of its production. Inappropriate responses might include neglecting or damaging the work of art, defiling it, or simply despising it.

Among this subset of constituents of meaning in life are some that are good and reason-giving in a basic or non-reducible way. For example, one's capacity for rational choice is good for an agent and reason-giving for that agent in a way that cannot be reduced to other values, such as well-being, usefulness, or moral virtue. I argue that close relationships (such as friendships and life partnerships) are such a constituent of meaning in life. I do not wish to claim that a life without such relationships is necessarily devoid of meaning, nor do I wish to claim that such relationships guarantee meaning. Rather, I think it is very often the case that these relationships contribute to the meaning in meaningful lives, and that when they do, they do so in a unique and interesting way. The meaning conferred by relationships of this sort is unavailable from other sources. In this sense, close relationships are a basic constituent of meaning in many human lives. I defend my claim with a two-part argument. One way in which close relationships are good for their participants is that our friends and loved ones are uniquely positioned to help us deepen and enhance our understanding of ourselves as individuals with commitments to values, or value systems. They can therefore also help us to develop and extend our value systems. The second way in which relationships are good, and consequently reason-giving, for their participants is that they offer an arena for a particular combination of reciprocity and beneficence. The opportunity for reciprocal beneficence that is uniquely available in the context of close relationships is partly constitutive of meaning because it affords us the opportunity to practice some of our particular value commitments. This contribution to meaning in a life is not reducible to any other value, such as rational agency, well-being, or moral character—or so I argue.

Sjoerd Oppenheim

University College London

Play and the Meaningful Life

Susan Wolf fitting-fulfilment view claims that meaning in life arises when one is subjectively attracted to objectively valuable things. Wolf's account thereby includes an objective element, since she believes that merely subjective attraction is inadequate. This notion of objective worth is generally taken to be problematic, but Wolf insists that we need it as we otherwise would have no way of arguing for the meaninglessness of those lives that are passionately committed to trivial affairs. These worries, however, can be alleviated by an enrichment and further substantiation of the subjective part of her theory, by an account of what it means to be subjectively attracted to something. In this paper, I provide an alternative view of what provides meaning in life that can accommodate for the problems Wolf sees with merely subjective views of meaning in life, by taking the notion of play to be crucial for meaningfulness. Building on Moritz Schlick's definition that play is 'free, purposeless action', I take play to designate not the activity of playing games, but rather the playful

attitude one has towards activities. I argue that this attitude, which I define as 'being engaged with activities, objects or persons, for reasons that are primarily but not necessarily exclusively internal to the action itself, resulting in a qualitative experience wherein this person, by freely realising values that are outside of 'ordinary life' in the world, finds a harmonisation between her values and the world.' can account for both our experiences of meaning in life, and our intuitions that tend to differentiate between the meaningfulness between lives. This thereby overcomes Wolf's worries about purely subjective accounts of meaning, without taking recourse to her problematic notion of objective worth.

^[1]_{SEP}Next, I compare these two theories of meaningfulness by applying them to a paradigm case of meaning, namely love. Wolf's account seems to be unable to account for love's meaningfulness, since one is often attracted not to the 'objective value' of one's beloved, but rather values the person in a personal way. Play as meaningfulness in contrast, with its emphasis on the idiosyncratic value creation, can account for the distinctive way in which we tend to value the objects of our love, and why acting upon these idiosyncratic values might give rise to feelings of meaning.

Slater Louis Simek
University of Oxford

C.S. Lewis and the Meaning of Life: Incorporating Lewis' "Argument from Desire" into the Philosophical Framework of Augustine

In this paper, I want to demonstrate how an Augustinian framework might prove useful in bolstering C.S. Lewis' 'Argument from Desire.' Lewis' argument has generated significant philosophical disagreement, both as to its typology and its referent. This is perhaps unsurprising given that Lewis' argument has been formally generated years after his passing. However, Lewis' argument has significant philosophical implications for the meaning of life, most aptly summed up in this quote from *Mere Christianity*, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." Key to this argument, and elsewhere seen in Lewis' work, is his conviction from experience that ultimate happiness, eudemonia, was ultimately meant to be found in the divine.

Where it seems like Lewis' argument can be bolstered is by placing it in a theological and philosophical framework which can make sense of Lewis' experience. One such framework is the theology of Augustine. Specifically, I intend to demonstrate how the Aristotelian teleology seen in Augustine's concept of ordered loves can add theological and philosophical merit to Lewis' Argument from Desire.

Augustine, in Aristotelian fashion, believed that since nature demonstrates that all things are moving toward their final cause, then so too must humans. And for Augustine, mankind's teleological orientation was toward God and ultimately to be fulfilled in union with God. God, whose telos is his own being, is the source of life through which all things find life. Thus, life is found in union with God, and when mankind turns toward God, the source of being, mankind's being is brought to fullness. In contrast, when man turns away from God, he experiences estrangement from God, the source of being, and as such, estrangement from himself.

As it relates to Lewis' argument, the fulcrum for movement in Augustine's teleology is love, a philologically similar concept to Lewis' desire. Significant for Augustine, is that love had both a teleologically and ontologically determinative status, leading Augustine to say, "such is each as his love." Love moves man toward or away his teleological end, and subsequently, given the connections between teleology and ontology in Augustine, impacts his ontology in doing so. As such, there are right loves, caritas, and wrong loves, cupiditas. Caritas is the love we are made to have, as it is the love which seeks God.

We can now revisit Lewis' argument. If God has made man to be in union with him, then man's eudemonia, can likewise be seen to be found in God alone. Lewis' experience of unfulfilled desires can be made sense of by demonstrating that loving the wrong things, or in Augustinian language, having cupiditas, leads to estrangement from oneself. In having caritas, man fulfills his teleological end, and subsequently fulfills "the desire which nothing in this world can satisfy."

Søren Harnow Klausen
University of Southern Denmark
Jockeying for Position: Meaning in Life, Happiness and Intrinsic Good

Meaning in life is standardly conceived as relational and involving transcendence: Having something to live and care for (e.g. Wolf 2010), transcending oneself (e.g. Nozick 1981; 1989), perfecting oneself or improving the world in some way (e.g. Singer 1995). I will argue that while these characteristics are undeniably part of commonsense and traditional notions of meaning in life (and standard accounts are descriptively correct and illuminating in many respects), they have been exaggerated. A consequence of this has been a tendency to distinguish too sharply between happiness or well-being and meaning in life (e.g. Wolf 2010; Metz 2013). An adequate (but by no means inflated) notion of happiness, I will argue, actually entails meaning in life. Moreover, the notion of meaning in life is parasitic on a notion of intrinsic good, the most plausible candidate for which is happiness. A symptom of this is the vulnerability of standard relational or transcendence-oriented accounts to pessimist or nihilist criticism. Whatever seems to provide meaning in life from a restricted perspective appears less meaningful from a broader, more detached one (Benatar 2017). Discounting the broader perspective seems unjustified, however, as long as meaning is conceived as relational or transcendence-involving; such accounts actually puts one on a slippery-slope towards relativization and, ultimately, nihilism. On the other hand, if something is acknowledged as being good in itself, it seems that it might be worth living for (or simply realize), and so render a life meaningful (assuming, pace Metz 2012, an intimate connection between the worthwhile and the meaningful). And experiential states seem particularly immune to “perspectival doubt” (Crisp 2006); the mere fact that they matter to the subject who has them endows them with a significance that may be said to be small from a cosmic perspective, but resists relativization and may be sufficient for meaning. I will defend this view tentatively, taking seriously objectivist doubts about the normative significance of experience, and attempting to accommodate intuitions about the role of transcendence and engagement in meaning. I will argue, however, that the potential significance of experience (and other candidates for non-relational, intrinsic good) has been underestimated in discussions about meaning in life, partly due to overly narrow conceptions of its phenomenology and prejudices about the kinds of activities that may or may not count as meaningful.

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John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
The Meaning of Life, Metafiction, and the Suspension of Judgement

Things, states and values pointed out by philosophers as the candidates for the meaning of life include goods so different – and likely mutually inconsistent – as beatific vision, personal happiness, and the triad of truth, beauty and goodness. It can be argued that such a broad disagreement in itself poses a

problem for the idea of such meaning. If the meaning of life is the ultimate existential goal one should pursue and if that goal is connected (and thus not inconsistent) with the ultimate purpose of the world as a whole, there are reasons to believe that the sole possibility of being mistaken about the meaning of life in spite of one's best efforts – an extreme example of existential tragedy – threatens the idea of there being such meaning.

While the possible existence of persons who do not have, or do not apply in practice, any concept of the meaning of life – and thus lead meaningless lives – is consistent with life's having meaning, the possibility of ultimately tragic (teleologically misguided) existence may not be. The often-made comparison between life as the bearer of meaning and fictional narrative makes it especially salient: given that the meaningfulness of life is not a matter of luck, the general message of the narrative featuring the characters who meet ultimately tragic end can hardly be read as affirming the purposefulness of the universe which they inhabit.

While the set of problems generated by the disagreement about the meaning of life does not have a simple solution, the analogies between human existence and fiction, helpful in picturing the problem, can also provide some hints concerning a possible solution. The aim of my presentation is to show (1.) why the disagreement about the meaning of life may pose a problem for the existence of such meaning, and (2.) how the best existential strategy given this problem may consist of treating our own life as a metafictional narrative – an example of a fiction (sometimes defined as „conscious” of its own fictionality) in which the characters realize on some level that they participate in a narrative and, more or less actively, search for its meaning. Since interacting with other characters and becoming acquainted with their perspectives is a crucial part of such search, it is reasonable to assume that one should suspend one's judgement on the claims ruling out the possibility that the concept of the meaning of life applied by someone in practice – a core factor in one's overall individual perspective – is entirely wrong. This suggests that openness to the perspectives of others – at least to some minimal degree – is a recommended existential principle not just on the grounds of what may be known about the meaning of life (as argued by John Cottingham) but also on the basis of what is not known about it.

Vijay Joseph Mascarenhas

MSU Denver

Temporal Infinity and the Value or Meaning of the Universe

To many secular people the idea of a universe that is extinguished and ceases to exist provokes the question: “what was it all for?” The question presumes the answer is either nothing or nothing discernible to rational minds. On the other hand, to many religious people, especially those of an eschatological bent, a universe that exists for all eternity seems, as Kant put it, like a “play without issue,” that is, something with no value or meaning. This dichotomy is the macrocosmic version of the microcosmic problem of the assessment of the value and meaning of a person's life whether it is a brief flash between eternal nothingness or an infinite existence. For macrocosmic version to work it must include all existences of any type, including anything that may exist in other dimensions, spatio-temporally distinct universes, multiverses, etc. As there is no longer any word that refers to what could be called “the whole shebang,” I shall here use the word “universe” to refer to the largest framework in which any existence whatsoever exists. First, I argue that the idea that any universe's existence could not have any value or meaning if it is finite and ends in nothingness is both an intuition that lies deeply within our minds and that it is well justified. For X to mean something is it to mean something for Y. If there is no Y outside of X, then X as a totality cannot mean anything. Value on the other hand can be intrinsic. X can have value even if X only has value to itself. However, that intrinsic value is dependent on X's existence. I then turn to the three most prevalent models of time (presentism, growing block, and eternal block) and show how none can overcome the nihilistic intuition regarding a temporally finite universe. The eternal block model offers the greatest hope but it fails since it confuses a model of time with metaphysics of time: the very term “eternal” block presumes there is a metaphysical time in which the model would still accurately depict the universe that no longer exists. Second, I argue that a temporally infinite universe could have no value or meaning. It could not have any meaning for the same reason that a temporality finite universe could not

have any meaning. There is no Y outside the X. It would seem, however, that it could have value, since that can be intrinsic. However, since there is the possibility of negative value – suffering – there is would be no way to assess of overall value of an infinite universe. Just as the totality of a universe infinite in space and matter could not be evaluated, neither could the totality of a universe infinite in time. One could still ask: what is the good of it all?

W. Jared Parmer
Stanford University
Meaningfulness as Final Personal Value of Ways of Life

In the first part of this talk, I present a novel fitting-attitude analysis of meaningfulness as a value that accrues to lives, according to which what it is for a way of life w to be meaningful for a person S just is for it to be fitting to value, in a final way and for S's sake, S's living in way w.

On this analysis, meaningfulness is distinctive as a) a final value because meaningful ways of life are fittingly valued in a final way, that is, not only for their effects; and b) a personal value because meaningful ways of life are fittingly valued for the person's own sake. Holding the object (ways of life) fixed, this makes salient three other categories of value:

1. non-final, personal value,
2. non-final, non-personal value, and
3. final, non-personal value.

Plausible examples of each are, respectively, a life that produces lots of pleasure, a life of service to others, and a morally upstanding life. One virtue of this analysis is that it allows us to cleanly distinguish meaningfulness from these other kinds of value a (way of) life might have. Another is that it allows us to regiment our thought and talk about meaningfulness in ways that our pretheoretical notion does not, due to its considerable imprecision and unclarity.

Secondly, I put this analysis to work by responding to Frank Martela's (what I call) Arbitrariness Dilemma: fitting-attitude analyses privilege some set of attitudes it is fitting to have regarding meaningful lives, where there may or may not be some underlying rationale for that set having the particular members it has; if there is no such underlying rationale, the set is entirely arbitrary; but if there is such an underlying rationale, that rationale has a more plausible claim to being the analysans than the fittingness of that set of attitudes. The punchline of my response is that the virtues I have outlined function as the underlying rationale for my analysis; but such virtues are simply the wrong kind of thing to themselves be the analysans.

Finally, I consider lives of self-sacrifice as potential counterexamples to my analysis. Thaddeus Metz has suggested that it is meaningful, for example, to endure bureaucratic drudgery so that one's colleagues need not. The first part of my response is that we need to be explicit about whether or not the person herself cares about alleviating the drudgery, suffering, etc. of others. If she does, I argue, these cases are not counterexamples at all. If we stipulate that the person herself does not so care, my response is to deny that such a life is meaningful. To see why this is correct, consider that such a life most plausibly a life of non-final, non-personal value: it is fitting to value, in an instrumental way and for the sake of others, a person's living a life of bureaucratic drudgery so that others need not. That kind of value is, in general, not the kind of value that meaningful lives have.

William Allen Sharp
University of Birmingham
Taking subjectivism metaphysically seriously

In this talk I want to examine the metaphysics of subjectivism about lives' meaningfulness, which says an individual's life is meaningful iff she takes it to be.

Subjectivism has it that a life's meaningfulness depends on the individual's take/judgment. The relations familiar from Metaphysics which might explain this dependence are causal dependence, constitutive dependence, and identity. I argue in my talk that none of these relations make it so that subjectivism looks like a metaphysically serious thesis. Individuals' judgments' causing their lives to possess meaningfulness violates all sorts of intuitive conditions on naturalistically respectable causation. Our judgments' constituting our lives' meaningfulness violates various intuitions we may have about what meaningfulness is and about how much of a life is meaningful when it is judged meaningful.

Identifying a life's meaningfulness with an individual's taking it to be meaningful raises the fewest problems. But even it has uncomfortable consequences—like, for instance, ruling out representationalism as a completely general theory of the mental and making it so that meaningfulness is not a quality lives possess.

Xin Jin

Nanjing University

The Meaning-Incompatibilism Concerning Free Will: Libertarianism and Meaning in Life

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the significance of free will if one wants to search for the meaning in life. The question of the relationship between free will and meaning in life is much less discussed than its relative topic: the relationship between free will and moral responsibility. The free will problem, as a big question throughout history, is closely discussed in contemporary analytic philosophy, most concerning with the compatibility of free will and determinism. Some free will compatibilists believe that free will is reconcilable with determinism, and we therefore do not need to concern about the problem of lack of freedom, even given the truth of determinism. However, most people are worried that once free will is falsified, moral responsibility is meanwhile destroyed. Then they try to justify moral responsibility, and meaning in life moreover, given the truth of determinism. According to Derk Pereboom's hard incompatibilism, it does not matter whether free will exists or not, but what is important is that the libertarian free will is incompatible with causal determinism. Pereboom (2001) then gives a solution of what it is like to live without free will, for example, meaningfulness. His view might be labeled 'meaning-compatibilism'. On the other hand, Trevor Pisciotta (2008) points out that life meaning depends necessarily on the fact whether the agent has free will in a deep sense, and the truth of determinism could devastate the meaning in life, also called 'meaning-incompatibilism'.

Pisciotta's argument relies on Susan Wolf's hybrid theory of meaning in life, that is, meaningfulness from subjective and objective aspects. This approach assumes that meaning-compatibilists neglect the role of non-subjective factors in judgements of meaning in life. His criticism is questioned by Drew Chastain (2019), who believes that "a life need only be directed toward something having objective value, ... [and] needn't be the case that the pursuit of objective value is judged by an external observer to be deeply free".

I will argue in this paper that neither objective aspect nor subjective aspect of meaning in life is compatible with determinism. Unless libertarian free will is present, the judgment of one's meaning in life, both subjectively and objectively, could be meaningful. The meaning-compatibilist view is merely an illusion, and it fails just as most classical compatibilists do. In the first section, I will scrutinize the dispute, between Pereboom and Pisciotta, with the compatibility of meaning in life and determinism, and explicate Chastain's challenge to Pisciotta's objective value argument. In section 2, I will show that Chastain's criticism does not threaten Pisciotta's argument because his agency defeat approach is in itself questionable. In section 3, I will apply Jaegwon Kim's causal exclusion argument on mental causation problem to pose a bigger challenge to Pisciotta's theory, and show that even subjective meaningfulness is impossible. Finally, in section 4, I will put forward why free will is possible and how libertarian free will plays a significant role in seeking meaning in life.