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"The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion."

— Albert Camus

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Last, but certainly not the least, I would like to thank the executive team (Susan Chen, Ryan Rainville, Daniyal Amed, Negus Taylor, Mahmoud Rakha, Ryan Lee, River Aleron, Pourya Decide, and Paul Joshua). It was a pleasure working the team. Had it not been for their continual support and efforts, Philosophia and The Oracle would not be possible. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Asad Umer
Editor-in-Chief
York University, 2017

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

What is this activity called Philosophy? What does it mean to be a Philosopher? The philosopher is as the midwife—an usher. The philosopher brings this grand process we call life—or existence—into thought and concepts. The philosopher is bound to thought, but thought itself is boundless. Just as the midwife ushers a child into the world, the philosopher ushers 'knowledge' into existence. However, the importance is not knowledge itself, but this ushering or bringing into existence. After all, philosophy is nothing more than the description of this process. Just as the midwife is concerned with the process of birth and not its product, her mastery of this process is to usher the child into existence—whereas the philosopher is concerned with ushering new concepts into existence. Thus, the attention is always ever focused on the process. What is of importance is not the knowledge gained, which is often just repetition of the old, but rather to usher something new: something creative into existence, to provide a whole new perspective, give a whole new way of looking at the grand process.

The Oracle is the York University Undergraduate Philosophy Journal. Our goal is to provide a platform for undergraduate students to engage in this grand process (as I have called it), and to, perhaps, usher something new into existence. We greatly value the original minds of this issue.

Sincerely,

Asad Umer
Editor-in-Chief
York University, 2017

NIETZSCHE AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

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This paper explores an alternative interpretation of the meaning of life as conceived by Friedrich Nietzsche. Rather than use the concept of Superman as the heart of his argument, I argue that self-expression serves as the true substance of mankind's purpose. Furthermore, the characteristics of self-expression will be analyzed, primarily using *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* and compared to the conventional conception of Nietzsche's thoughts on the meaning of life.

Introduction

Conventionally, scholars argue that Nietzsche holds the meaning of life to be the birth of the Übermensch, which directly translates into Superman (OED), one with superhuman qualities. As Hoslett writes, " [t]o Nietzsche the development of the Superman is the growth of his peculiar ego."(3). However, I consider this position to be reductive as it misleads the reader into believing that Nietzsche believes that one should attempt to become a Superman; I will examine this mistake in the final section of this paper. In contrast, I argue that the 19th century philosopher would reject this conclusion wholeheartedly, as it does not reflect the virtues that Nietzsche celebrates. As such, I will provide an alternative analysis of Nietzsche's position on the meaning of life, which I will call self-expression. To begin, I will examine thoroughly Nietzsche's distinctive position on what he considers to be the Self, which will be necessary to explain his position on its expression. Next, I will demonstrate the virtues Nietzsche argues to be necessary for self-expression. Finally, I will unite this

interpretation of his the meaning of life with the conception of the Superman, and consequently demonstrate the problematic nature of the conventional interpretation.

Nietzsche and Selfhood

Throughout his life, Nietzsche harboured a complex relationship with individuality; he speaks of it as early as 1876 in Untimely Meditations, specifically in the section Schopenhauer as Educator, and as late as his posthumously published writings. He does not reject the Self, yet entirely rejects what he deems to be the conventional conception of the individual. He writes about it as such in his aforementioned unpublished work:

'The individual' is merely a sum of conscious feelings and judgments and misconceptions, a belief, a piece of the true life system or many pieces thought together and spun together, a 'unity', that doesn't hold together. We are buds on a single tree—what do we know about what can become of us from the interests of the tree! But we have a consciousness as though we would and should be everything, a phantasy of 'I' and all 'not I.' Stop feeling oneself as this phantastic ego! Learn gradually to discard the supposed individual! (...)! Recognize egoism as fallacy! (...)Get beyond 'myself' and 'yourself'! Experience cosmically! (van der Braak, 84)

In this section, Nietzsche harshly opposes the concept of the ego as the individual. At first, what Nietzsche means by "phantastic ego" (84) is abstract. One can see that he considers it "a unity, that doesn't hold together" (84) , and that, as conscious creatures, we have a tendency to discriminate between the I and the other, without taking into account the interdependent nature of being. After all, as Nietzsche says, "We are buds on a single tree" (84), and yet ""The

individual' (84) conceives themselves as being an entire tree to themselves. He clarifies his rejection of the ego in another passage, as he writes: " "Be yourself! All that you are now doing, thinking, and desiring is not really yourself."(Nietzsche, 127) With this in mind, the aforementioned "unity that does not hold together" becomes clearer. Nietzsche recognizes that the Self is not a summation of all parts of experience, "doing, thinking, desiring"(127), and so forth, as what one does, what one desires, and what one thinks, are all necessarily affected by causes outside of one's control: genetics, circumstance, culture, and so on.

Nevertheless, Nietzsche claims that despite our illusory conception of an ego, there remains a Self. Keeping in mind the imagery of the tree provided by Nietzsche, the Self is a bud, amongst many others, on a single tree. Necessarily, this bud distinguishes itself from all of its fellow buds, if not visually, at the very least by existing in a different area of space. Considering this logic in the individual, one Self may share experience, genetics, and culture with another Self, yet Nietzsche claims they remain fundamentally different: "At bottom every man knows well enough that he is a unique being, only once on this earth; and by no extraordinary chance will such a marvellously picturesque piece of diversity in unity as he is, ever be put together a second time." (104) Here, Nietzsche eloquently articulates his position: the Self is what one is uniquely. From the tree grows out a branch which diverges from the trunk, reaching a separate direction than all others branches, only to split once again into different buds, all reaching out and growing in separate directions. As such, each bud diverges into its own path, expanding ever-onwards in its own space, and it distinguishes itself from all other buds by its space, by its direction. The words direction and expanding are particularly precise, as Nietzsche believes that the Self

lies at the other end of a process. As he writes: "What does your conscience say? — 'You should become the person you are." (252) To Nietzsche, the meaning of life the continual process of becoming oneself.

In this section, I have articulated Nietzsche's position on the individual, and, importantly, that the path to becoming oneself composes the heart and spirit of his conception of the meaning of life. Nevertheless, to properly understand the concept of self-expression, its distinctive characteristics must be analyzed.

The Two Characteristics of Self-Expression

Nietzsche proposes that first characteristic of this ideal person, most famously known as the "free spirit", is creativity. He offers imagery for the definition of the creativity particular to the free spirit at the beginning of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, with his discussion of the Child. Simply put, Nietzsche articulates his conception of the creative person through a metaphorical three-fold evolution.

In his first form, the individual manifests himself as the Camel: the beast of burden who accepts the commandments, the "Thou Shalts", of others, and trudges ever-onwards. Second, the individual rejects these commandments, beliefs and convictions and evolves into the Lion, who utters the "Sacred No" (57). Nevertheless, there is a limit to the freedom of the Lion, as he remains bound in opposition with the commandments, he remains the beast of burden of the "Thou Shalt Not". At the second stage, the individual has freed himself from the chains of others, but yet has nowhere else to go. As Nietzsche says: "He who cannot command himself should obey" (217) As such, the Lion finds himself in a transitory stage, not commanded by others, nor by himself; he defines himself in opposition with his previous commandments, he is the contrarian of those who

previously governed him. Nietzsche illustrates the third evolution, the form in which the individual is free from others and free to obey himself, with the imagery of the Child:

"The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world." (58)

In this passage, Nietzsche offers a clear distinction between the Lion and the Child. While the Lion is bound to his "Sacred No" to others, he may only be free once he speaks a "Sacred Yes" to himself. As he writes, "for the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred 'Yes' is needed" (58); consequently, the Child delivers himself of the chains that bound both previous iterations of himself: he is independent from others. In the Gay Science, Nietzsche describe this characteristic of self-liberation of the child as such: "Farewell to every belief, to every wish for certainty, accustomed as [the free spirit] would be to support itself on the slender cords and possibilities, and to dance on the verge of abysses. Such a spirit would be a free spirit by excellence" (135) In this passage, it would seem that Nietzsche is describing the child as one who abandons the ego and its characteristics related to others: vanity, pandering, morality, religion amongst other forms of commandments subjected onto the self by others. Through this abandonment, the individual removes all crutches of convictions he previously used as support. In consequence, Nietzsche suggests that the one who "wills his own will" (58), by virtue of independence from others, is the only one who can reach the true meaning of his life as he possesses the freedom to express himself.

Nietzsche claims that one can only express himself through creativity. In the previously cited passage on the child, Nietzsche describes the process of self-expression as "the game of creation". In fact, it is for the absence of creative expression that Nietzsche condemns the Lion and the Camel, and introduces the evolution of the Child. Specifically, when discussing the bounds that prevent liberation, he writes: "Your self can no longer perform that act it most desires to perform: To create beyond itself. That is what it most wishes to do, that is its whole ardour."(63) This statement is supported by Nietzsche's aforementioned conception of self: that which is unique to the individual. To clarify, to be creative, as defined by the OED, is "To make, form, set up, or bring into existence (something which has not existed before)". In other words, to be creative is to be unique, and therefore, Nietzsche argues, to be one's Self. As such, self expression can be nothing else but the action of creativity. Nietzsche alludes to this in a call to action: "May your spirit and your virtue serve the meaning of the earth my brothers: and may the value of all things be created anew by you. To that end you should be fighters! To that end you should be creators!" (102). In this passage, Nietzsche clarifies that to create, which is necessarily to express oneself, is at the heart of the meaning of life.

Nevertheless, creativity on its own proves itself inadequate as the meaning of life. Nietzsche does not simply claim one should be a "creator", but also a "fighter". Here lies the second necessary characteristic of self-expression: willpower. Necessarily, creation is a process of self-expression and to be oneself is to reach the end of this colossal process, "for your true self does not lie buried deep within you, but rather rises immeasurably high above you" (129). Critically, the variable that decides whether or not one may thrive in the creative process, according to Nietzsche, is will.

This characteristic is so prominent in his philosophy that, in the first section of Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche writes that "The "non-free will" is mythology; in real life it is only a question of STRONG and WEAK wills" (35). With this citation, one may gather that when Nietzsche speaks of will, he speaks of its strength. Importantly, Nietzsche defines what makes a will strong in a particular way, critical to understanding its relationship with creativity: "I assess the power of a will by how much resistance, pain, torture it endures and knows how to turn to its advantage" (53). In other words, Nietzsche considers willpower to be the individual's ability to push through suffering, to rise above it. For those he cares about who suffer extensively, he writes: "I have no pity for them, because I wish them the only thing that can prove today whether one is worth anything or not—that one endures." In short, he proposes that willpower the means to evaluate one's worth.

Nietzsche, then, considers willpower to be the prerequisite of a person of value; one may have a noble soul, or a creative one, but the process of creation requires that one "endures" (53)., that one survives the "resistance, pain, torture" (53). That accompanies the path of self-expression. He argues that one must go through this resistance in order to achieve creativity, because, to ease through it through the help of shortcuts would be to "pawn yourself and lose"(105). This suggests that Nietzsche believes suffering to be not only a necessary part of one's journey towards self-expression, but that it is at the very heart of becoming oneself; the pain shapes the person. As such, to avoid the suffering through the help of "demi-gods"(105) would be "at the cost of yourself" (105). Therefore, the strength of will to overcome suffering is essential to the process of self-expression, and consequently, to the meaning of life.

The Superman

Most often, Nietzsche is understood as being a proponent of the evolution of man, which he considers a "rope between beast and Superman" (44). This Superman is Nietzsche's idol, his ideal future. He himself writes of the Superman as the meaning of life: "I want to teach men the meaning of their existence, which is the Superman the lightning out of the dark cloud of man." Here, Nietzsche justifies the existence of the free spirit by claiming that they are working towards the evolution of mankind. Yet, one must not consider the purpose of the free spirit is to become a Superman. Rather, as Nietzsche emphasizes through his character of Zarathustra, that it is"for the sake of his children must Zarathustra perfect himself" (181). Critically, the free spirit's purpose is not to become Superman, but to contribute to the creation of a world in which the Superman will be born. Nietzsche articulates this point as such: "I love him who labors and invents, that he may build the house for the Superman, and prepare for him earth, animal, and plant: for thus he seeks his own down-going." (44) Conclusively, it is impossible for the individual to transform into the Superman, for they are merely Man. As such, the meaning of life is to seek one's "down-going", to destroy the world of Man with a "Sacred No" and to create a new one with a "Sacred Yes" so that one day the Superman may live" (44). Moreover, Nietzsche comments on the means through which one "perfect[s] himself" when he writes that he "love[s] him who labours and invents". These two words synergize with the two concepts of self-expression explored earlier: he who labors carries a strong will and he who invents demonstrates creativity. Nietzsche ties in the idea of seeking one's own "down-going" with creation and will explicitly:

"But you could surely create the Superman. Perhaps not

you yourselves, my brothers! But you could transform yourselves into forefathers and ancestors of the Superman: and let this be your finest creating!(...) And you yourselves should create what you have hitherto called the World: the World should be formed in your image by your reason, your will, and your love! And truly, it will be to your happiness, you enlightened men!" (110)

Here, Nietzsche connects the overcoming of man through the rise of the Superman with the free spirit's "finest creating!", making the role of creativity explicit. He further develops the connection between the rise of the Superman and self-expression when he writes: "the World should be formed in your image". Of course, this image of "what you have hitherto called the World" must be the previously explored "one way, on which nobody can go, except you": the path of self-expression. As such, the conventional conception that the meaning of life is the rise of the Superman is misleading insofar as it implies that the individual's purpose is to become the Superman. Rather, the individual gives rise to the Superman through the creation of a new world that will serve as the natural habitat this prospective evolution of Man.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed Nietzsche's thoughts on the meaning of life through the lens of self-expression. Through this process, it is revealed that he holds two characteristics higher than all others: creativity and willpower. Furthermore, it has been clarified that Nietzsche does not call for the individual to become a Superman, but rather to create a world worthy of one. The principal purpose of this paper has been to reveal the qualities of Nietzsche's theory on the meaning of life that provide much value to our personal ventures into answering the question. Rather than focusing on

the secondary factor of the Superman, the scholarly community ought to concentrate its attention to a greater extent on the substance of Nietzsche's philosophy that possesses the ability to truly move individuals. This process of reexamination of his philosophy begins with an analysis of those virtues, creativity and willpower, that he conceives as being the answer to the human question of meaning.

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THE ONTIC FOUNDATION OF HOPE: JOSEF PIEPER'S CRITIQUE OF ATHEISTIC EXISTENTIALISM

Rashad Rehman
University of Western Ontario

In this paper, I will explore the philosophical merits of the existentialist claim that subjective meaning is sufficient for the meaning of life. In the first part of the paper, I will lay out an important analytic distinction between 'subjective' and 'objective' meaning as an epistemic framework for the discussion. Secondly, I ask the question of the subjectivity of meaning and its respective merits as a foundation for the meaning of life, especially by approaching the work of philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (especially his *Existentialism is a Humanism*). Thirdly, to show the existential gap that subjective meaning inherently contains, I turn to the work of German philosopher Josef Pieper, and his casting the problem of the meaning of life in terms of 'hope.' Asking 'what can we legitimately hope for?', instead of 'what is the meaning of life?', Pieper provides a significant contribution to the way we talk about meaning inasmuch as the object of hope must reside, as I hope I can show, outside the bounds of temporal experience. I conclude the paper by suggesting that what constitutes the legitimacy of hope is ontologically equivalent to what is constitutive of objective meaning.

"All I know is that I must soon die, but what I know least about is this very death which I cannot evade."[1] - Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

[1] Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. (London, England: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 158.

Albert Camus, in his 1942 *The Myth of Sisyphus*, has called the question of the meaning of life "the most urgent of questions."[2] In this paper, I shall take Camus' dictum as axiomatic, and I shall proceed on the assumption that the question is indeed meaningful. In this paper, though, my goal is to outline an argument against existentialism, roughly defined as the view that subjective meaning, that is, contingent meaning we ourselves arbitrarily create, bears the ontic weight sufficient for the meaning of life. I will begin my paper by outlining the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, especially in his *Existentialism is a Humanism*. I will point out the implications of Sartre's work, one of which is that subjective meaning has within itself an ontic inability to ensure the meaning of life. To provide warrant for this claim, I shall turn to the work of the German philosopher Josef Pieper and his discussion of the meaning of life in terms of the concept of 'hope.' I shall mention the merits of this approach, and why Pieper directly responds to the existentialist shortcomings by pointing out that while we may have 'hopes', the *ultimate* hope must transcend death and thus the bounds of finite time. I conclude that Pieper not only answers the existentialist thesis, but provides an interesting and contributory contextualization of questions surrounding the meaning of life.

Sartre's argument for existentialism begins first with the premises upon which existentialism rests, and the implications it bears, especially in the field of ontology. Though he considers subjectivity to be the "first principle of existentialism"[3], I shall resist this interpretation of Sartre and take his ontology as fundamental instead:

> "Existentialists, on the other hand, find it extremely disturbing that God no longer exists, for along with his disappearance goes the possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There could

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[2] Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Trans. Justin O'Brien. (England: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 2.
[3] Sartre, p. 22.

> no longer be any a priori good, since there would be no infinite and perfect consciousness to conceive of it. Nowhere is it written that good exists, that we must be honest or must not lie, since we are on a plane shared only by men. Dostoyevsky once wrote: "If God does not exist, everything is permissible." This is the starting point of existentialism. Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and man is consequently abandoned, for he cannot find anything to rely on —neither within nor without…If, however, God does not exist, we will encounter no values or orders to legitimize our conduct."[4]

Here Sartre expresses the inability to ground, ontologically, anything beyond the threshold of subjectivity; further, the inability to find any meaning, value or purpose is fundamental to this ontology Sartre endorses. Sartre's usage of "to rely on" ("cling to", another translation has it) above reveals this ontological gap precisely: any foundation for values on existentialism will contradict an existentialist axiom, namely, that man is *forlorn*, that is, a being who must face the consequences of a God-less world and therefore even if to "get on" man devises a set of values, he will not *authentically* ground objective values—for they do not exist. Elsewhere, Sartre writes that he encapsulates and embodies his own nothingness.[5] While Sartre admits this results in the creation of self, meaning and so on, he realizes that "in life, a man commits himself and draws his own portrait, outside of which there is nothing."[6] We find in Dostoevsky a similar thought when, in his *Dream of a Ridiculous Man* (1877), he notes "a terrible anguish had developed within my [the protagonist's] soul, occasioned by a circumstance which loomed infinitely larger than my own

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[4] Ibid., p. 28-29.

[5] Marino, Gordon. *Basic Writings of Existentialism*. (New York: Modern Library, 2004), p. 369-409

[6] Sartre, p. 37.

self", in essence, "it was the dawning conviction that in the world at large, *nothing mattered*."[7] The question that is fundamental to my paper is, then, the following: Given Sartre's account of human beings as existing in a world without God, objective values and the bounds of subjectivity, what is the meaning of life? Sartre, of course, has an answer to this: *whatever one makes of it*. To live a (subjectively) meaningless life, on Sartre's account, is to exist inauthentically, not assuming responsibility for others, and who does not define oneself. The objector here might pause and retort: Why think that this subjective meaning is constitutive of the meaning of life? Does not this seem at best arbitrary? Perhaps so. But Sartre wants to insist that this arbitrariness is the consequence of a world without God. At best "he cannot find anything to rely on—neither within nor without." There is no objective reference point at which it would be meaningful to talk about objective meaning. Since Sartre's account involves subjectivity being the primary source of self and meaning, the problem of arbitrariness reinforces, rather than undermines, Sartre's account of meaning (so his thought goes). Leaving aside the ontic foundation of Sartre's theory of meaning, the German philosopher Josef Pieper explores how this theory cannot work, inasmuch as it does not answer the question that Camus poses.[8] Turning to the work of Pieper, he notes how Sartre fails to both encapsulate the meaning of life (and so delves into the notion of 'hope'), and that this mistake is based on a commitment to a false philosophical anthropology.

Instead of asking "what is the meaning of life?", Pieper asks the question "what can we legitimately hope for?".[9] Pieper's analysis, though, centers around what any theory of meaning agrees upon: the fact of *death*. The question shifts,

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[7] Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *A Gentle Creature and Other Short Stories*. Trans. Alan Myers. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 108.

[8] This is my interpretation of Pieper; this he does not say explicitly (this —merely as a textual note—should be mentioned).

[9] I will explain why this transition from 'meaning' into 'hope' has benefits after going through Pieper's view.

then, to asking on Sartre's account if subjective can meaning be constitutive of the meaning of life if we must die? In Pieperian terms, "what becomes of our hopes if we must die after all?"[10]. Before getting into Pieper's account, we ought to specify some aspects of 'hope' before moving on. First, 'hope' is something we cannot refrain from doing: "…hope is something that can be encountered and grasped in our experience; obviously no man can keep from hoping."[11] It is simply part of the human condition to hope for things—what the objects of hope are, of course, is a different matter. Secondly, meaningful talk about 'hope' can only occur when "we expect [what we hope] is *good* for us."[12] To be clear, things like "desire, longing, craving, wishes, hunger and thirst must be involved; otherwise we are not talking about hope."[13] Thirdly, and most importantly, "no one says he hopes for a thing that he can make or bring about himself."[14] It is absurd, says Pieper, to speak of hoping for something we can bring about ourselves (why hope when we can do it?). Fourthly, and most importantly, there is a distinction between 'hope' and 'hopes'.[15] Given these characteristics, Pieper seeks to answer the question: What can we legitimately hope for?

Pieper takes the concept of hope only to be legitimized if it makes reference to death:

> "What I am stressing it this: no conception of a future state which simply ignores the fact of death, which leaves out of consideration the fact that men are destined for death, that their lives are a movement towards death, and which likewise ignores all those who have already died—no such

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[10] Pieper, Josef. *Hope and History*. Trans. Richard and Clara Winston. (Ashley Place, London: Burns and Oates Limited, 1969), p. 70.
[11] Ibid., p. 18.
[12] Ibid., p. 19.
[13] Ibid., p. 19.
[14] Ibid., p. 21.
[15] I will develop this distinction later on in the paper.

> picture of the future can seriously claim to be an object of human hope! How can there be any talk of hope when the thing hoped for is so conceived that the being who along is capable of hoping, namely the individual person, cannot have it?"[16]

Pieper here stresses the notion that a legitimate object of hope —sufficient to ground the meaning of life—cannot be within the bounds of finite temporal existence. To be clear: "…if there is no hope of a "beyond" in that sense, that is to say, a hope attainable on the other side of death, there is no hope at all."[17] At this point, we might want a rejoinder. However, Sartre seems to display a sharp concurrence: Being *forlorn* (Sartre's technical term for facing the non-existence of God) requires an authentic orientation towards death as finality, that is, as the end of human existence. Thus, if the only meaning available is within finite temporal existence, and "it is above all when life grows short that hope grows weary"[18], we might legitimately wonder if there is hope at all on Sartre's ontology. The crucial misunderstanding existentialism makes, says Pieper, is failing to realize that finite temporal meaning, that is, subjective meaning, is not enough for human beings: "…existentialism fails to recognize the true nature of human existence because it denies the "pilgrimage" character of the *status viatoris*, its orientation toward fulfillment beyond time, and hence, in principle, the *status viatoris* itself."[19] By *status viatoris*, Pieper means the aspect of human existence which essentially means "not yet." There is a positive and negative aspect to this: "the absence of fulfillment and the orientation toward fulfillment."[20] This philosophical anthropological claim has implications extending into the realm of hope and sheds light on hope in light of the

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[16] Ibid., p. 71.
[17] Ibid., p. 73.
[18] "*On Hope"* in *Faith, Hope, Love*. Trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 110.
[19] Ibid., p. 95.
[20] Ibid., p. 93.

fact of death. Drawing on Pieper's aforementioned comment on existentialism, we see that he notes existentialism's lack of recognition that subjective meaning is not enough. This means that subjective meaning might be a subjective illusion devised to make life bearable[21], but taken as constitutive of the meaning of life existentialism "fails to comprehend the nature of its subject."[22] Jacques Maritain, in speaking of Sartre's existentialism, makes this more noticeable:

> "This time it is the finite existence of subjects devoid of essence whom a primordial atheistic option flings into the chaos of slimy and disaggregated appearances that make up a radically irrational world, and whom it summons to make or create, not of course their essence or their intelligible structure, since those do not exist, but images launched into time, projects which fail again and again to furnish them with something like a countenance."[23]

Sartre's account, therefore, cannot ground the meaning of life.

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[21] See William Lane Craig's chapter "The Absurdity of Life Without God" in *ReasonableFaith: Christian Faith and Apologetics.* Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008. Print.

[22] Ibid., p. 95.

[23] Maritain, Jacques. *Existence and the Existent: An Essay on Christian Existentialism*. Trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan. (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1956), p. 15. Søren Kierkegaard continues this thought and directly foresees this atheistic existentialism as inherently implying despair: "Every human existence that is not conscious of itself as spirit or conscious of itself before God as spirit, every human existence that does not rest transparently in God but vaguely rests in and merges in some abstract universality (state, nation, etc.) or, in the dark about his self, regards his capacities merely as powers to produce without becoming deeply aware of their source, regards his self, if it is to have intrinsic meaning, as an indefinable something—every such existence, whatever it achieves, be it most amazing, whatever it explains, be it the whole of existence, however intensively it enjoys life aesthetically—every such existence is nevertheless despair." Marino, *Basic Writings of Existentialism*, p. 76.

If at death "the chips are down"[24], and the chips themselves are simply without merit, what makes life meaningful? Pieper makes clear that Sartre's account does not, and simply cannot account for meaning and so should be rejected. Pieper, though, wants to emphasize the distinction between 'hopes' and 'hope':

> "There are a thousand hopes that man can abandon and lose without thereby becoming absolutely "hopeless"; but there is a single hope, the hope for one thing, whose loss would signify that a person no longer had any hope whatsoever and was absolutely "without hope"."[25]

Pieper, unsurprisingly, realizes that "the question is, what the object of this one hope is."[26] It is here that I conclude that Pieper has successfully falsified Sartre's claim that existentialist meaning could be constitutive of the meaning of life—what more is required is a question which lies beyond the confines of this paper but at any rate the dictum that Christians "confus[e] their own hope with [the existentialists]"[27] is simply false.

In this paper, I hope I have shown that Pieper's critique of Sartre's existentialist theory of meaning, based on his discussion of the concept of 'hope', was successful. In focusing on the question of 'hope', Pieper has avoided the ambiguities begotten by 'meaning' born either of linguistic misuse or groundless claims as to what makes life worth living. By asking what we can legitimately hope for, Pieper has abled conversation about 'meaning' in such a way that satisfies the conditions for meaning in a non-arbitrary and objective way. Should one answer the question "what can we legitimately hope for?", one has thereby, under Pieper's definitions and arguments, provided an answer to the age-old, and ever anew,

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[24] Camus, p. 55.
[25] Pieper, *Hope and History*, p. 23.
[26] Ibid., p. 23.
[27] Sartre, p. 54.

question "what is the meaning of life?" Having gone through and explored the inadequacies of Sartre's account, the meaning of life must be objective and thus must be a hope which lies beyond the temporal order. Having begun this paper with Pascal, I shall end this paper with Pascal's answer to his own question of the meaning of life:

> "What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself."[28]

[28] Pascal, p. 75. The implication of this is that when Sartre says in *Existentialism* "if God were to exist, it would make no difference" (p. 53), he does not fully grasp the ontic weight of *objective* meaning (or *the* 'hope'). For a powerful defense against Sartre, see William Lane Craig's "The Absurdity of Life Without God" in *Reasonable Faith* (cited above).

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DASEIN AND UNCONSCIOUS PROCESS: HOW AND WHY WE SHOULD LOOK FOR MEANING IN LIFE

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In this essay I will attempt to understand a few questions concerning life and the meaning we give it. First, I will look at what it means to exist based on Heidegger's phenomenology, so that we may begin to understand a meaning behind that existence. From this I look at how the concept of death is one that can help us to understand the meaning of our being, in the sense that the nothingness and meaninglessness of death is what drives us to find meaning in life. This brings us to an overarching understanding of the meaning-of- life, or the reason for being, which states that the subjective experiencing of meanings of specific situations and contexts is what gives life its overall meaning. However, the concept of meaning itself is still a mystery, as we can only follow a line of intent questioning, i.e. questioning an individual's meaning behind their actions, so far before we come to the impenetrable wall of unconscious processes. That is, it appears that so much of the meaning of one's actions in one's life is based on unconscious processes not directly observable by the subject experiencing the feeling of meaning. I then make the claim that in order to find the true meaning of our lives we must study these unconscious processes through psychology and cognitive neuroscience.

Introduction

Discerning the concept of meaning in life has been an important subject of inquiry since the very beginning of

recorded philosophical discourse. As the methods for acquiring any type of knowledge evolves over time, it is fair to believe that the method for understanding the meaning or reason behind life can aIso evolve. It often makes sense in this age, with the exponential growth in scientific discovery and advancement over past decades, to turn to science for aid with difficult philosophical questions. At the end of the 20th century, attempting to understand the meaning of human life came to be a most central problem in the discipline of existentialism. It is through existentialists like Martin Heidegger that, I believe, we can discern what our existence, or *Dasein* as he puts it, essentially is. However, from this point in the philosophical history of meaning in life, I believe philosophical argumentation comes to an impenetrable wall by itself, in that we are not conscious of certain processes that compel us to find and understand meaning in life. I, will, therefore argue that any future philosophical arguments concerning the meaning we give to our existence, requires aid from the methods of science and use of empirical evidence from psychology and cognitive neuroscience.

Part I: What is 'Being'

I would like to begin by unpacking the concept of meaning in its various contexts. The discussion of the meaning of life is often so broad it would seem quite difficult to frame, so, I would argue that in order to have any such discussion one would need to begin from a fundamental principle. Namely in this case, when we talk about a meaning of life we first need to come to a fundamental understanding of the concept meaning. I would argue that the meaning of a thing can in almost all cases be translated as "a reason for something". For example, we can say that the meaning of a light switch, or the reason for a light switch, is to control the flow of electricity to a lightbulb in order to turn the light on or off. As such, if our attempt is to understand the meaning of human existence, we are really looking for a reason for the existence of life, or a reason for our *being*, as '*being'* is what most anyone calls this state we as humans occupy in the present. However, the concept of '*being'*

also appears to entail a preconception that we might not really understand. Therefore, just as one would first need to understand what a light is to understand the reason for the light switch, in order to understand the reason for '*being'* we must first begin by coming to a distinct definition or understanding of '*being'* itself.

Just as is the case with the meaning of life, the understanding of '*being'* is itself a controversial concept. However, I would argue we can at least find a very helpful description of '*being'* in Martin Heidegger's monumental work *Being and Time*. To begin a full discussion on Heidegger's concept of '*being'* in terms of human existence, or as he calls it *Dasein*, would require an entire essay itself. As such I will focus on the concepts which I believe are the most essential to an understanding of '*being'* that are most relevant to understanding the reason for '*being'*. Essentially Dasein can be thought of as interacting and caring for the immediately experienced reality in which one exists. At the same time Dasein entails an understanding of the contingent nature of that reality in the sense that human beings cannot be understood except as being existent in the middle of a world among other things,[29] but to also understand the ever-changing nature of the self in relation to the world. To *be,* in the sense of humanity, is to be fixed and immersed in the tangible everyday world. This sense of '*being'* is not understood as *subject* (in the sense of individual self) or *object* (in the sense of outer objective world) alone, but the convergence of the two at all times of experience.[30] Thus, it would appear that '*being'* is the conscious experience of the everyday observable world, as there is no conscious experience cut off from an object, and no object without some consciousness involved with it.

Part II: Meaning from Death

Now that we have a general understanding of what it is to

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[29] M. Warnock, *Existentialism,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[30] J. Collins, H. Selina, *Heidegger for Beginners* (Duxford: Cambridge Icon Books 1998) pp48.

be, I believe we can begin to understand the reason for our '*being'* by briefly sketching out Heidegger's philosophy of death. Heidegger initially distinguishes between two ways of understanding death: *being-at-an-end* which signifies the state of death, i.e. a non-existent human, and *being-towards-the-end* which signifies the concept of death, referring to the way in which an existing human can *be* through a realization of the inevitable end.[31] This understanding treats death not as the end point of '*being'*, but as a motivational concept, an eternal possibility for an existing being to at some point cease existing. B*eing-at-an-end* is the more common understanding of the state of death, that is simply non-existence, or *non-being*. I would like to argue from here that we can use the state of *being-towards-an-end* understanding of death, to inform ourselves about how we might interpret the meaning or the reason for our '*being'*, i.e. the meaning of life itself. In following Heidegger's concept of *being-towards-an-end* we may be able to discern some reason for our conscious experience by contemplating the nature of death and its relation to '*being'*. However, as I will attempt to demonstrate, philosophical contemplation of the meaning of life in relation to death can only be taken so far before we reach an impenetrable wall of unconscious process in our attempted understanding of meaning.

Why is it that we go on living when we know everything will end? We do not know the exact circumstances of the end, yet we know there will be a point at which all will cease to be for an individual, or at the very least we intuitively grasp this concept. We go on acquiring and applying meaning to every aspect of our existence despite this fact, but why? That ever-approaching moment of the end in many ways is what drives us to find meaning and importance in all the time that we are given, no matter how little control we consciously have over what we want and where we end up. Without a belief that there is something inherently good nested in '*being'* itself, there is no reason to attempt to prolong one's life at all. Philosophers ranging from Utilitarian's like John Stuart Mill and Karl Popper

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[31] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (), pp245.

to those who outright reject Utilitarianism like Friedrich Nietzsche,[32] as well as religions such as Buddhism, have rightly noted that life is plainly full of suffering, so without a belief in the inherent goodness of existence why would anyone continue to push on through such an apparently endless possibility for suffering.

I would argue the inherent goodness in life is essentially the possibility of the experience of meaningfulness in one's life. Simply with this one concept life is seen to be a better alternative to non-being. It is for the sake of life itself, which entails the possibility of meaning, that we find the reason for so much of what we do. Even if the meaning of those actions are initially hidden, they lead to the preservation of the possibility for a meaning-to-come, whereas non-existence is simply void of meaning. This is all based off the concept that the experience of meaning is inherently better than the experience of meaninglessness. That is, nothing is worse than something, as something entails so much possibility for meaning, where as the state of non-being in itself is meaningless. Viktor Frankl's discipline of Logotherapy, lends some credence to this concept of experiencing meaning in life. He appears to have shown that what people need in therapy and life in general, based on his own experiences of suffering in a Nazi concentration camp and numerous conducted therapy sessions with individual, is to find a meaning in their initial suffering in life, but also that peoples everyday actions in life are based on an attempt to experience meaning.[33]

It is easy to see how this line of argumentation is confusing; the reason for '*being*', i.e. the meaning-of-life is that life itself contains the experience of meaning whereas non-existence is meaningless. It might seem at first that arguing that the meaning-of-life is experiencing meaning, appears to be a

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[32] See: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002); Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2008).

[33] Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, (London: Rider, 2008)

circular argument, however, I am referring to meaning here in two slightly different senses. The meaning-of-life, or the reason for being, uses the word meaning as an overarching term to describe the reason to exist. Whereas meaning in the sense of experiencing the reason of something, describes what I will call a subset of the overarching meaning-of-life, i.e. the experience of a specific meaning in a specific context tied to a specific object or concept. The main difference is that one cannot experience the overarching meaning-of-life in the way that one might experience a subset meaning. For example: the meaning of a specific apple in a specific moment is to provide one with sustenance, and as a search for meaning is essentially a search for the reason behind something, the reason for obtaining sustenance is because it will allow one to survive. It is obvious then how this kind of subset meaning can all be experienced by an individual first hand. The overarching meaning-of-life then, is the concept of an individual experiencing this likely infinite collection of the subset of meanings. From that clarification, the line of argumentation can essentially be laid out as such:

P1. There is an overarching meaning to life that cannot be directly experienced.

P2. An individual may experience various subsets of context specific meanings in life.

P3. The opposite of life, i.e. non-being, contains only meaninglessness as non-being is void of experience.

P4. The experience of meaning is greater than meaninglessness.

C. The overarching meaning-of-life is for one to experience the various subsets of meaning that life offers and to avoid the meaninglessness that non-life offers.

We can, therefore, see how Heidegger's understanding of the *being-towards-an-end* concept of death allows us to derive meaning from life. That is, the understanding of a possible non-existence, or meaninglessness, is such an inherently negative thing that the reason for a large amount of our actions is to preserve life itself. In this case then, the fundamental meaning-of-life, i.e. the reason for our being, is to survive in

order to experience various forms of meaning in life. This is where the concept of meaning begins to get very relative and subjective. That is, we can essentially see a hierarchy of meaning, where there is an objective *fundamental meaning*, i.e. the doing of certain things to preserve survival so that one may experience *further meaning*. The *further meaning*, which stems from the *fundamental meaning*, is a more subjective and relative form of, closely related to that context specific type of meaning, which begins to get very difficult to observe as a subject consciously.

Part III: Beyond Conscious Intention

As stated in Part II, there is a hierarchy of meanings, that is, meaning does not exist in a vacuum but is tied to various other meanings of various other things that are all causally linked and all inform one another like a network, (e.g. 'the meaning' of the apple is to provide sustenance, I want sustenance to survive). However, it makes little practical sense at most times, if at all, to think of the world in terms of the holistic meaning-of-life. Rather we focus on the meaning of things that affect us in specific contexts at distinct points in our lives because those are the moments we are directly experience, not the holistic network of the meaning-of-life. The problem we will come across then, is that at a certain point we are no longer able to be consciously aware of the reasons we are doing specific things, or the meanings behind actions in specific contexts. One can follow a line of questioning another's intentions, or reasons for their actions, and end up at a point where the person will no longer be able to give actual coherent reasons for their actions. For example, I could ask a person why they want to be in good shape, they answer by saying they want to be healthy. I ask why they want to be healthy, they answer that they want to live a long time. I question why they want to live a long time, they then might even answer that they want to experience as much meaning out of their life as possible. Again, I question their intention but here it is incredibly difficult for the person to give a reason why they want to experience as much meaning as possible. This is to say that there are very likely unconscious biological processes going on in our bodies

and brains that are informing the ways and the reasons we make decisions.[34]

From here we can see why it is important to understand the reason we should approach the specific contextual meanings in life from the discipline of cognitive psychology. As we have seen so far, if the meaning of human life is essentially looking at the reason for a human being's existence, it makes the most since to approach this discussion from a discipline that focuses on understanding and explaining the psychological and biological processes behind the human subjective experience. This is to say that meaning in every case is fundamentally tied to the functioning of our cognitive processes, that is, we attend to various phenomena, and subsequently carry out actions based on those phenomena and on the significance of its meaning to us.[35] In many cases we might not be conscious of why things are meaningful to us, we simply intuitively feel that they are.

So, going from the overarching meaning-of-life, which states that we desire to survive because we can experience subsets of meaning, it becomes important to study meaning from the discipline of cognitive psychology and neuroscience as it allows us to attempt to directly understand and observe those cognitive and biological processes which are directly responsible for creating that sense of meaning in specific contexts. As we have discovered that at a certain point people are unable to further explain their intentions, the only place to turn to be able to understand our reasons for acting on a thing is to attempt to understand those unconscious cognitive processes that push us to find things meaningful.

Numerous studies are being done and have been done using neuroimaging to understand the manner in which the

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[34] A. M. Treisman, "Verbal Cues, Language, and Meaning in Selective Attention", *The American Journal of Psychology*. **77** (2): 206–219, (1964) DOI: 10.2307/1420127.

[35] A. M. Treisman, "Verbal Cues, Language, and Meaning in Selective Attention", *The American Journal of Psychology*. **77** (2): 206–219, (1964) DOI: 10.2307/1420127.

brain functions in terms of its beliefs,[36] so it would also likely be possible to use neuroimaging to understand how these unconscious processes inform us with a conscious understanding of meaning applied to various actions and objects. I would argue it is important for us to understand the true reason behind our actions, i.e. the true meaning of our actions, in order to understand how we might best achieve the goal of survival or the avoidance of non-being, as described in Part II of this essay. This is to say, that a better understanding of the unconscious biological processes that inform our conscious understanding of meaning, might allow us as a species to understand the things that are most meaningful to us in everyday life, thereby providing humans a greater sense of what meanings we should strive to uphold as a species.

Conclusion

While Heidegger's *being-towards-an-end* can help us to arrive at a conscious reason for our existence, there is a point in the line of questioning of meaning and reasons for actions where an individual arrives at an impenetrable wall of unconscious process. Therefore, we need to go a step further to truly understand where meaning comes from, and what the reason for the things we do really is. We must attempt to step outside understanding meaning from the subjective experience, and look objectively at the empirical evidence of the cognitive processes which provide us with an understanding of meaning through things like neuro-imaging and theories of cognition, to understand what it truly is that drives human action. This in turn, will hopefully allow us to better deliberate about how we as humans should carry out actions.

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[36] A. M. Treisman, "Verbal Cues, Language, and Meaning in Selective Attention", *The American Journal of Psychology*. **77** (2): 206–219, (1964) DOI: 10.2307/1420127.

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Musings of a Restless Mind: An Anthology

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Sonnet: Intelligent Grass

The sun drifts up above the coastline hues.
It lingers in the hollow sea of stones.
The reds, the greens, the vast oceans of blues;
They paint the curved horizon tranquil tones.

Auroras dance atop the snow-capped poles.
A wall of mountains rises from the climb.
The jungles, thick, diffuse to grassy knolls.
Such structures are the children of great time.

A web is etched onto this granite globe:
Organic and complex like full-grown grass.
This structure is a light-absorbing lobe,
Just like the trees, but grown of steel and glass.

Juxtaposition of nature and hand
Ignores the truth behind the place of man.

Haiku: Blue Dust.
Oceans of onyx.
A speck of dust drifts through time.
On it… everything.

Limerick: Toils
There once was a bright man named Harold
Who had tried to make sense of his world.
He searched for causations
But found only relations.
That's when he gave up and hurled.

Free Verse: More to the Mind?

Sparks fly through a tangled nexus of snakes. They twitch. They Grow.
Such is the nature of sentience.
The automatons of chemistry have a definite fulcrum - a library of mirages, flowing and breeding just under the skull.
A thousand worlds. A thousand lives.
Just sodium? Just Potassium?
The vectors of thought are a long way down.
Perhaps there is more than just computations and codons?
To feel. To love. These constructs are diffuse, the products of numbers. Like forming vapour from bricks.
It doesn't add up. Something is missing that we do not understand.
The library is a machine of great power.
The citadel of order.
The birthplace of beauty – outside it beauty is mute.
Logic is malleable in this palace of reflection.
This only adds to this paradox of perception.
There must be more to this explanation.
The whole is more than the sum of the parts.

Free Verse: Small

The angels of angstroms dance around the moons of matter
In a starless void of causality,
Piping out melodies that resonate in conflict with the mind.
The sweet fragrance of light ebbs out of this world.
This is the beginning.
This is the end.
This is the place where oblivion is friend.
Time is but a construct.
Life is but a thought.
Probability
Vibration
These are the cogs of this machine.
Like a fog of ones and zeroes
They embody no real heroes,
But like fire and fortune
They forge a foundation
This is the base of a structure
That spans all of creation.

AN OUTLINE CHINESE THOUGHTS

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I. On the Origin of Taoism:

Since Taoism is influenced by ancient maternal society; it is seen as feminine philosophy. Taoism inherits and developed the notion of life and the idea of reborn from reproduction worship. Taoism emphasizes the importance of life; hence, it can be seen as a philosophy of life. From this, Taoism advocates peace and is against wars; so, Taoism is also a philosophy of peace. Taoist ontology of the universe is similar to Hegel's methodology of philosophy. Tao Te Jing shows that Tao generates one; one generates two; two generates three generates everything. For Tao is Hegel's absolute spirit. The process one generating two and two generating three is equivalent to Hegel's dialectic process, i.e. Old synthesis generating thesis (Yang) & antithesis (Ying) and further generating a new synthesis. The process continues, e.g. synthesis (1) = thesis (1), + antithesis (1) = synthesis, (2) = thesis (2) + antithesis (2), = synthesis (3) =... Taoism also inherits Ancient China's political wisdom. Therefore, it can be seen as a systematic political philosophy. Finally, I Jing is the origin of Confucian thoughts; however, it is also the origin of Taoist writing – Tao Te Jing.

II. On Lao-Tze:

For Lao-Tze, Tao is nothingness and nothingness generate beings and, in turn, generate everything. For if we refer to Stephen Hawking's "No Boundary Proposal" which predicts density variations in the early universe due to quantum fluctuations of the vacuum, we can read between the lines. For Lao-Tze, Tao is not a concrete substance, and it is transcendental. One can not say what Tao really is. One can know Tao only through meditation and intuition.

Epistemologically speaking, Lao-Tze preaches intuition, not rationalism. Lao-Tze shows that reaction is the principle of motion for Tao and gentleness/weakness is the function of Tao. From this, Lao-Tze preaches his philosophy of life which is everybody should lead a humble life. For Lao-Tze, ethically speaking, gentleness/weakness is a virtue and a wisdom of survival. For Lao-Tze, his humanism complies with the following formula. Human beings comply with the world, and the world complies with the universe and the universe, the Tao and finally the Tao, the naturalness. Anything compiled to Tao is natural. For Lao-Tze, he thinks that the Tao of the universe is fair and just; however, humanism in the real world is the other way round. Thus, the conclusion is that everybody should observe the Tao of the universe. Furthermore, Lao-Tze's philosophy of life has three rules. First, one has to be sympathetic. Second, one has to be frugal. Third, one has not to be an exhibitionist. Besides, the origin of social unrest, for Lao-Tze, is because the ruler is an evil one. However, Lao-Tze's philosophy shows anti-war sentiments and advocates peace.

The theme of Lao-Tze's political philosophy is that a ruler should not interfere his people's daily activities. Every political measure is according to people's needs. Nevertheless, for Lao-Tze, the best way to rule people is to make them simple mind within and desireless without. For Lao-Tze, is just like raising stocks. Thus, making people ignorant is an ideal way to rule, and the ruler has to be acting like a fool; hence, his people has no means to adopt any kinds of wisdom. Eventually, people becomes fools. The ruling tactics are amusingly contrary to Machiavelli's The Prince. For Lao-Tze, an ideal state is a primitive populism which is a 'four without society'; i.e. first, no mechanical operations, e.g. technology; second, no transportations, communications, and diplomatic relations; third, no wars, and, fourth, no cultural educations. In a world, this is an anti-civilization state. This is only a utopia which can not be realized anyhow for Lao-Tze. Lastly, Lao-Tze's utopia is contrary to Confucius' society of great harmony, of which, can be realized somehow in the future as a true social democratic state.

III. On Chuang-Tze:

For Chuang-Tze, Tao is the ultimate concern of the universe. On the Tao-matter issue, Chuang-Tze shows a sense of pantheism. From the set theory point of view, Tao is a universal set and matters are daughter sets. For Chuang-Tze, from Tao's perspective, differentness is relative, and sameness is absolute. He said, "the universe and I were born/existed simultaneously, and everything and I are in one unity." His purpose is to let life floating with the naturalness of everything. For Chuang-Tze, right and wrong are relative, not absolute for they cab be mutually transformed under certain condition(s). Thus, it would be futile to be controversial on any issues for it would be one-sided if one takes a side. For Chuang-Tze, Tao can not be expressed by any languages and concepts for they are the origins of confusion and controversy. Furthermore, for Chuang-Tze, is also futile for itself is relative to the (s), which is a paradox.

Chuang-Tze preaches absolute freedom only if we are self-sustain independently. And the way to achieve self-sustain is to accomplish selfless spiritually. Practically, one can achieve unity with Tao through zen-kind meditations. And this is Chuang-Tze's philosophy of life. Furthermore, Chuang-Tze advocates his survival wisdom by preaching his principle - "utility of useless." In a word, Chuang-Tze thinks if one wants to be safe, one has to be an opportunist. For Chuang-Tze, life is short and everyone has to die. So, how should one arrange one's life? Chuang-Tze thinks that one should worry less. For Chuang-Tze, true happiness is that when one does not know what happiness is.

Death and life are just like the cycle of four seasons. For Chuang-Tze, true death is better than to be a living dead. With that said, Chuang-Tze's writing can be therapeutic psychologically.

IV. Neo-Taoism/Mysticism (North-South Dynasty):

Essentially, there are three groups of Neo-Taoists. The first group tries to utilize naturalism to simplify Confucian ethics and generate a social dynamic state. The second group

tries to dissolve Confucian ethics and advocate anarchism. The third group tries to synthesize Confucian ethics and uphold the nation-state. Basically, three of them also preach secularism and hedonism.

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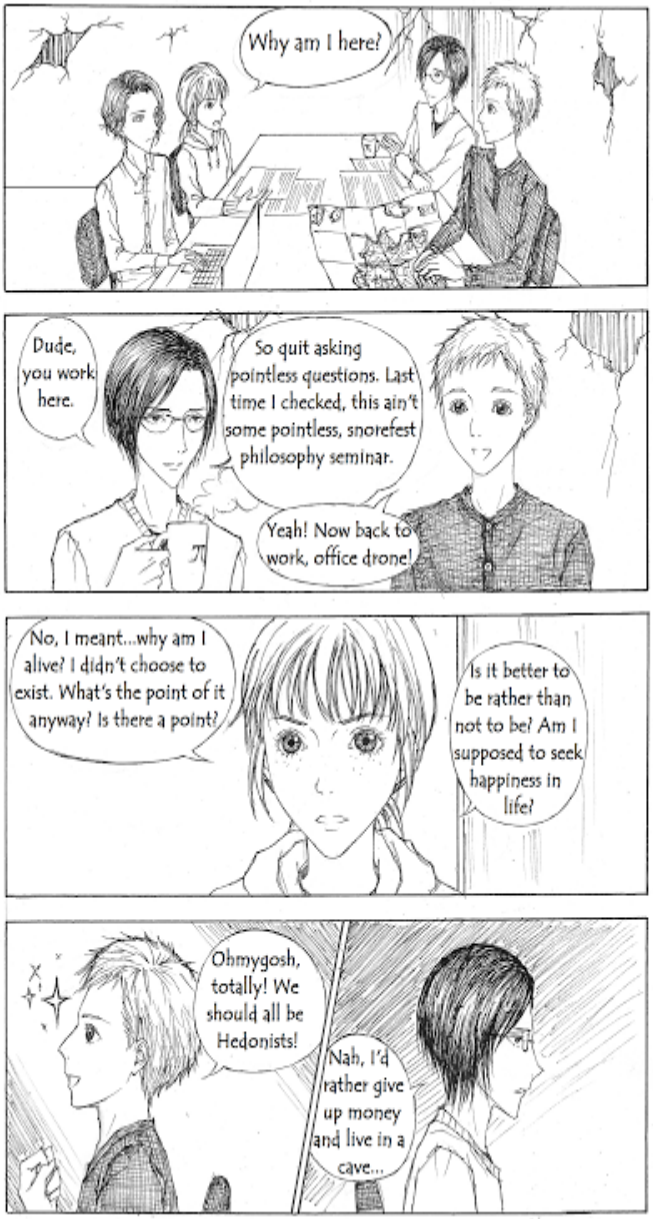
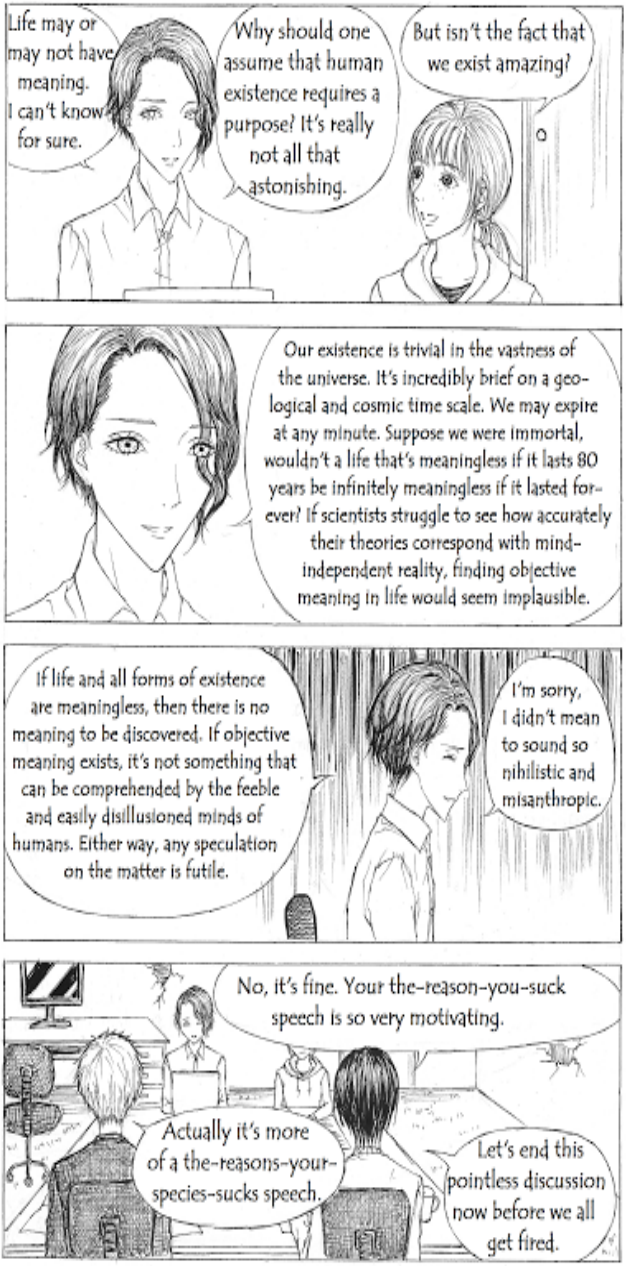
INQUIRIES ON THE MEANING OF LIFE

River Aleron
York University





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THE GOOD LIFE: EPICUREANISM AS A RESPONSE TO ARISTOTLE AND PLATO

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In this paper, I will be arguing that Aristotle and Plato overstate the value of human rationality in determining the best life to live. Aristotle most notably privileges rationality through the "function argument" in the Nichomachean Ethics, while in Plato's Republic, the principle of specialization favours the ruling class precisely because of their superior rational abilities. I will demonstrate that for both Aristotle and Plato, human reason forms the foundation of a good life, primarily because of reason's ability to contain and restrain the bodily appetites. I will be arguing that the emphasis on human reason for suppressing the bodily appetites is overstated, and that as a result, they both fail to present an effective prescriptive moral theory in regards to the best life to live. I will argue that the Epicureans present a better account of the good life, since they allow for reason without overstating its importance.

Ancient and early modern philosophers alike were much enamored of reason. In looking to Aristotle and Plato, I will demonstrate the importance of rationality in their ethical theories. In looking for the best human life, Aristotle uses human reason as the foundation for his argument in the Nichomachean Ethics. In Plato's Republic, the principle of specialization favours the ruling class due to their ability to think and reason. However, both theories disproportionately value the role of human reason in living the best life. It is important to note that I am not disagreeing with the necessity of rationality in living a good life. Rather, I will be arguing that the emphasis on reason for suppressing the bodily appetites is overstated, thereby failing to present an effective prescriptive moral theory. In pointing to the Epicureans, I will explain why

their ethical views are the best solution for accommodating reason without overstating its importance. I will aim to show that their conception of pleasure is more effective in defining the best human life, since it does not disproportionately value human rationality.

In the Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle seeks to explain the highest human good and how it can be attained. He begins by explaining that the highest good must be desired for its own sake and not for the sake of something else (1097a20). That is to say, the highest good must be the most complete; otherwise it would be desired as a means to some end. To make clear what he means by this, he gives the example that health is the goal of medicine and a house is the goal of architecture, which is meant to demonstrate that there are different ends pursued for different arts. However, the suggestion is that if all human action is motivated by a highest good, then this good must be something greater and more fulfilling. Aristotle explains that "such a thing [is] happiness…for this we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else" (1097b). To explain in more detail what happiness is for humans, he introduces the function argument to elucidate his view. This is where the element of rationality is introduced into his argument.

Aristotle explains that all things have a particular function (1097b27). For example, the function of a piano player is to play the piano and the function of the eye is to produce sight. In determining what the 'good' of a particular thing is, he explains that it must be producing that function well (1097b27). And so, the 'good' of a piano player resides in playing the piano well and the 'good' of the eye resides in producing good vision. The point here is that if the 'good' of the human life is happiness, then attainment of the 'good' resides in determining the function of a human.

In determining the specific function of a human, he posits that it must be found in the particular trait that makes humans different from other things (1098a). That is to say, the function is the characteristic activity that makes a thing unique. According to Aristotle, the elements of human nutrition,

growth, and perception must be ruled out as functions because they are traits also shared by all animals. Since the function of humans must be "what is peculiar to man" (1098a), Aristotle concludes that the ability to think as rational beings sets humans apart from the rest. The implication, then, is that the happy life depends on rational activity. Rationality as the defining trait of human beings, demonstrates the importance of human reason in Aristotle's argument. He goes on to further explain that "in the soul there is something besides reason, resisting and opposing it" (1102b22). Here, he is referring to the irrational element of the soul which is the locus of the bodily appetites. Aristotle characterizes the element of the soul responsible for desire as one which "listens to and obeys" reason (1102b31). This notion of discipline, implicit in Aristotle's characterization of desire, highlights the superiority of reason, thereby denigrating the natural human impulses and bodily itches as peripheral traits which require reason for their control. They are peripheral because they are not the main function of human beings; rather, they simply fight against the exercise of reason. It seems that Aristotle is greatly concerned with distinguishing human beings from animals, fearing that indulgence in the bodily appetites will lead to excess, threatening the capacity of reason to function well. He notes that "self-indulgence would seem to be justly a matter of reproach, because it attaches to us not as men but as animals" (1118b3), highlighting the negative view of desire in Aristotle's argument. The constant need to preserve the human function of rationality, in the face of other human traits, demonstrates that rationality is valued above all else.

In the Republic, Plato also emphasizes the trait of rationality. He sets out to discover the characteristics of the ideal society, in the hopes of discovering where justice is located. In doing so, the ideal society will serve as a parallel for the human soul, which will then allow Plato to locate justice in the individual as well. One of the foundations that the ideal society rests on is its characterization as a healthy city rather than one of luxury. In discussing the city, the suggestion of introducing luxury and excess is considered and Plato discovers

that in this society they "mustn't provide [people] only with the necessities mentioned at first, such as houses, clothes, and shoes, but painting and embroidery must be begun, and gold, and ivory, and the like acquired" (373a). Eventually, this society of luxury proves to be untenable because the city must grow too large to accommodate the additional resources required for its sustenance. In growing too large, acquiring more land to meet the needs of the city will introduce war (373d). Luxury, which is by nature excessive and beyond one's basic needs, is thus shown to be unfavorable in the city. Going beyond one's basic needs is therefore a threat to the healthy functioning of the city. This echoes the negative notion of self-indulgence discussed by Aristotle. It seems that Plato is making the similar suggestion that desire, when uncontrolled, becomes destructive. In Plato's city, going beyond the city's needs leads to war, and under Aristotle's conception, going beyond one's individual needs leads to animal behaviour. While the scenarios they present are dissimilar, the results echo similar fears of human decline in the face of excess and luxury. At this point in Plato's theory, the value of human rationality is not explicitly clear, but its value is lingering in the consequences of having a luxurious city. That is to say, the association of excess with war suggests that luxury is negative and leads to human decline.

In describing more specifically the function of the city, Plato explains the principle of specialization; that all humans exhibit a natural ability for certain tasks and the most efficient city will force people to specialize in work that makes use of their natural abilities (370c). This is the case because people will become experts in what they are best at, thereby making the city run smoothly and more effectively. For example, a person who demonstrates a natural ability for cooking must work as a chef. Once all members are designated tasks best suited to their abilities (how this is accomplished is not necessary for the discussion), the society is then divided into three different classes separating people according to their skills - the ruling class, the guardians, and the craftsmen. The ruling class represents the virtue of wisdom, by demonstrating knowledge in effectively leading the city, the guardians represent the virtue

of courage in defending the city, and the craftsmen exhibit the virtue of moderation in subordinating their personal desires to a higher authority (i.e. the rulers) (428d-432a). Justice is found in the city when all three classes of society perform their appropriate function (433a).

This highly controlled society, as organized by Plato, highlights the significance of rationality in his theory because the rulers are the only ones who exercise reason for their function in society, and Plato considers them to be the highest class. The class of craftsmen, who exhibit limited rational ability, have severely restricted individual freedom. The guardians do not concern themselves with reason either and are only occupied with protecting the city. The ways in which they are educated, through manipulation and censorship, highlight their lack of individual autonomy too. This demonstrates the value of rationality in Plato's theory, since those who do not exercise reason for their function in the city are not granted the same individual freedoms as the ruling class. According to Plato, this is necessary for the harmony of the city and for the sake of justice. In other words, Plato is positing that a well-ordered society is more important than individual freedom. Sacrificing personal freedom is necessary for the collective good of the city. In disregarding the personal freedoms of the guardians and craftsmen, Plato has demonstrated that human reason is the most valued trait in his society, as the most rational people (i.e. rulers) are given the most autonomy and decision making power. Plato is not "aiming to make any one group outstandingly happy but to make the whole city so" (420b).

The Epicurean position explaining the best life for humans to live characterizes rationality differently than in Aristotle and Plato's views. I will first elucidate the good life of the Epicureans and then proceed to explain why the role of human reason in the view presented by the Epicureans is an improvement since it does not overvalue reason's function in living the good life. I will aim to suggest that the Epicureans present an improved ethical position in regards to the best human life, since they do not overstate the importance of

rationality and do not fiercely condemn the animal desires that are inextricably linked with the body.

The Epicurean position explains that the good life is one that is dedicated to pleasure (Inwood, §128). There are two types of pleasures – katastematic and kinetic. The former is a state of mind that derives pleasure from an awareness of lacking any bodily pain (aponia) and being free from mental disturbance (ataraxia), while the latter is pleasure that requires an action to physically satisfy a desire (like having sex). It is important to note that for Epicurus, katastematic pleasure is to be valued while "kinetic pleasure can distract one…from [attaining] katastematic pleasure" (Preuss, 220). That is to say, acting to satisfy kinetic pleasures, which are typically associated with bodily desires, is not what the good life entails. Rather, attaining a state of tranquility is the goal of the good life. In order to achieve this state of peace, Epicurus explains the different types of desires, providing a greater understanding for how to act on in order to achieve this state of peace.

He explains that some desires are natural and others are not, that some desires are necessary and others not, and that some natural necessary desires are relevant to happiness, some to freedom from pain, and some to life in general (Inwood, §127). It is important to note that in describing desires as unnatural, he means to say that the desires are not innate; they are acquired or habituated. For example, desiring to smoke a cigarette is acquired and is not natural. A natural desire would be one which satisfies basic human necessities like the desire for food and water. In making these distinctions between desires, Epicurus explains that only the natural necessary desires are to be satisfied for the good life. However, these desires, though natural and necessary, must be satisfied in moderation (Inglewood, §130). In the face of excess, the virtue of prudence allows one to exercise self-control (Inwood, §131). Prudence is what allows for rational calculation and "practical wisdom" (Preuss, 223) in regulating kinetic pleasures which interfere with the achievement of aponia and ataraxia. Prudence plays a central role in the Epicurean good life because it is considered "a more valuable thing than philosophy

[for] prudence is the source of all other virtues" (Inwood, §132). This is not meant to undermine the value of philosophy in any way, but a discussion of this is not relevant to the paper. To be prudent is to exercise reasoned judgment and deliberation, highlighting that reason is the foundation for achieving the Epicurean good life.

On the surface, it may appear that Aristotle, Plato, and Epicurus have similar views of rationality and desire, since human reason persists in all three positions and plays the role of controlling bodily desires. But the way desires are dealt with in the Epicurean good life is different and worth noting since it offers a more concrete approach in finding harmony between reason and desire. The success of Epicurus' position stems from the attitude of acceptance, acknowledging that extravagance and luxury will always find their way into the world, whereas in Plato's society he aims to remove the presence of luxury for the health of the city. Since this is a hypothetical city, he is able to do this but the need to remove luxury highlights its conception as being dangerous to human well-being. Plato describes bodily appetites as "lawless," "beastly," and "savage" (571b-c). This characterization of desire requires it to be suppressed and locked away. The language that Plato uses for desire makes it the enemy of human reason. Similarly, Aristotle describes the bodily desires as needing discipline, which implies an association of unruliness as well. Bodily desires directly threaten the rational function of a human being and lower humans to the status of animals when left uncontrolled. Both Plato and Aristotle attack the bodily appetites, leaving reason with all the work of caging its unruliness.

Epicurus explains that "becoming accustomed to simple, not extravagant, ways of life makes one completely healthy, makes man unhesitant in the face of life's necessary duties, [and] puts us in a better condition for the times of extravagance which occasionally come along" (Inwood, §131). Epicurus' language contrasts the aggressive tone of Plato and Aristotle. The position is more accommodating of desires, since it is less offensive and hostile, making it a more appealing view.

Epicurus still acknowledges that controlling desires is necessary for the good life but he does not condemn human appetites in the same way. His approach accepts that extravagance and luxury cannot be removed from the world. In living the simple life and learning to be satisfied with what is typically considered as "less", human beings develop mental toughness in the face of temptation, when confronted with the extravagant desires that present themselves. In altering the focus of what is desired to simple things, Epicurus introduces a lower standard for desire satisfaction. Instead of condemning the unruliness of bodily appetites, he explains how they can be dealt with more tangibly, with a defensive strategy rather than one of hostility. By altering the meaning of pleasure and making it minimalistic, Epicurus has allowed for desire and reason to work in harmony. While prudence (and thus reason) is central to Epicurus' argument, he does not treat reason as man's defining function, nor does he treat it as having greater importance than individual freedom, demonstrating a more subdued yet effective use of reason for living the best human life.

Aristotle may argue that his characterization of desire requiring obedience does not undermine his solution for accommodating desire with reason, since the capacities for appetites and passions "can be appropriate to a situation, felt in the right degree, and acted upon in accordance with reason" (Jacobs, 108-109). However, the circumstantial nature of each situation makes it difficult to assess how one should always act in living the good life, for 'feeling to the right degree' is a subjective requirement that presents a challenge in defining the best way to live. The Epicureans, in altering the notion of pleasure for living the good life, set a uniform standard to live by; namely the simple life which they describe. It is a clearer prescriptive moral theory and is thus more effective in explaining how one ought to live in order to achieve happiness. Aristotle's teleology, though aimed at happiness too, falls short in effectively accomplishing this. In lacking a concrete standard to live by in order to achieve happiness, Aristotle weakens his ethical theory, spending too much time emphasizing the role of rationality. Martha Nussbaum argues that "Aristotelian ethical

arguments are empty and useless because they are not adequately committed to the only proper task of philosophical argument, namely, the relief of human misery" (Nussbaum, 102). Nussbaum echoes the same concern that Aristotle does not sufficiently explain how to actually achieve the happiness that we should strive for. His theory is mainly concerned with the element of rationality that must control bodily desires. Though this element is important in living the good life, as Plato and Epicurus would similarly agree, Aristotle disproportionately concentrates on the value of reason and neglects to offer a practical moral theory. In this regard, Plato, too, fails to offer a practical theory since he disregards individual happiness. Though Plato is not bothered by this, it weakens his argument since it is unusual to overemphasize the health of the collective state when it leads to sacrifices in personal happiness. In overvaluing the city's well-being, at the expense of individual happiness, Plato does not succeed in outlining an effective ethical theory either. Unlike Aristotle, at least Plato is more concrete with what people are supposed to do to achieve a collective harmony in the city. However, this does not excuse the fact that he sacrifices what many philosophers argue is the goal of human life – happiness.

In overstating the importance of rationality, Aristotle, through the function argument, and Plato, through the privilege of the ruling class, overvalue human reason in attaining the happy life. The Epicurean solution of a minimalist standard for pleasure is more effective since it is less hostile to bodily appetites and offers a concrete moral theory. If an argument prescribing the best life to live does not have practical value, then it loses any impact in trying to accomplish what it sets out to achieve. The Epicurean moral approach maintains the essential components of a good life and is the most pragmatic theory in accommodating the proper role of reason in a human being.

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