

MEANING OF LIFE AS A MENTAL CONCEPT

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ABSTRACT

MEANING OF LIFE AS A MENTAL CONCEPT

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What is the meaning of life? This has been one of the major questions of philosophy for centuries; from Socrates to Nietzsche and from Tolstoy to the famous comedy writers' group Monty Python. People from diverse intellectual backgrounds asked what the meaning of life is. Although there are doubts that this question is now outdated, meaning of life seems to me still an intriguing subject. In this thesis I argue that life's meaning must be discussed according to two different notions. One of these notions is the content of life where life's meaning can be analyzed according to its coherence with a value system, its achievements or its influence on others. The other is the notion of life's meaning as a mental concept, as an experience. I provide reasons to think life's meaning as a composite mental state and propose its components. My point of view carries subjectivist implications, however by introducing necessary conditions of the formation of the composite mental state that provides a life with meaning I argue that such a mental state attains objectivity.

Key Words: Meaning of Life, Mental State, Subjectivism, Good Life, Well Lived

ÖZ

ZİHİNSEL BİR KAVRAM OLARAK HAYATIN ANLAMI

Aydođan, Arzu

Yüksek Lisans, Felsefe Bölümü

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“Hayatın anlamı nedir?” Bu soru yüzlerce yıldır felsefenin en büyük sorularından biri olmuştur; Sokrat’tan Nietzsche’ye, Tolstoy’dan ünlü komedi yazarlar topluluđu Monty Phyton’a kadar farklı entellektüel yapılardaki insanlar hayatın anlamı sorusunu sormuştur. Bu sorunun eski moda olduğuna dair şüpheler olmasına rağmen, benim için hayatın anlamı hala merak uyandıran bir konudur. Bu tezde hayatın anlamının iki farklı kavram olarak ele alınması gerektiğini tartıştım. Bu kavramlardan biri hayatın anlamının o hayatın bir değeri dizgesine uyumu, kazançları ya da diđer insanlar üstündeki etkisi yani hayatın içeriğine göre değerlendirilebileceğidir. Diđerisi ise hayatın anlamına zihinsel bir kavram, bir deneyim olarak yaklaşılmasıdır. Hayatın anlamının bileşik bir zihin durumu olduğunu düşündürtecek nedenler sundum ve bu zihin durumunun oluşturulmasından sorumlu olan bileşenleri anlattım. Bakış açım öznel imalar taşımakla birlikte hayatın anlamının gerekli koşullarını belirleyerek birleşik bir zihin durumu olarak hayatın anlamının nesnellik kazandığını düşünüyorum.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Hayatın Anlamı, Öznellik, Zihin Durumları, İyi Yaşam

To my daughters Narkız, Azra and Sahra,

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Meaning of life is a matter of debate for anyone who has ever asked questions about his existence, purpose, the uniqueness of being him or his life's value. Therefore, this matter seems to be inescapable for someone who has the ability to think. Given this conclusion, it is to be expected that the interest in this subject must be at least continuous if not increasing. But as Metz stated even philosophers seem to have lost their interest in this ever-lasting matter.¹

I think the reason for this result is not that we find life meaningless but we lost our hope to find a meaning for life. Philosophers, authors, religious authorities, even the prophets couldn't tell us a single meaning of life that would satisfy everyone. Since more than two thousand years of effort to find a meaning to life ended up with nothing, it would be very likely to see a loss of interest in this problem. But after studying the works on the meaning of life, from Socrates to today's philosophers like Luc Ferry, Owen Flanagan and Susan Wolf, I began to think that the reason for losing our hope to find a meaning to life rests on our expectation about life's meaning. Therefore, in my

¹ Metz.

thesis I focused on those expectations first and then I proposed a new approach to the question of life's meaning.

In the second chapter there is an introductory section that presents the existing approaches to the question of life's meaning and the possible reasons for loss of interest in the issue.

The third chapter will be a detailed analysis of the question of life's meaning, and then I propose two necessary conditions for a life to have meaning. As most of the writers on this matter do, I ask whether Hitler lived a meaningful life. After deciding that Hitler lived a meaningful life, I ask if there is a difference between Hitler's and Mother Theresa's meaningful lives. Then I argue that life's meaning can be divided into two notions. According to the first notion anyone can discuss whether or not a certain life has meaning, but if we cannot escape the conclusion that Hitler lived a meaningful life, there must be another approach to this matter.

The fourth chapter is mainly based on this new approach that I proposed. The first section is about eliminating the unrealistic preconceptions that are formed from overrated expectations about life's meaning. In the second section I reconsider the experiences that constitute life's meaning and in the last section I reformed the relation between the necessary conditions of a meaningful life and experiences that constitute life's meaning.

When I chose this subject as my thesis, I thought that the question of life's meaning has an answer that can be stated in a few sentences. Frankly, I did not expect the account of life's meaning to take more than three sentences.

But after many readings on that subject, I understood that it is not possible to state life's meaning with any language; it does not seem to be verbal in nature. The concept is very similar to the concept of happiness. Everyone knows when he or she is happy, but no one has presented a satisfying definition of happiness yet. That idea drew the outline of my thesis; in my view life's meaning is not something that can be stated in words. As a result, this approach to this eternal question can be accepted as novel.

CHAPTER 2

INQUIRING INTO THE QUESTION OF LIFE'S MEANING

2.1 AN OUTLINE OF THE PRESENT ANSWERS

The search for meaning of life has an ever-lasting motive for all who can think beyond the physical needs of the material body. The question “What is the meaning of life” has been the centre of interest since human beings’ ability to ask philosophical questions flourished. Obviously, it is a person’s own life that is to be questioned.

Metz’s invaluable work *Recent Work on the Meaning of Life*, draws a very clear map of the attempts of different schools answering this question. The first attempt comes from the school of supernaturalists. According to their view the truest meaning of life can exist only if the person has a connection with an ultimate being. This view has two subcategories: God-centered views and soul-centered views, but as a matter of fact a pure soul-centered view cannot justify itself without the existence of an ultimate creator. For it is hard to understand the motivation for suggesting existence of soul without existence of God.²

Connecting meaning to God, a supernatural entity, is the most secure and practical way of searching for meaning in life, because God is omnipotent

² Metz.

and omniscient; so a God given meaning will be perfect and flawless. In the centre of this argument lies the belief in God. The questions about the existence of God or his reasons to create us are not the subjects of this thesis. But it is generally understood that believing in the existence of God is enough to have a meaning for one's life, as if when you believe, meaning is transferred to your minds or maybe to your souls. But, as Joske put it, a sense of value imposed on life by God, which is not possessed or established by the person himself³ would be God's sense of value, not the person's own sense of value. Of course, it is matter of debate whether God's values should necessarily be suitable for everyone or not. In addition, Nozick argues about the structure of a God-given purpose. According to Nozick, if God's purpose is to create us as food for some aliens and in a future time a group of space travelers would come and use the world as a fast food court,⁴ will this purpose satisfy our high expectations of having a purpose in the divine plan? Most probably, it will not. These considerations show that even God's existence and a God-given purpose might not fulfill our quest for meaning in life.

Besides, what about unbelievers, who think that there is no supernatural existence? Are their lives meaningless? Can we infer that all believers have meaning in their lives and unbelievers don't? It does not seem to be plausible to infer that. Therefore, if it is acceptable that unbelievers can also have a meaning in life, then meaning derived from God does not have to be a necessary condition for meaning in life.

3 Joske,.

4 Nozick.

Metz's second category is a counter-view against supernaturalists: it is the school of naturalism. Naturalists deny the existence of any supernatural entity and believe that the laws of nature govern every being and a meaningful life is possible in a purely material existence.⁵

Since science can describe and explain nature without the help of an initiator and/or an animator, the strength of naturalist schools increased by the rise of science. In the mean time, men began to understand that in order the universe to be as it is, it does not need an ultimate entity. This has an enormous impact on philosophical schools, the powers of divine creation changed their place and religion left its authority to science.⁶ As a result, naturalism has strengthened its stance. It has two subcategories: objectivism and subjectivism.⁷

Objectivism, as a subcategory of naturalism, tries to answer the question of life's meaning by constructing a moral life, full with goals that are not only worthy for the person himself, but have objective worth, i.e. goals that are worthy for all.⁸

An objectivist attempt seemed to be a solution for naturalists but it has its own problems. For example, can a person's life mean a lot to the community and not for himself? That seems possible, for we can think of a pure nihilist philosopher, whose contribution to philosophy is never in question and is worthy. So, her life is meaningful to the community, but her life is absolutely

5 Metz, p.792.

6 Young.

7 Metz, pp. 792 – 801.

8 Metz, pp. 796 – 801.

meaningless to her. Can a life have meaning when it means nothing for the one who owns this life? This is a flaw for the meaning of life on an objective view.

Secondly, when meaning is meaning to the community, it mustn't be overlooked that it has dependency on time and culture. As Stern emphasizes, "meanings change from one age to another, from one civilization to another."⁹ So a certain kind of life can be meaningful for one culture and meaningless for another. Can we think that in one culture Mother Theresa has lived a meaningful life and in another culture her life is wasted for others and therefore meaningless? It is highly plausible to think so. As a result, time dependency of meaning to culture is also a problem for the objectivists.

Another flaw of the objective attempt is whether a person's contribution to community can be understood and valued as meaningful after hundreds of years of his death. So, objective meaning of life can be delayed. Therefore, from an objectivist point of view a life can be meaningful long after it's ended and the results of this would be problematic for the person who lives that life. In conclusion, attempts to define life's meaning objectively are not flawless.

Another sub-category of approaches in naturalism is subjectivism. According to this attempt the subject is the only authority to decide whether his goals are worthy and his life is meaningful.¹⁰ This approach is very similar to Ferry's notion of "the personal structure of meaning." According to him meaning can only come from within the subject.¹¹ And the concept of meaning

9 Stern, p.6.

10 Metz, pp.792 – 796.

11 Ferry.

in question finds another expansion in Stern's statement that "meaning is always meaning to someone."¹²

Although the subjective attempt solves the problems of objective views, it has its own problems. When subjectivity is at the centre of meaning of life, the objective moral and good can disappear. But, on the other hand, why a meaningful life should be a moral life is a question of debate.

Susan Wolf tried to reconcile the naturalist objective and subjective approaches. Her very famous slogan was "Meaning arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness."¹³ Although this attempt seems to solve the problems of both the objective and subjective approaches, it still couldn't be satisfactory. For, Wolf's concepts of "subjective attraction" and "objective attractiveness" could not be analyzed in order to form a definite theory of a meaningful life.¹⁴

On the other hand, the view that life is meaningless belongs to the Nihilist school of thought. According to this view we create our value systems without any absolute foundation, because there is no deity to create anything absolute. Therefore, our values can change and this makes them totally arbitrary. As a result, everything in life is devoid of value and meaning.

2.2 WHY HAS THE MEANING OF LIFE QUESTION FADED AWAY?

The question of life's meaning occupied many minds for hundreds of years about than twenty years ago this interest was exhausted abruptly. Metz

¹² Stern, p.6.

¹³ Wolf (1997) p.211.

¹⁴ Metz.

screened philosophical writings from 1980 to 2002 in order to find the number of works on the meaning of life and concluded that thinkers lost their curiosity about the subject.¹⁵ Neither the question nor the answer was thought to deserve the attention.

But why are people not searching for the meaning of life as often as they used to? Do we have a satisfactory answer or is there a concealed agreement between philosophers and also ordinary people who thinks about that life does not have a meaning therefore it is unwarranted to search for it? I think the reason for losing our interest in the question of life's meaning can be found in the change of our views of the world and God.

The first of the many turning points can be dated back to Copernicus. Those were the times that the meaning of life question can be answered without any hesitation by invoking the almighty God. For those lucky people, who didn't have to struggle and fight for the answer, the meaning of life had been determined by God even before they were born. It was an honour that you, your life and your role had been in God's mind as a part of the holy project. That belief indisputably makes a life unique and precious. The only problem is that you don't know what it is that in God has in mind for you. However, you have holy scripts and religious books guiding you for a life that can satisfy God. And at the end, if you conducted your life, according to his plan you will be rewarded with heaven.

¹⁵ Ibid.

As a matter of fact, the belief in the Earth's being in the centre of the Universe was taken as one of the strongest reasons that gives meaning to our existence. Theologians and religious men wrote on this subject by giving references from holy books and from scientific results of those times, which claim that the Earth was in the centre of the universe. It was very important for religion to have perfectly matching results with science. For the reason that God had already told about the structure of the Universe in holy books, and by observing planets and stars science found exactly the same results, it was not possible to think of an alternative. Since God had created the Earth in the centre of the Universe, we, human beings, were also in the centre of the Universe. This justified the idea that our existence is central to God's project. Even though the meaning of life was still not clear for those people, they were sure that there was a meaning in life and it must be divine and God given. Then a brave scientist, Copernicus came along and showed that the Earth was not in the centre of the Universe but the Sun was.

The ground beneath our feet was shaken and the seeds of suspicion began to flourish. We had to face two discomfoting results after Copernicus. The first one is to accept that we were not in the centre of the Universe and therefore the value of our existence cannot be taken for granted as before. The second result is much more expansive, if the Earth was not in the centre, for then the statements in the holy books could be wrong. But how can a holy statement be wrong and how much of the holy books had these kinds of wrong statements? Not only asking but also becoming aware of those questions was a

disaster for the holy books. Although the results were highly discomfoting and crucial, science went on working as it was.

The second turning point came from the findings of Newton. Humans seek for the cause and effect relations. And if they cannot find the exact cause, they create a cause. That's why we have science, to get rid of fake causes. Before Newton, there was a strong belief that for the Universe to move and to hold the planets in empty space there must be a power that is beyond our faculty of thought. An unmoved mover was needed, which is God. Then came Newton's delicate law of universal gravitation and it had quite astonishing consequences. It simply says that the movement of the planets and their position in space was a result of the attraction between masses. The need for an unmoved mover suddenly vanished. This need was accepted as a kind of proof for the existence of God, because it built on the idea that without God it was not possible for the universe to move in its orderly fashion and the planets to hang in empty space. Newton's law of universal gravitation never claimed that God did not exist but it weakened the proof of His existence. The planets and the universal order could be as it is without the existence of an unmoved mover. So when the question "Who holds and moves the planets in space?" was asked, after Newton the answer was "gravity, only gravity."

The third turning point was Darwin's theory of evolution. Since 1859, the time *Origin of Species* was published, the debate on this theory continues. The theory of evolution clearly implied that a God is not needed to have life on planet Earth; natural laws had the power to govern the creation of living and nonliving beings. Consequently the story of Adam and Eve cannot be true and

also God's creation of the whole Universe in seven days according to Christianity and Judaism must be at best a metaphor. But was it a metaphor or truth?

In 1923, Edward Hubble's discovery can be regarded as the fourth turning point. The first idea about the Universe was that the Universe was composed of Sun in the centre and planets were revolving around it. By the time, this was thought to be the entire Universe. But after many scientific achievements we understood that places of the Sun and the planets were not as we accepted them to be. But Hubble's conclusion changed our view of the entire universe. It was found that our galaxy is only one of many galaxies. Besides it is one of the modest-sized ones.

Copernicus made us understand that we are not in the centre of the universe; Hubble showed that we are on a small-sized planet, in a modest-sized galaxy. This means that our existence is nothing more than ordinary.

As a result of these turning points, now with a positive attitude we can believe that in the future, science will prove God's existence. Or we can tend to accept that the proof of God's existence and his holy project must be out of our reach, if God exists. It is obvious that there is a third, bitter, option; there is no God.

The problem of life's meaning in a world without a God or His divine plan, is also a challenge. This is a kind of meaning, which is not so divine therefore absolute to deserve to be the meaning of life. Intuitively we think that if life has a meaning it must have the quality of being absolute. Any flaw in its

absoluteness leads us to think whether it is not the meaning of life or life is meaningless. Although we never succeeded in defining life's meaning till now, we concluded that if it is to be perfect it must be in relation with God who is known to be the source of absoluteness. As a result, when the discoveries of Copernicus, Newton and Darwin came to stage, belief in God's existence is shot through the heart. Consequently, absoluteness of the meaning of life had been wounded.

Then came Nietzsche and his fearless statement "God is dead." At all times there were unbelievers and sceptical people about God and religion, but people abstained to vocalize their ideas. As most of us grew up with the religious stories of punishment that comes from the skies as holy lightning, we barely choose to think God may not exist. I think what Nietzsche stated was very hard to assimilate –how can God die? However, 'surprisingly' nothing happened to Nietzsche. He died, of course, but long after he told that God is dead, there was no lightning. After that the debate about God enkindled.

After the Second World War more people began to think that there was no God or if there was he must have abandoned us long ago. 6 million Jews were killed in concentration camps; 2 million of them were children. In Wallace's work *An Auschwitz Alphabet* the feeling of abandonment is expressed as follows: "By far the simplest explanation for Auschwitz is that there is no God to intervene in human affairs. No deity exists to care what we do to each other... We are on our own."¹⁶ The extent of horror and wickedness in

¹⁶ Wallace.

concentration camps exclude the possibility of a divine project. Of course, on religious grounds the evil behaviours are intellectually forged to fit into the divine picture. According to religious thinkers there is evil and suffering in the world to make us understand the value of goodness. But for the abandoned those explanations are far from being satisfactory.

There is a strong belief that when you believe in God, that will automatically make your life valuable and this must be a kind of absolute value. However, what we live through makes us suspicious about that. And now we face the risk of accepting our lives as composed of being born, working, consuming and being dead –a life devoid of value. No human being can cope with a life that he thinks to be of no value. Existentialists offer suicide as a solution to this. But instead of killing ourselves, we decided to create values for ourselves. Although they are not God given and absolute, this was what we needed. It was the time when Marxism, and later, communism rose. The human life and labour owns value that comes not from God but from the community. But later on we saw the fall of communism, because members of the community did not want to be equal, and the people of the world preferred individualism and eventually came capitalism to the world scene with its power to bring freedom of inequality.

Our lives' had meaning before Copernicus, Newton and Darwin. God was not dead and He was up in heavens. He created the universe for a reason and our lives have a purpose and on earth there are divine, absolute values that we can learn from holy books and religious men. As Ferry puts it “religion is

irreplaceable as a source of meaning.”¹⁷ Then we understood that whether God exists or not, there is no value immanent in our lives, so there is no meaning. Our solution to this problem was creating values and meaning together, so we come up with the ideal of communism. But it could not stand long enough to save man made values and we were unable to anticipate the end result of it. Ferry bitterly explains the situation that has an ultimate effect in today’s world.

It is this relation to meaning, in world history as well as in personal life that has vanished with nothing having come along to take its place. And it was owing to the secularization of our universe that a doctrine that was still slightly religious was going to collapse in the West even before *perestroika* would put an end to the Soviet camp. This is why the end of communism implies an even deeper void that can be filled by some substitute ideology, at least not by one lacking the same theological virtues.¹⁸

According to Ferry “religious virtues” are the value sources of life and life’s meaning. When we understood that there is no God-given value immanent to our lives we stick to create communal values, which are similar to religious virtues. Equality, for example, we are all equal in front of God, and so are in a communist system. In religion you work in God’s name, in communism you work for the sake of the community and both of them glorify your labour. And communism and religion share another aspect that is very central to them. As human beings you have an already granted value; a human being’s life is

¹⁷ Ferry, p.9.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.10

divinely sacred according to religion and secularly sacred according to communism. Therefore, the fall of communism means the fall of all those human virtues and without those virtues it is not possible to have a meaningful life. A meaningful life cannot be thought of without values.

Ferry concludes that

This also accounts for why, within the sphere of philosophy itself, the question of the meaning of life could have disappeared, to the point that simply to recall it seems old-fashioned. A strange kind of eclipse, to be sure, if we remember that over the millennia this question was at the heart of the discipline that sought (Need we remind ourselves?) to lead men to wisdom.¹⁹

Metz and Ferry ended up with the same conclusion. I also think that this must be a kind of mental or intellectual eclipse because life's meaning seemed to be the most important question ever and it still is. It doesn't mean that the interest towards this question decreased drastically because the question is outdated but I think it is because we lost our hope to find a satisfactory answer to this eternal question. Since we could not attach our worldview with God as strongly as it was before Copernicus and Nietzsche, we seem to have lost our chance to give a divinely valuable answer to a question that has a divine outlook.

¹⁹ Ibid.

2.3 PROPOSING A DECENT APPROACH

In my opinion, because philosophers hesitate to search an answer to the question of life's meaning, people turned to charlatans for an answer and believed their smart twists that exploit the findings of quantum physics such as the famous book *Secret*²⁰ writer Rhonda Byrne or *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old*²¹'s writer Deepak Chopra. In the meantime, some of them thought to create new religions such as Scientology²² or Wicca.²³ What we need is a decent approach to this question; we must understand that it is possible for the answer of this question is to be related to anything divine.

I think Darwin's idea can be a very valuable example for our proposal. In 1859 *The Origin of Species* was published and it proposed an entirely different approach to the tough question of creation. In the description of Stanford University course named "Darwin's Legacy", his incredible effect on human understanding is summarized as follows:

"Light will be thrown..." With these modest words, Charles Darwin launched a sweeping new theory of life in his epic book, *On the Origin of Species* (1859). The theory opened eyes and minds around the world to a radical new understanding of the flora and fauna of the

20 Byrne, Rhonda, *Secret*, Beyond Words Publishing, USA, 2006.

21 Chopra, Deepak, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old*, Three Rivers Press, New York, 1994.

22 Hubbard, Ron, *Scientology: The Fundamentals of Thought*, Bridge Publications Inc., New York, 2007.

23 Murphy-Hiscock, Arin, *Solitary Wicca For Life: Complete Guide to Mastering the Craft on Your Own*, Provance Press, Avon, 2005.

planet. Here, Darwin showed for the first time that no supernatural processes are necessary to explain the profusion of living beings on earth, that all organisms past and present are related in a historical branching pattern of descent, and that human beings fall into place quite naturally in the web of all life....no wonder the theory of evolution by natural selection has been called “the single best idea, ever.”²⁴

Darwin never said that evolution is the proof of inexistence of God, but he modestly said that the origin of our existence did not need to be searched in divine creation but simply in the evolution of species on the planet Earth. His answer to the question of our creation was elegant; he didn't attribute transcendental qualities to our existence but his answer to the question of “How did human beings came into existence?” was simple: “By natural selection.”

Therefore, we could accept the possibility of finding meaning in our lives, which is without any transcendental quality and is as valuable as a God-given one.

24 Description: Darwin's Legacy Course (Anon., 2008) Retrived on July 06, 2010 from <http://itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewiTunesUCollection?id=384233220>

CHAPTER 3

HOW TO HANDLE THE MEANING OF LIFE

QUESTION?

3.1 IS THE QUESTION OF MEANING OF LIFE A KIND OF LANGUAGE WASTE?

The question “What is the meaning of life” has been the centre of interest since human beings’ ability to ask philosophical questions flourished. This is one of the most famous questions in philosophy. Many great philosophers thought about it and answered according to their views of the world or life. However, no one has reached an absolutely satisfactory answer as yet. In my thesis, I will suggest a solution for the insolvable character of this question. It could be at least a small leap forward or a mere jump in the same place. I think it is the former.

In order to clarify the subject, we should analyze the question; first of all according to the grammatical structure of this question and secondly, according to its nature in the French language. I want to claim that this is not a question that can be analyzed by grammar or semantics of any language. It would be a mistake to handle the question in both ways.

The very well known grammatical approach belongs to Wittgenstein. He thinks that it is not possible to ask what the meaning of life is, the way you ask the meaning of the word ‘cucumber’. For Wittgenstein, anyone who asks the meaning-of-life must be in a state of misconception caused by the structure of language.²⁵ Our language makes it possible to ask this question and the question entails the presupposition that there is an answer. According to his view, there cannot be an answer because the question is bogus, fake, so there is no meaningful question as “What is the meaning of life?” Evidently, this explanation does not seem to resolve the question at stake, but its point is valid and important, because the concept of meaning has a very strong connection with language. In his book *Man Made God: The Meaning of Life*, Ferry addresses the structure of the question in his native language, French.²⁶ His first question is on the meaning of meaning:

Oddly, the formula that comes to mind is, “Now what could that *mean*?” [In French, this is literally, “want to say” (*veut dire*) – Trans.] This is a curious way of putting things, for if such is the case, it is difficult to seek a priori what the *will* is doing here. Why not just be content to ask, “What does this word say?” Isn’t this question sufficient to obtain the wished-for information? Why “wanting,” which in this case entails the *intention of a subject*? Is the underlying presence of a person, an ego,

25 Eagleton.

26 Ferry.

essentially tied to the very idea of meaning that we cannot do without it in even such a banal question?²⁷

The question, when analyzed in French, is not ‘what life means’ but it is ‘what life wants to say’; it implies someone who has something to say, the one who has an intention, who “wants.” Ferry thinks including “the intention of a subject” in questions of meaning is pointless, but he admits that there is no way to escape from it. On my view, this result clarifies the point that if you take the question of life’s meaning according to a language, you may be misled.

So, when the question of life’s meaning is analyzed not only the grammar has effects on the formation of that question but also different languages have different implications. We can deny the meaningfulness of the question as Wittgenstein did or we can choose to follow a new strategy to analyze it. Human beings asked many questions about existence, its worth or reasons for it, our uniqueness or the emptiness of all our struggles. As a new strategy we can work on those questions to identify the most related ones with the question of life’s meaning.

3.2 THE RELATED QUESTIONS

The root of questions on the meaning of life lies in the question of “Why is there something rather than nothing?” This question is not about our existence as living beings, for even if there existed no living beings, this would

²⁷ Ferry, pp.15-16.

still be a valid question. Therefore, the root question has a wider area of interest than the meaning of life question.

The questions we ask about the reasons of our being and our purpose of being are also related to the question of life's meaning. These questions are selected from Solomon and Higgins' *The Big Questions*²⁸, Blackburn's *Think*²⁹ and Baggini's *What's It All About? Philosophy and the Meaning of Life*³⁰. The questions that I thought to be related with the question of life's meaning can be listed as follows:

- ◆ **What is the purpose of it all?** As stated in the root question, this too is a valid question that does not depend on the existence of living beings. Therefore, this question is primary to questions asking for the purpose of living beings and indirectly related to the question of life's meaning.

- ◆ **What's all about life? Why are there living beings?** When I ask this question, I am not asking it about any individual living beings, but for life in general. It is not as wide as the root question. With this question, I am moving a step further and I am asking why there is life rather than a lifeless universe. Likewise, these questions are indirectly related to the question of life's meaning.

- ◆ **Why are we here? What are we here for?** In these questions we are searching for the purpose of our being, not as individuals but for the whole mankind. But the question about the meaning of life is much more about

28 Solomon, C. Robert, and Higgins, M. Kathleen.

29 Blackburn.

30 Baggini.

lives in a more personified sense, so, we must be careful. I am not saying that every person has his personal meaning in life and life's meaning is totally subjective. But the question of life's meaning is not about the purpose of existence for all human beings.

◆ **What is the meaning of life?** I think the question of meaning of life is a step towards a more specific subject compared to the general questions about human existence. In the search for life's meaning there are personal elements and elements in relation with all human beings. The possible answer to this question is related to human beings in particular and in general as well. When I ask "What is the meaning of life?" my life is also included in the subject matter, because the answer is going to be directly related to my life. On the other hand, if there is at least one person for whom there is a satisfactory answer, this will also be about other lives.

While examining possible question about life's meaning, two related questions must be dealt with differently. These are:

- What is the significance of life?
- What is the value of life?

But before analyzing these two questions please consider the following questions whether to see they can be related to the meaning of life question.

There are two other types of questions:

◆ **What is the reason to live? What are we living for?** These kinds of questions ask about the reason of our being and our lives. The answer lies in the person's value system; for a Muslim believer, he lives to worship God and his life is devoted to work for the hereafter to enter the eternal heaven.

Likewise, for an atheist or a nihilist, the reason of their being and their lives also rests on their value systems. I think these kinds of questions that ask about our reasons of life can be placed into the questions on the value of life. They don't need to be regarded as separate, because any reason will definitely be related to the person's value system.

◆ **What is the purpose of life? What is the purpose of one's life?**

Purpose questions can be regarded as one of the necessary questions on life's meaning. A meaningful life cannot be a life that leads to nothing, devoid of purpose; a life without a purpose would be empty, only a waste of time. But a purpose, whether decided by God or by you, is a product of your value system and therefore this is another question that has to be taken in relation to the questions on the value of life.

In brief, there can be a thousand more questions, asking reason, purpose, and importance and worth of life and they will all be under the headings listed above. And more importantly, I think that the questions on the significance and the value are left as the only most related questions on the meaning of life.

I find the questions about value and significance very important and central to life's meaning. My life, if it would have meaning, must be valuable and must be significant. This is my point of departure. In my opinion, while asking questions about meaning of life I am looking into these two conditions, namely value and significance; they are the necessary conditions of a meaningful life. In the following section, I will discuss the reliability of my opinion.

3.3 NECESSARY CONDITIONS OF LIFE'S MEANING

When a person thinks that his life has value this means that he is living according to a personal, communal, cultural or religious value system; he lives his life in the way he thinks is valuable. He shapes his life from the viewpoint of his value system. Because life consists of a person's experiences, choices, purposes, beliefs and thoughts, it is obvious that one of the driving forces that governs his life is the value system he owns. When we observe Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, the first two steps are related to our animalism (our animal nature), which is defined as "Enjoyment of vigorous health and physical drives."³¹ Therefore, we must satisfy physiological and safety related needs first but later on the driving force of our lives will not be our animal nature but our value systems. In other words, we choose to live according to what we find valuable.

It may be objected that not everyone is driven by a value system; alcoholics or drug addicts act against their value systems and they do accept that their behavior is devoid of value. But isn't their acceptance a proof of our thesis? Just because their life is not in coherence with their value systems, they accept that their life is of no or little value. That, of course, if they are not praising being an alcoholic or a drug addict.

The value system of a person can overcome even their animalism and their instinct to survive. People can choose suicide when their value system does not cohere with what they experience in their lives. Jean Améry was a

³¹ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language. (2000) 4th ed. Houghton Mifflin Company.

Jewish intellectual who had experienced life in Auschwitz. Myers wrote the following about Améry's experiences.

In the material security of our daily lives, we are unaware just how much we trust others to grant us life, and if not to ease our suffering at least not to cause it. But the victim of torture, the survivor of Auschwitz, has lost that trust forever. "Whoever was tortured, stays tortured," Améry concludes.³²

Améry, after more than thirty years of his survival, committed suicide. Obviously, he couldn't find any value system that can explain the reasons of Auschwitz or any guarantee that it is left behind and will never happen again. Probably, he could find nothing to heal his wounds; what he has experienced scarred him so deeply. He didn't commit suicide when he was a prisoner, but after his rescue he must have felt that it was worse than Auschwitz.

This is an example of how we regard our value systems. A person's value system is higher than his survival instinct, which is a conclusion Maslow would hardly accept as he stated in a letter to Frankl, after Frankl's remarkable works on the need for meaning in life were widely accepted.³³

On one side of the coin we have the condition of value, on the other side is the condition of significance. What is the significance of my life? What is the significance of my life in the totality of all lives?

³² Myers.

³³ Frankl, p.13.

For a life to have a meaning, we need values that can drive our beliefs, choices, thoughts and purposes accompanied by significance of our life. Value is the potentiality aspect of every concrete move, it is the motive behind the actualization of a life designed in mind. Therefore, significance is found in the actualization side. The way you live your life can make your life significant or insignificant. You can decide a move, which coheres perfectly with your value system, but without the actualization of that move there will be no possibility to create significance.

But there is a problem here: Should I accept any life that is lived according to a value system as significant? Significance is not an easily achieved quality. For a life to be significant it must have an effect on its environment, on both material and mental lives of others. It must leave its marks on people, on the lives of others.

A critical question is how much change on the lives of others will be enough to make a person's life significant? How can I measure the changes that would produce significance? I think today's popular culture overrate the significance of mere actions. It is possible to give millions of examples from movies, literature or books described as "inspirational" mostly categorized under the title of "self-development." The very famous story written by Loren Eiseley is one of them. It is known as "The Starfish Story"³⁴, where there is a boy on the beach picking up something from the ground and throwing it to the ocean. Later it is understood that he was rescuing starfishes from the tide,

³⁴ Eiseley, (A).

because they will unavoidably die, but there are hundreds of them on the beach. He was told by an old man, “Son, don’t you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfishes? You can’t make a difference!”³⁵ The boy understood the old man’s point but threw another starfish into the sea and told the old man, “I made a difference for that one.”³⁶ But the day after this boy’s visit, the starfishes will face the same end and it is clear that those survived starfishes didn’t know they lived one day longer, thanks to the boy.

Owen Flanagan, a well known philosopher in the philosophy of mind who is also known to be a materialist, dealt with the question of the meaning of life in his book, *The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World*. But, I found his approach to the problem to be just like the idea in the story of Eiseley. Flanagan followed the same route and wrote in his book that even having existed makes a difference:

Even if I am an animal, even if at the end of the day I am dead and gone for good, I still make a difference, good or bad. Why? Because I exist. Each existing thing makes a difference to how things go — a small difference, but a difference. It would be nice to know, given that I care, how to contribute a bit to the accumulation of good effects, or ones I hope will be positive.³⁷

35 Eiseley, (B).

36 Ibid.

37 Flanagan, p.3.

Flanagan's 'difference' is a vague, blurred concept; what I prefer to use instead of 'difference' is 'change' as a criterion that makes a person's actions significant. So, for Flanagan it is possible to accept that my life is significant because I simply exist. Is it enough, though? Can there be any people whose lives cannot be accepted as significant although they exist?

3.4 ZERO - EFFECT LIVES

People who live in coherence with a value system, but whose lives are totally devoid of significance live zero effect lives. In the following thought experiment I aimed to show the possibility of that kind of lives. What if you swap Mr. A with Mr. B so that Mr. A will live the life of Mr. B and vice versa, and at the end you find out that nobody has realized the difference. Both Mr. A and Mr. B work in a factory in front of a conveyor belt and clench nuts of car wheels, then go home, eat, watch television, go to sleep to be ready for clenching nuts tomorrow. They don't have families or friends, they work in a factory with a few hundreds of thousands workers, they don't attract the attention of other people although they are working side by side. This is a situation that anyone can think about: be born, grow up, work and finally, die. In these kind of lives, living the life of Mr. A or Mr. B does not create the slightest difference for themselves and others; everything will be completely the same as before they are swapped. So these two lives are the possible zero effect lives. Therefore, these kinds of lives are devoid of significance and so they are absolutely meaningless, but people who live these lives do exist. Flanagan believed that our existence is a creator of difference and makes our lives significant, but as we see the existence of Mr. A and Mr. B only makes a

difference for the wheels and the nuts because their existence has no significance. Everything will be the same whether they exist or not.

For a better understanding we can use the possible worlds language. In W_A lives Mr. A and in W_B lives Mr. B. We inserted Mr. A into Mr. B's world and vice versa. Not a single change is observed in W_A and W_B . These kinds of lives should therefore be accepted as zero effect lives.

Another objection can come in reference to the butterfly effect, where “a butterfly flapping its wings in Argentina could result in a tidal wave in Asia”³⁸ meaning that a tiny action results in a chain of actions that ends with a catastrophic consequence. This view supports Flanagan's view that any existence is a source of difference whether it is small or not, therefore any being satisfies the condition of significance.

Let's make Mr. Flanagan, not the philosopher Owen Flanagan, a very ordinary man to play a part in my thought experiment. Imagine that he died and went to the divine court. He met an officer angel there and wanted to learn what makes his life significant. In Flanagan's words Mr. Flanagan was asking what was the difference he had made. The officer angel told him that he once planted a daisy in his garden and Bill Gates was a child in their neighborhood. He had seen this daisy and adored it. After many years he became the genius of the century and founded the Microsoft empire. Mr. Flanagan looked directly to the eyes of the officer and asked in amazement ‘Did my daisy make a difference to

³⁸ Guastello, p. 18.

whom Bill Gates became?’ ‘No,’ replied the angel, ‘but if it wasn’t you, there would be a poppy in that spot.’

We are in search of a change that matters, not a passive existence. The measure of this is not that complex; if your life is not replaceable with another life, regarding the effect you produce, then the condition of significance is satisfied. It is obvious that we are facing a difficulty on the degree of change. Flanagan accepts any kind of difference as if any one’s existence is a natural source of change in the environment, but I don’t agree with him. It is not acceptable for me to think anyone’s life is significant because they existed. *Zero Affect Lives* argument is designed to show that significance of a person’s life needs more than his mere existence.

King, Hicks, Krull, and Del Gaiso mentioned in their work that “lives maybe experienced as meaningful when they are felt to have significance beyond the trivial or momentary...³⁹ Therefore, according to these authors, for a life to have significance, it must have an effect “beyond the trivial and momentary.” My daisy-poppy thought experiment is about trivial significance. And as stated in the recent work of King et al., if significance of my life must go “beyond momentary” then it cannot be the result of experiences in very brief moments.

I think that there is a threshold point of the effect that produces a remarkable change; this must be passed beyond to accept a life as significant. I

³⁹ King, L. A., Hicks, J. A., Krull, J., & Del Gaiso, p. 182.

think it is not possible to exactly define what it is, but I defined what it mustn't be. We need a change that permanently affects other's lives.

3.5 WHEN THERE IS VALUE BUT NO SIGNIFICANCE AND VICE VERSA

We realized that life's meaning has two conditions: value and significance. But we have to solve the conflict caused by two different cases; there are meaningful lives with opposing value systems and there are lives that seem to lean against a value system but they are meaningless.

Both believers of God or other transcendental spiritual beings and atheists can live meaningful lives. I think this bothers mostly the believers because they think that believing in God is the necessary condition of a meaningful life, but it does not seem so. As a matter of fact, contrary to what theists think, atheists have their own value systems, humanism for example, which is a value system that does not need to be God related. The reason for having meaning in life despite opposing value systems lies in the condition of significance. Both a theist and an atheist can have value and significance in their lives and eventually meaning.

On the other hand, why is it not enough to have a value system and live according to it and sooner or later have a meaningful life emerging out of this formula? World is full of religions and in a religion it is possible to find hundreds of different schools of thought. Pick one, be a devoted believer, live a life according to what is expected from you, pray, feast, etc. but your life can still be meaningless. Herman Hesse's book *Siddartha* is a wonderful example of

this.⁴⁰ Siddartha, son of a rich, noble man in India went to live with Samanas. Samanas are Hindu monks who devote their lives to worship and they stay away from worldly delights, they are ascetic. After a few years, Siddartha progressed extraordinarily in Samana rituals. But one day he asks his friend Govinda “What now Govinda, might we be on the right path? Might we get closer to enlightenment? Might we get closer to salvation? Or do we perhaps live in a circle –we, who have thought we were escaping the cycle?”⁴¹ That shows us that a life with a value system is never enough for a meaningful life, because if the way you live your life does not produce any significance even in your own life, it would be devoid of meaning.

Another example can be the life of a PETA (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals) activist. Miss Peta fights for the lives of animals that are used for fur coats. Those animals are electro shocked, drowned, beaten and often skinned alive and left for to die. 85% of the fur comes from China; the batches also include cat and dog furs. Not a single value system, if it is not a Cartesian one that thinks that animals are automatons, can bear that cruelty and find any value in it. But as reported “China's mink, fox raccoon and dog inventories are forecast at 70 million head in 2010, up from 55 million head the previous year due to recovery in the fur industry.”⁴² The value of the fur trade market was 3.6 and it is estimated as 1.3 billion US\$ for 2009.⁴³ It is a market

40 Hesse.

41 Ibid. p.24.

42 GAIN. (2010). Fur Animals and Products [online]. Beijing: Gain, p. 1. Available from http://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Fur%20Animals%20and%20Products_Beijing_China%20-%20Peoples%20Republic%20of_5-25-2010.pdf

43 Ibid.

that makes so much money that no one cares to save lives of animals. So Miss Peta's life can cohere with a branch of humanism that cares for animal rights and satisfies the value condition, but her protests against the fur market of China would not be heard in the vast amount of money flow. Nothing will change. Miss Peta's life is not meaningful according to the significance condition although it is in coherence with the animal rights value system.

I think the point we have reached has a noteworthy importance: you can live according to a value system, but if your life does not have significance, you cannot escape slipping into meaninglessness. But most of us think that following any religious or secular value system is enough for a meaningful life. We tend to think that life's meaning is inherent in the value systems and it would be downloaded immediately to our minds.

In summary, I claim that necessary conditions of a meaningful life are value and significance. Our value system is a result of our culture, religion, genetic tendencies (for example an optimist world view) and many other factors. We have beliefs and purposes produced by our value systems. Therefore, when we follow our purposes or live according to our beliefs, we actualize our value system. So, the way we live our lives can make our lives significant or our actions will result in zero-effect lives and as a result, our lives will be insignificant. These conditions are linked to each other, because if you think you accept a value system but none of your actions are actualized in accordance with it would be irrational. For example, behaving like a devoted Christian although you are a Muslim with respect to your value system will be

ridiculous. When we analyze a life to see whether it is a meaningful life we must analyze its value system and the significance it brings about.

3.6 BUT WHAT ABOUT HAPPINESS, OR MORE IMPORTANTLY, EUDAIMONIA?

Most of us think that life must only aim towards long lasting happiness and a happy life must be a meaningful life. But why must a happy life necessarily be a meaningful life? Obviously, happiness is a desirable consequence, everyone wants to be in a state of continuous happiness, but that does not imply that only happy lives are meaningful lives. It is possible to accept a life as meaningful in which there has never been a moment of happiness. I can think of lives that had happiness in them until a decisive event changed the possibility of being happy for the rest of their lifetime. For instance, after losing a loved one, people may cease to be happy, but they can still have meaningful lives.

Do we really live only to be happy? Do we live for the sake of pleasure? Flanagan introduced his ideas on the meaning of life while discussing whether meaning is possible in a materialistic world by putting Greek eudemonia in the centre of a life that has meaning.⁴⁴ ‘Eudemonia’ is not only happiness; it is something more than that, and the nearest translation seems to be “human

⁴⁴ Flanagan.

flourishing.”⁴⁵ Eudemonia, as I understand, is a process towards advanced states of being, where you aim for reaching a perfect self.

Most importantly, eudemonia is objective; it mustn't be understood as subjective like we understand happiness. Eudemonia seems to Flanagan as the highest possible option for a meaningful life. First of all, it is about creating a perfect you and secondly it is objective, therefore its goodness and applicability is valid for all of us. This view is almost a warranty document for life's meaning:

1. You are becoming a perfect person.
2. You are happy and full of pleasure.
3. The eudemonic life you have is objectively valid.

Therefore, it is a life that is good both for you and others.

4. Anyone can live an eudemonic life.

I respect the philosophers who think that a meaningful life must be good, moral or in other words it must be a life that has the most wanted positive qualities anyone could think of. I respect their ideas, but frankly, I find them naïve. Why do we think that a man, who was the leader of a communist government and murderer of millions of his opponents, did not live a meaningful life? What is our criterion to judge that he lived a life without meaning? Stalin lived a life according to what he believed to be valuable and righteous. He was one of the greatest figures of communism in Russia; his name is acknowledged with Lenin and Trotsky. So there is no reason to deny that

⁴⁵ Hursthouse.

Stalin lived a meaningful life. Imagine yourself as someone who can live a life in accordance with your beliefs and values and reach the utmost success in your purposes while millions of your advocates were praising you, could your mind produce the thought 'Oh, what a meaningless life this is'? Most of my readers will find the idea of accepting that Stalin lived a meaningful life unbearable. Intuitively, we sense that accepting an evil person's life to be meaningful must be a huge flaw in the analysis of the concept of meaningfulness I am proposing. We are inclined to think that a meaningful life must include positive qualities that are also objectively valid. For example, when we admit that A had a meaningful life we inevitably accept that A had positive qualities in his life like being just and helpful to others or being a cat lover. I claim that a meaningful life does not have to contain objectively positive qualities in nature because attaching positive qualities to meaning of life is just like believing that "Whoever does wrong, wrongs himself..."⁴⁶ Why should life's meaning be good in nature and whoever does wrong will eventually suffer from what he has done? Obviously, there is no reason to believe that our preconceptions are true, except our efforts for a better society for all of us. As a result Stalin, live bombs, the Crusaders or jihad believers can live meaningful lives. Although I am not happy to admit my following thought, I find it unavoidable: Evil lives can have meaning. So a meaningful life does not have to be moral and benevolent. As a result, the opposing face of good or nice eudemonia, can be flourishing of evil lives.

⁴⁶ Aurelius, p.82.

When philosophers use concepts such as ‘happiness’, ‘love’ or ‘human flourishing’ they think that these concepts naturally include absolute goodness, but this is not a realistic point of view. I don’t know if an absolute goodness could be defined in the future, but I am sure that for the time being we can define the concept of goodness according to our value systems. Value systems differ according to culture, religion, economic variations and technology; therefore the concept of goodness must also differ. Thagard presents some important findings about reactions taking place in the brain for certain activities. In a study, people who reported that they are in love were brain scanned while they were looking at the photograph of their loved ones. According to the results, the same brain areas of subjects are activated, and as Thagard put it, the fact that “viewing a romantic partner stimulates brain areas associated with reward and pleasure explains why it feels so good to fall in love.”⁴⁷ All of the subjects expressed that they were in love and we could understand from their brains that they are telling the truth. And love is considered inherently good by most of the philosophers. But for the subjects in the experiment their love can vary. One of them can be a radical Islamist wishing to see his partner in hijab (a very conservative Islamic outfit). Although, he knew that she wouldn’t agree, he thinks that he could save her with his love. On the other hand, another one of the subjects is dreaming a life in which he supports his partner through her career. Both of them are in love and their brains tell us that what they feel when they are in love is very similar to each other, but what they think of when they have the concept of love in their minds is totally different. I think none of the

⁴⁷ Thagard, p.153.

concepts ‘happiness’, ‘love’ or ‘human flourishing’ necessarily contains absolute goodness. Therefore, we cannot think that eudemonia eventually creates objectively good lives; it can also result in eudemonic lives that we think as evil.

In conclusion, eudemonic is not objective in the sense that it is valid for eternity or it is beyond the concept of time. Different political, religious or secular regimes produce different eudemonic lives. Most probably, if we could scan two exemplary persons’ brains we would find that they are really feeling satisfaction and the part of their brains, which is responsible for ‘flourishing self’, is highly active but one of them can be Gandhi and the other one can be George W. Bush.

3. 7 MEANINGFUL BUT IMMORAL

Through our quest for life’s meaning, a powerful objection will breed from exemplary lives that are meaningful for the owner but disastrous for others. Think about Hitler, Bush or Saddam, is it possible that they lived or living meaningful lives? This question triggers a rejection; it is inconceivable to accept a dictator’s, a murderer’s life to be meaningful. So can we say that Hitler’s, Bush’s or Saddam’s life is not meaningful? Is accepting the statement ‘Hitler’s life is meaningful’ inconceivable, so the opposite is true? Thagard writes about the ideas, which are proved to be wrong at the present time, but previously, for decades, their opposites were accepted as true because denying

them was inconceivable.⁴⁸ An idea's being inconceivable to deny cannot be regarded as a reliable criterion for the truth of it. As a matter of fact, we have to accept that although the lives of dictators are disastrous for enormous number of victims, they may have lived meaningful lives.

Hitler's life was in coherence with his value system, which he clearly presented in his book *Mein Struggle* or *My Fight*. His ideas are so crystal clear that even Primo Levi, an Auschwitz survivor, admits that "*Mein Kampf*, in which Hitler promised exactly what he carried out, and that he didn't betray anyone; if you can say one thing for him it's simply that he was never a deceiver."⁴⁹ Hitler described his goals and his reasons to believe them in his book and followed them sincerely. And as a result of his actions, his life had enormous significance. These two facts are not open to debate. Therefore, it is possible to admit that he lived a meaningful life. I want to point out that "Hitler lived a meaningful life" or "Hitler's life was meaningful" are the most important statements of my thesis, because by accepting the truth of these statements I would free the subject matter from misleading preconceived ideas which claim that in order for a life to have meaning it must have an inherently 'good' quality.

Raymond Belliotti, in his book *What is the Meaning of Human Life?*, discussed the very same subject. He thinks that Hitler's life is abundantly meaningful.

48 Thaggard.

49 Camon, p. 37.

Throughout most of his life, he was deeply engaged in projects having wide ranging effects; he had interests, convictions, and purposes that sustained him; he was creative and imaginative; his pursuits yielded many culminations and successes; his activities brought him satisfactions; and he was not bored or disengaged for extended periods... We can imagine Hitler conquering the world, savoring the fruits of his deeds, and hatching new, evil plans. If persuasive, this would show that a meaningful life need not be a morally good or noble one.⁵⁰

I think this is a very important aspect of a meaningful life. Philosophers suffered from the prejudice that a meaningful life must be a moral one and tried to prove that being morally good must be a necessary quality of a meaningful life. But in Hitler's case we eventually reach a point where we have to decide whether a life of evil doings can be meaningful or not. Rationally, we don't have any foundation to reject the claim that Hitler lived a meaningful life.

3.8 ON THE NATURE OF THE STATEMENT "X'S LIFE IS MEANINGFUL"

Is it possible to state that 'X's life is meaningful'? This statement is only possible if the property attributed to X (i.e. the meaningfulness of X's life) is not relative or relational. When we say that 'Dogs are mammals' being mammal is not a relational property; dogs will be mammal for any observer or condition. Similarly, when we state 'X's life is meaningful' and think that it is true, we are

⁵⁰ Belliotti, p.61

claiming that X's life is meaningful under every condition and according to everybody. For X's life to be meaningful under every condition it must have a transcendental character; it must be accepted above differences of culture, religion or political orientation. And X's life must be meaningful under today's conditions as well as conditions of a thousand years before now and after. In the first chapter I tried to point out that no one has satisfactorily pronounced a transcendental notion of life's meaning. As a matter of fact, even the believers of a divine being haven't given an answer valid for all of us. For the time being, meaningfulness of life seems to depend on cultural differences, religious attitudes, changes in value systems or changes in people's own beliefs. Therefore, when we state that X's life is meaningful, we are missing its relation to culture, religion or a value system. For that reason, the statement of life's meaning seem to be not monadic in character, but it must be a dyadic statement. This dyadic statement has the form 'X's life is meaningful according to Y'.

When dyadic statement is accepted as the correct form of the statement of life's meaning, how do we analyze Hitler's and Mother Theresa's lives?

3.9 HITLER'S LIFE IS MEANINGFUL ACCORDING TO Y, SO IS MOTHER THERESA'S LIFE. IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

It is obvious that although I had to accept the fact that Hitler lived a meaningful life, I am also aware of the fact that Hitler's values are not in coherence with my value system. Therefore, I must introduce a better perspective. In the monadic version (i.e. in the statement form 'X's life is meaningful') there is no emphasis on different standards of morality or

goodness. So when the statement is monadic, objectively one has to accept 'Hitler's life is meaningful' or 'Hitler's life is not meaningful'; the statement is either true or false. But that cannot be a statement that can only be true or false without regard to other conditions. It can be true for Goebels, a Nazi leader, and not for Primo Levi, as mentioned before he had spent a couple of years in Auschwitz. Therefore, for Goebels 'Hitler's life is meaningful according to Nazi value system and it is a significant life due to its effects on millions of people and its long lasting effect on personal histories and overall world history'. But from Primo Levi's point of view 'Hitler's life is not meaningful according to humanistic value system although his life is highly significant'.

These two statements on Hitler's life seemed to be right, but accepting both of them still makes us face a puzzle: How could Hitler's life be meaningful and meaningless at the same time? Did he live a meaningful life or not? If we focus on how he lived his life, was it a life that resembles a meaningless life? As a matter of fact when I insist that the concept of life's meaning inherently contains the absolute goodness, I have no other choice than accepting that Hitler's life was meaningless. But when we focus on his life experience, it is hard to believe that a meaningless life would be like his life.

When I say that 'Hitler's life was meaningful', that does not mean that I approve his beliefs or his actions. I am simply looking at the concept of life's meaning from a different perspective; I focus my attention on to the experience.

When we think about Mother Theresa's life, it is obvious that her life coheres with all value systems even with that of Nazism. So it is surprising that

even evil ideas like Nazism can understand the value of Mother Theresa's life. Besides she has affected many personal histories and the world history, which means that her life has significance. So we can state that Mother Theresa's life is meaningful according to many value systems even Nazism and given its significance.

But now I face another problem, since I have ended up with two dyadic statements on two exemplary lives:

- ◆ Hitler's life is meaningful according to Nazi value system (Nazism) and it is a significant life due to its effect on millions of people and its long lasting effect on personal histories and overall world history.
- ◆ Mother Theresa's life is meaningful according to many value systems including Nazism and according to its significance.

So according to Nazis, Hitler's life is meaningful just as is Mother Theresa's life. But is there any difference in between those lives? Are those statements conflicting? Although we want to say that Mother Theresa's life is absolutely meaningful and Hitler lived an awful, meaningless life, this is not the claim we end up with. If those statements are not conflicting then we should accept that what makes Mother Theresa's life meaningful, makes Hitler's life also meaningful.

Besides, there can be a school of thought that believes that sacrificing your life for others is absolutely ridiculous; therefore they can think that Mother

Theresa's life is devoid of meaning. The same can happen for Hitler's life: in the future if Neo-Nazism rises again all of the people at that time could accept that his life is not only meaningful but also valuable.

As a result, I can't see a way to reject the claim, 'Hitler lived a meaningful life', unless we have preconception that life's meaning must contain absolute goodness. When I state that 'Hitler lived a meaningful life', interestingly I am putting myself in his shoes, and I am looking through his value system and it is inherent to my judgment. I am not looking from my point of view, so my value system will not be effective because I am reasoning as if I am looking through Hitler's eyes. It is not as if I am building empathy; I am not in a process of understanding his views or emotions. What I mentally exercise is much simpler and easier. When I look at his life what I see is a life that has been lived in accordance with his values and goals, while achieving success and satisfaction in reaching what is determined as a goal. Therefore, when I stated that 'Hitler lived a meaningful life' this statement will be valid and true from every point of view.

It seems that I have reached a critical point that would solve the problem. Up to this section I followed the same route that has been followed by many great philosophers on their quest for life's meaning. I focused on the content of a life to decide whether it is meaningful or not. Then the content of an exemplary life, Hitler's life, created a problem, as you could recall that Hitler's life is not meaningful according to humanism but accepted highly meaningful in Nazism. This result created a high amount of relativism; any life can be meaningful for a value system and not for another one. That is not a kind

of conclusion that I wanted to reach because if my argument is sound about the zero-effect lives there must be at least some lives that are meaningless, because we knew that Mr. A and Mr. B are not totally fictional. But according to the Z1Z value system accepted by a tribe in Africa, especially the zero-effect lives are thought to be highly meaningful. I think the main problem of philosophers who tried to find an answer to the meaning of life question is approaching the subject from the point of view of their own value system without focusing their attention on the experience of that person.

But when I choose another route, as I know which is not chosen before, and focus on not the content but the experience of the person itself, I can end up with the idea of accepting Hitler's and Mother Theresa's life as meaningful as each other without any conflict. For, the 'experience of a meaningful life' is not about the content but it is about being in a certain mental state. Only by that maneuver we could resolve the problem at hand: How can people with different value systems have meaningful lives? How can an atheist and a Muslim believer live meaningful lives? According to the Muslim believer meaning of life is worshipping Allah as it is clearly stated in Quran and for the atheist any kind of worshipping to a deity is nothing but deceiving yourself and it is not possible for anyone to find a meaning in any religion because every religion is nonsense. This was the conflict that mesmerized us; according to the Muslim believer an atheist cannot live a meaningful life and for an atheist any believer of any religion seeks for life's meaning where they cannot find it. But obviously there is no reason that Muslim A and atheist B cannot have a meaningful life. For although the content of Muslim A's and atheist B's lives are different, they

are having the same experience, which is living a meaningful life. Therefore, whether I am a humanist or a Nazi or a Muslim or a Christian there is no problem to accept that Hitler and Mother Theresa lived meaningful lives when we focused on their experience of living.

From now on, my route is cleared. In my thesis living a meaningful life means that you are having a certain kind of experience, a mental state. So, the statement about the meaning of life as dyadic in structure is valid only if we are analyzing the content of the life in question. But when we are analyzing the experience and state that 'X's life is meaningful' we are dealing with a statement that is monadic in structure.

3.10 TWO NOTIONS OF LIFE'S MEANING

Our experience of life is composed of our beliefs, ideas, purposes and values that I call the content of life. Our mental experiences or mental states are independent of the content. One of us can choose to collect yellow rubber bands and another one can choose to work in the Doctors without Borders organization. We don't have to be highly qualified philosophers to admit that there is a gap of value between these two lives when we compare them according to their content. But we cannot admit that the rubber collector cannot be in the mental state of satisfaction produced by active engagement in an activity as the member of Doctors without Borders.

Grünberg in his work about meaning of life wrote: “we shall restrict the sense of meaningful life to a happy and ethically valuable one.”⁵¹ By restricting the sense of a meaningful life, he freed himself from facing Hitler’s life as meaningful, because anyone who studies a life’s content would find himself in a struggle with ethical concepts. In his later article titled as “Etik ve Hayatın Anlamı” (Ethics and The Meaning of Life), he needed to change the question and wrote that “an answer to the question ‘What could the meaning of life be?’ (which is closely related to ethics) is proposed”⁵² in his paper.

Ferry did the same thing, in his first book about *Man Made God*, he dealt with the question ‘What is the meaning of life?’ but later he changed the question and this time he asked ‘What is the good life?’ because a good life can be different then a meaningful life.

In the following chapter, I will focus on the concept of living-a-meaningful-life as being in a kind of composite mental state and how the relation of significance and value conditions interact with that mental state.

51 Grünberg, David, (A) p. 15.

52 Grünberg, David, (B) p. 147.

CHAPTER 4

A NEW APPROACH TO THE QUESTION OF LIFE'S MEANING

4.1 SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE MEANING OF LIFE

Everyone knows what is not the meaning of life.

I think this is one of the strangest misconceptions that I have encountered while studying on the question of life's meaning. Even the works of highly respectable religious people or atheist philosophers, even the holy books or very well known philosophical essays, all of them can only make sense to us to an extent but till now, none of them entirely satisfied the struggle for life's meaning. The problem is how can we know what is not the *complete*, best suiting answer to the question of life's meaning? We certainly know that life's meaning does not consist only of taking care of our children or being a devoted citizen or worshipping God. How can we know that *worshipping God* cannot be life's complete meaning although it is clearly expressed⁵³ by authorities? Or even though we invest most of our life time, intense labor and love in our children, how can we be sure that *raising kids* cannot produce life's complete meaning?

53 Golshani, p.45.

I would like to point out the general intuition that the answer to the question of life's meaning must have a quality of completeness. It must answer most of our questions like what is my reason for being here, what is my goal to satisfy in life or what is my uniqueness of being me? The answer to the question of life's meaning must be such that when we find it we would be enlightened by its completeness. It would tell us what we have to know all about our being. It must be an answer to our troubling questions about a life that has a meaning.

Canfield in his book *Philosophy of Meaning, Knowledge and Value in the Twentieth Century* has this to say:

It is a curious feature of the human intellect that explaining something mysterious by appealing to something even more mysterious has the attraction that it does. Still, the deeper mystery can remain intellectually satisfying only as long as there are no other explanations on the field which possess what it does not, some real explanatory power.⁵⁴

This is exactly what most of us unknowingly do on the quest for life's meaning. We intuitively think that life's meaning is a mystery with transcendental qualities and we are trying to explain it by attributing more mystery to it.

For me, the critical question is how it is possible for us to know what is not life's meaning? The reason for this problem lies in our expectations. It is the expectation that life must have a meaning that is more than what we are usually

⁵⁴ Canfield, p.143.

engaged within life; it must be something higher and more valuable than what we already have. It is something very frequently emphasized in works about life's meaning that life must have a meaning which is more valuable than life itself. I think this is a myth and in my opinion it is nonsense, unintelligible to ascribe a kind of value to life's meaning that is thought to be more than what life is. Existentialists unveiled this bitter truth: our rigorous demand for something that is perfect, complete and infinite comes from our understanding of ourselves as being imperfect, incomplete and finite. We find the idea of being as we are and life as it is, unbearable; as a result we created the myth of life's meaning to be more than life. Statements such as 'life is a journey', 'life is a wonderful secret' or 'life is a present that you have once in your lifetime' are attempts to give life something more than it has. Therefore, whatever is told to us as life's meaning, if it is something from life we reject it; if it is not something from life, most of us will buy it, only a few of us would continue being suspicious.

Nozick tells a wonderful story that expresses the issue that I am talking about. This story is told to Gershom Scholem, a well-known Jewish philosopher and historian. When he was a young man he wanted to study kabbalah with masters. They told him this story to make him understand that he shouldn't ask any question during his education for two years. He, who became a philosopher later, had refused not to ask questions.

In this story, there was an ordinary man, who searches for the meaning of life. He was told that in Himalayas there was a man of wisdom who can answer this perennial question. The journey was very long and tiresome, but he

was so anxious about the answer he sought. Most probably I would feel the same as he did because if in minutes I were to learn the answer of a perennial question, I would be terrified because of the subsequent experience. It would be a kind of illumination that will make me understand what life is all about. He entered into a cave where the man of wisdom was meditating, and asked his question in quite a certainty, because he never worried that the wise man might not know the answer. He asked, “What is the meaning of life?” After a long silence, the wise man ended his meditation and told “Life is a fountain.”⁵⁵ When our hero heard the answer he furiously yelled at the wise man. “What do you mean, life is a fountain? I have just traveled thousands of miles to hear your words and all you have to tell me is just that? That is ridiculous.”⁵⁶ After this furious outburst the wise man said, “You mean it is not a fountain?” in one version of the story and “So, it is not a fountain” in the other version.

I would like to emphasize my point one more time. How did he know that the answer is not ‘Life is a fountain’? Because this answer didn’t give him the feeling of being illuminated, it did not satisfy his expectations. But most of the time the kinds of answers like the ones mentioned about intuition (proposing a higher mystery as an answer to another mystery) are accepted as satisfactory and true. We feel secure towards the unknown when we ignore the question whether the answer is an appropriate answer. In religious education when you begin asking questions about God, the authorities never appear as they don’t have the answer, but that you are not capable to understand the answer. The

55 Nozick, p. 571.

56 Ibid.

statement “Life is a fountain” as an answer is similar to the statement “Life is not a fountain”, because neither of them is open to understanding; they are mysteriously vague. The real challenge is to differentiate between what is nonsense and what is hard to understand. But if we continue to expect an answer to the question of life’s meaning that is more than life itself, we must accustom ourselves to accepting statements like ‘Life is a fountain’ as an answer that we are not capable enough to understand.

If we were told the real meaning of life, we would immediately know that it is the correct one.

The expectations I have mentioned above are also responsible for that misconception. We all know what is not the meaning of life, and in addition to this, we will certainly know what it is. I find this view too optimistic: although only a few of us can comprehend the meaning of evolution or quantum physics, we are so self-confident that we would recognize the meaning of life immediately we were told. For the reason that we tend to ascribe to life’s meaning some extraordinary qualities, we think that it has the quality of clarity so that everyone could understand it. In addition, anyone who is told the meaning of life certainly knows that it is the absolutely correct meaning of life.

In summary, the claim we are considering is that we know what not is the meaning of life and we are certain that when it is told we would recognize it. Although we don’t have any reliable reasons to believe that, it is accepted as truth when meaning of life is the issue.

There must be only one life's meaning that would mean the same to everyone.

This misconception is plausible because it would answer questions like the reasons of our existence, the purpose of our lives and the value of being as we are and answer of those questions seem to be objective in nature. But, how is it possible to have the same meaning of life for everyone? World is full with a vast amount of differences among human beings. Is it possible for Salman Rushdie –author of the Satanic Verses for whom in 1989 had issued a fatwa, a religious order to be killed by devoted Muslims because of his book– and Ayetullah Humeyni –who had issued the fatwa for Rushdie– share the same meaning of life? Life's meaning can only be same for everyone if it is absolute, then it would be same for any life. Obviously, it is very hard to free ourselves from believing the existence of something that is perfect, infinite and complete, in other words absolute.

Further more, when people are asked about their life's meaning they tend to separate their life into parts as development of self, career, family and/or friends. As a result people define different meanings for each part, because roles in life differ according to those parts.⁵⁷ In conclusion, attempts for only one and absolute meaning of life are not seem to be possible in practice.

⁵⁷ Baumeister.

Life's meaning is permanent.

For, we tend to believe in an absolute meaning of life, it must be permanent in its nature. But life's meaning can change all through our lifetime from youth to elderly. Therefore, if an absolute meaning of life, which is God-given, does not exist, we should accept its finite quality and not permanence.

Comparing lives according to their meaningfulness.

We compare lives and judge according to their meaningfulness. For example, it is not so debatable that Pasteur's life is more meaningful than farmer Hüsmen Ağa. In my view, judging one life to be meaningful more than another is a deception. We can discuss whether or not Pasteur's and Hüsmen Ağa's lives are meaningful according to their beliefs, achievements and vice versa, but when we discuss about their experience of a meaningful life, we cannot compare them on the account of their experience. I think meaning of life, as a mental state is dependent on the cognitive capacity of the person. Pasteur could be in the meaningful life mental state by his achievements in science and Hüsmen Ağa could experience the same mental state by an abundant harvest in his fields. As I explained in the third chapter when the subject matter is the content of a life, anyone can judge according to a value system, but when we study the experience of that life then Mother Theresa's life would be as meaningful as Hitler's life.

In short, those misconceptions cause a kind of chauvinism, which we can call chauvinism of absolutes. We want life's meaning to be ethically valuable, good, beautiful, complete, perfect, infinite, beyond all cultural and

economical influences, irrefutably favorable, wise and more than what life is. Although we think that life's meaning is found in absolutes, we can change our point of view and search for a meaning of life that is found in our lives.

I think life has meaning, but I don't think that life is meaningful in the sense that meaning of life contains absolute features. These misconceptions caused by our beliefs that we as human beings exist for a reason and the whole universe is created for us to establish our God-given or supernaturalistic purpose. Although we believe in our role in a divine purpose, our lives were full of unending struggles or at least monotonous, we repeat the things year after year for most of our lifetime. To end this conflict of having divine purposes and living a life that does not give the sense of any divinity, we were left with three choices:

1. We could end up with the idea that life is meaningless.
2. Life's meaning is more than what life has therefore it must contain absolute features.
3. Life's meaning is no more than life and does not need to have absolute features.

I prefer the third choice and claim that this will end many conflicts caused by the groundless assumptions of absolutes. In the first part of the second chapter, I introduced the necessary conditions of life as value and significance and in the second part, I introduced two notions of life's meaning and proposed that the quest for life's meaning must not be about the content of

life but the experience of it. After presenting some misconceptions about life's meaning I would like to introduce the nature of life's meaning as an experience and its relation with the conditions of value and significance.

4.2 LIFE'S MEANING AS A MENTAL STATE

I think there is meaning in life and it is totally composed of what exists in life, nothing more. According to my view, what makes a life meaningful is a certain composite mental state and when you are in that certain mental state you will experience a meaningful life.

I claim that philosophers who are dealing with the question of life's meaning and psychologists who study the subject of a well-lived life were explaining the components of a meaningful life; Aristotle had written about eudemonia emphasizing happiness⁵⁸, Nietzsche emphasized artistic creativity⁵⁹ and Csíkszentmihályi added to this Nietzschean approach the concept of scientific creativity⁶⁰, Csíkszentmihályi⁶¹, Frankl⁶², Wolf⁶³, Thagard⁶⁴ and Grünberg⁶⁵ mentioned the experience of effective and creative engagement in an purposeful activity. I think those components of a meaningful life are single mental states as happiness or processes that form mental states which will produce the meaningful life mental state.

58 Kraut.

59 Young.

60 Csíkszentmihályi.

61 Ibid.

62 Frankl.

63 Wolf (2010).

64 Thagard.

65 Grünberg, David, (A).

4.3 WHAT ARE THOSE SINGLE MENTAL STATES OR PROCESSES THAT FORM THE COMPOSITE MENTAL STATE OF A LIFE WITH MEANING?

The subjectivist school of philosophy defined meaning of life as completely subjective and to this view “whether a life is meaningful is essentially a function of whether it is (or its parts are) the object of some proattitude or other.”⁶⁶ We can observe traces of mental qualities of life’s meaning in this definition. Metz told us in his work, *Recent Work on the Meaning of Life* that “An objectivist can grant that a certain positive mental orientation helps to constitute life’s meaning; subjectivist’s defining point is that such a disposition is sufficient for meaning in life.”⁶⁷ Subjectivists didn’t define life’s meaning as a mental state but I think their view indirectly contains mental quality of life’s meaning.

Metz gives basic subjectivist ideas that define the sufficient mental states for life’s meaning, but he also states that there is not much discussion on which one of those mental states is primary or basic to life’s meaning.⁶⁸ I think the very famous story known as The Blind Men and The Elephant⁶⁹ where blind men were trying to identify an elephant by touching only one part of the animal, is very suitable for this point. Subjectivists and some other thinkers tried to identify a single mental state or a process for a meaningful life, but according to me although they were rightful in their claims, they were telling parts of the

66 Metz, p.p. 292-293.

67 Metz, p.293.

68 Ibid.

69 McDougall, Jill and Peterson, Laura.

whole, they couldn't see the elephant completely. Next, I will try to propose a more complete picture of life's meaning. I claim that a life with meaning has four components; these are mental states that play a part in the composite mental state of a meaningful life or processes that produce those states.

A Purpose

A purpose or many purposes in life is found to be one of the most important aspects of a life with meaning. Thinkers wrote about the properties of the most acceptable purposes. For example, religious thinkers cultivate the belief that when your life purposes are coherent with God's plan, they can be accepted as absolutely valuable purposes. Philosophers also wanted to maintain objective qualities to life's meaning such as Aristotle⁷⁰, in his work on eudemonia, happiness is not a subjective but an objective quality. Wolf seeks for a purpose, which is higher than our personal interests.⁷¹

A purpose as 'I want to be a car racer' or 'I will be a doctor in Doctors without Borders' implies an intention and has content; therefore it can be evaluated in the category of propositional attitudes. Consequently, I think that to have a purpose in life is necessary for a meaningful life and I use 'having a purpose' as a mental state with content. But I don't focus on the content for a meaningful life; I focused on the experience of having a purpose.

70 Kraut.

71 Wolf, Suzan (2010).

Active Engagement in an Activity

Csikszentmihályi⁷², Grünberg⁷³ and Thagard⁷⁴ analyzed being effectively engaged in an activity that has a play like quality. Csikszentmihályi and Grünberg chose work as an activity, which covers a huge space in our lives. On the other hand, Thagard divided activities as work and play. Their ideas share the aspect of being engaged in an activity such that all the possible mental capacity is at work. Csikszentmihályi thinks that when the person is totally involved in an activity he would be in a mental state similar to the mental state of children at play. Being entirely absorbed in the activity is an indicator of being actively engaged with that activity. Engagement in an activity is not itself a mental state but it is a cognitive process, composed of many mental states like love, passion, confidence, sensations and/or anxiety, and many others.

Creativity

The concept of creativity can be taken as a relation between the person and the activity he is engaged in. Creativity is a cognitive process that allows you to produce something new to you. As Thagard states “creativity can be understood as a process of novel conceptual combination, in which existing concepts are joined for the first time to produce something new.”⁷⁵ And creativity is such an activity that it is performed for the sake of itself. Grünberg states that

72 Csikszentmihályi.

73 Grünberg, David, (A).

74 Thagard.

75 Thagard, p.236.

all creative activities are self-gratifying. Indeed a person cannot *create* a product without engaging enthusiastically in her own creative activities so that she would be ready to undertake the activity independently of the benefits she might expect from the product.⁷⁶

Motive

Motives of life's meaning can be happiness, love, satisfaction, proud, loyalty or other mental states. The motives of a person can change, can be multiple or can have levels of influence but it is for sure that it is a force needed to follow a purpose or to be engaged in an activity.

Thagard emphasized love as one of the components of a meaningful life.⁷⁷ Love seems to be a very powerful motive for us. It can be your love to your family, children, spouse, friends or your love to work. His point is valuable; he is not trying to define love in the sense that 'love' inherently contains goodness, but love as an experience independent of its content.

There are many different mental states that can motivate a person. Besides a motive can be a combination of many emotional mental states as happiness, love and satisfaction together. Therefore, it would be a mistake if we accept only happiness or pleasure as the main component of a meaningful life. I think the best way to understand different mental states, which are responsible for a meaningful life, is to put them under motive category.

76 Grünberg, (A) p.25.

77 Thaggard.

4.4 COMPONENTS OF A LIFE WITH MEANING AND THEIR RELATION WITH SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE

I think those four components are sufficient for a life with meaning; however it is obvious that any life could be meaningful that satisfies those conditions, this is a problem for the subjectivist view. But, in chapter three we observed lives that are not meaningful, for example the life of Mr. A; he seems to have a purpose –clenching nuts and bolts– and he can be fully engaged in this activity, besides he can be creative, he can find different ways to clench. And he has motive, he loves his work and he is satisfied. But according to our necessary conditions of value and significance, although he seemed to satisfy the components of a meaningful life, his life could not satisfy the condition of significance as discussed in third chapter. But is there any possibility that he could be experiencing the certain composite mental state of a meaningful life? Mr. A’s life–having no family and no need for a spouse, children and friends but only working in a job where he is some inert employee–resembles Sisyphus’s life where, as Taylor suggested, Gods make him want to roll the rock and go on this activity forever.⁷⁸ The first objection comes from Taylor, Metz tells that “Taylor argues that such a life would not be meaningful because the way that the aim (*purpose*) originated... Since Sisyphus’s goal (*purpose*) is the product of manipulation, it is not truly his, and hence its satisfaction confers no meaning on his life.”⁷⁹ (Italics belong to me.) I agree with Taylor, it is not important whether or not Sisyphus is motivated and actively engaged in an

⁷⁸ Metz, p.795.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

activity, but the fact that his purpose is not his own is important. And obviously this purpose is not in coherence with any value system, ‘clenching nuts and bolts’ or ‘opening and closing doors’ are not examples of purposes but tedious activities.

Metz tells “Critics point out that, so long as the relevant mental states obtained, subjectivism oddly entails that a person’s existence could become significant by merely staying alive... collecting bottle tops, or eating ice cream,”⁸⁰ in order to eliminate those ridiculous implications of subjectivism I proposed value and significance as necessary conditions of life’s meaning and discussed in the third chapter the reasons of their necessity. In conclusion, the four components of life’s meaning must satisfy the necessary conditions of value and significance.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In the beginning, life had meaning and it was God-given and it was flawless. But at the same time we are left with two choices. The first one was believing that God had clearly stated the life's meaning and it was obeying God's orders and the second one was believing that meaning of life was not clearly stated by God, and therefore we had to discover it.⁸¹ In those times life's meaning was directly connected with religion. But by the developments in science and in philosophical thinking the connection of life's meaning with religion has weakened. Besides religion became powerless to maintain a better human civilization, so human beings thought to create a better community without the concept of God. Communist ideology was established to fill in the space left by the fall of religious ideals with the ideals of humans. This was the time when life's meaning is thought to be independent of God. But by the end of communism we observed the failure of human ideals. Following this result, belief in the existence of an ideal meaning of life changed from being hopefully possible to desperately impossible.

⁸¹ Young, p.84.

Hitler's life and Mother Theresa's life are taken as the most crucial examples in the arguments about life's meaning. And there is a strong tendency to accept Hitler's life as meaningless, or as Belliotti⁸² did, meaningful but devoid of value, and all of the arguments accept Mother Theresa's life as perfectly meaningful. In my thesis I argue that Hitler lived a meaningful life and when I compared his life with Mother Theresa's life, I conclude that there is no difference in their life's meaning, they both lived meaningful lives. I propose that life's meaning is an experience, a composite mental state; therefore it is independent of the content of a life. A person's beliefs, values, culture or worldview form the content of a life. Obviously, it is not possible to compare the contents of Hitler's and Mother Theresa's lives or Pasteur's with Hüsmen Ağa's life, but it is still possible for them to have meaningful lives on the basis of their experiences. Intuitively, we wanted to degrade Hitler's life and thought that accepting it as meaningful inevitably makes it valuable, but this is not the case. A meaningful life does not need to contain absolute values such as absolute goodness or does not have to be moral.

Secondly, I proposed that life's meaning must be about life, about our activities and our feelings. Therefore I once more eliminate the expectations that life's meaning must have a transcendental or absolute quality.

I conclude that the four components of life's meaning are purpose, active engagement in an activity, creativity and motive. These components must satisfy the necessary conditions of significance and value. But anyone whose

82 Belliotti.

life's content that has those four components, which satisfy the necessary conditions I mentioned, would be in the composite mental state which signifies a meaningful life. It is plausible that an atheist or a Christian, Buddhist or Muslim, Stalin, Gandhi, W. Bush and Dalai Lama or a suicide bomber serving for jihad and a paparazzi person working for Nonsense magazine can have meaningful lives. If life's meaning is about content it is not possible for all of those people to have meaningful lives, because their lives' contents contradict with each other. If we accept that according to their content both W. Bush and Dalai Lama have meaningful lives, it would be committing a *reductio ad absurdum*, reduction to absurdity. But it is highly acceptable that W. Bush and Dalai Lama each have the composite mental state required for a life to have meaning.

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