

# The Meaning of Life?



No guts—no glory! Someone posed the question: “What do you think is the meaning of life?” How could I resist? Some would label it as an imponderable; I look at it as a challenge.

Prior to jumping into the swirling cauldron of opinion, let’s contemplate for a moment. Before we can talk about the meaning of life we need to define life. How can we discuss the meaning of something without first understanding what the thing is? That isn’t as simple as you might think. I was a biology major in college, and I took a lot of classes in that field, but I still remember the first day of Biology 101. That day, our goal was to define life. The closest we could get was a list of characteristics generally shared by living organisms, irritation, growth, metabolism, and replication to name a few.

Even if we limit the scope to our own species, defining life isn’t an easy task. If we look at a living person and a dead body, we can tell which is which. We know there is a difference, things

change at death. When a person dies their breathing stops, the heart stops, and a list of observable signs tell us that life has ended. However, we have not defined life, we have only observed that it ends; we still don't understand what it is.

Many people deny anything that can't be understood—or at least studied—by science, but if we are limited to matter and energy, the meaning of life is unanswerable. However, there is a problem for those who believe in a purely natural universe. Matter and energy cannot be eternal. The second law of thermodynamics tells us that any system increases in entropy; it gets more random over time. If matter is eternal, it would have had an infinite amount of time to become less organized. It would be infinitely random. That is not what we see. Matter cannot be eternal. If the material universe is not eternal, it must have started. If it had a beginning, there had to be a cause. If not, we must deny the law of cause and effect—a fundamental law of science. If we postulate that the universe started but had no cause, we have toppled the very foundation of all science. To deny that the universe had a beginning but no cause is to negate all of scientific reasoning.

I'm comfortable saying the universe had a beginning—and a reason, but logic cannot tell us the nature of this prime mover, only that there must be something beyond the material universe. At this point, we must leave science. Some will cringe at that

statement thinking it's tantamount to relinquishing our hold on reason. We must hold on to reason, and we dare not lessen our grip on logic. However, science is the study of matter, and we are not discussing matter but the source of matter. Whatever we call it, God, or something unnamed and unknown, there is—or at least was—something, not comprised of matter or energy with the power to create, to bring matter out of nothing. In my mind, the first sentence of the Bible: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” seems to provide the best explanation available.

Up to this point, I believe the logic is compelling, but going forward there will be more supposition. My goal is to follow reason, but the path is necessarily more speculative.

If there is a meaning to life, it must be something that transcends the individual. Otherwise it would be absurd to speak of a meaning of life. There would be as many meanings as there are lives. There are two ways we can think of the meaning of life being transcendent. People change people. When I interact with another person, I might be changed by the encounter, or the other individual might be changed by me. Many of the people in my past have changed me, and some of those are no longer living. Yet, in a sense they are still living in me. I carry them in my thoughts and memories. The changes they wrought in me helps make me who I am. In that sense, they share in the

meaning of life.

While that does give our lives a deeper meaning, something that transcends the individual, it falls short. I believe we have a soul.

I can't give a scientific proof the existence of the soul because through science we can only study matter and energy, and the soul does not live in the material world. We can't take the soul into a laboratory and subject it to a series of tests, but we can use a philosophical thought experiment to show its reasonableness.

Imagine that I am alive and standing before you. Could you see me? I suggest that you could not. Imagine that you could remove parts of my body without hurting me. You could take off my left thumb and examine it. Would I be in my thumb? No, I do not reside in my thumb. You could go through all of my fingers, but you would not find me in any of them. You could examine every part of my body and still not find me any of them. Then where am I? In the way we talk about ourselves and our bodies, we show what seems to be an understanding that we reside in our bodies but are not our bodies. My body is not me, only the box I came in. Does this prove the existence of a soul? No, but it might give you another way to think about who we are.

If we believe we have a soul, the meaning of life gets easier to comprehend and more magnificent. If we have a soul, we can still influence each other while we live. But if the soul is

nonmaterial, there is no reason it should experience decay. Christianity, like many other religions believes in an afterlife.

I introduced the idea of an uncaused cause earlier. I believe this prime mover, the causal agent of the universe, is the God of the Bible. While I think this is a reasonable, and even the best alternative, it is based on faith as well as observation.

The Bible speaks of God as Father, Son, and Spirit. While the word trinity is never used in the Bible, it is an important concept showing that God is relational within himself. God did not create out of a need; He is, and always has been complete in Himself, but being relational in His own nature, He created us to share a relationship with Him. Genesis 1:26 says: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’” The plural pronoun in the phrase “Let us make,” shows that God is relational in and of Himself. He chose to make us in His image, relational. It is in relationships that life gets its meaning. If we try to find meaning in our own solitary life it becomes empty, and one might even say—meaningless. If meaning is to be found in relationships, the fullness we crave in our lives comes when we live for others as well as for ourselves.

When a Pharisee asked Jesus which commandment was the most important, he replied with the words of Matthew 22:37:40. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your

soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” The meaning of life comes from a relationship with God himself, loving Him and humbling ourselves before Him. The closer our relationship with God becomes, the more we take on His attributes, becoming more like Him. As we grow in our relationship with God we become more like He created us to be; we become more and more the image of God. When we take on His ways, we build more and stronger relationships with people. We begin to love them more because they are what He loves.

Some might think that becoming more concerned about other people might make us lose ourselves in the process, but as we become more what God created us to be, we become who we really are. That, I believe, is the meaning of life.