

THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

The Newsletter of the Philosophical Discussion Group

*Please join us for our discussion on Meaning (or anything else for that matter).
We will meet in Gamble 213 on Friday, September 10th at 3:00 pm.*

Meaning

Meaningless! Meaningless...Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless. -Ecclesiastes 1:2

One constant in my life up to this point is arising each morning. I wake up and a feeling always overcomes me. I feel the dread of facing another day. My stomach turns and my body resists. Oh, sweet sleep, why have you departed me? That blackness that brings peace, how can I hold you within my feeble grasp? But, alas, I know I must get up and tackle the world, I must be. So I go through my daily routine; eat, shower, brush my teeth. I go to school, work, and do my part to contribute to society. But, all the while, I wonder why. Why work? To get money, I guess. Why get money? To eat, I guess. Why eat? To keep existing, I guess? Why exist? Who knows, who cares? If I ask why enough times, I always hit a wall. There must be some underlying reason for existing, some meaning to my being.

Well, certainly there are pleasures in life that are worth living for. Perhaps...but pleasures always depart and pains always arise. I can never

thoroughly enjoy any pleasure, because I dread when it will depart and pain will come to take its place. It always does and always will. It is a funny thing, though. When one feels pain, one wishes for it to depart, but at least one feels. When one is comfortable, one is numb. After all, what is comfort but lack of feeling? Think of a comfortable chair versus an uncomfortable chair. The uncomfortable chair puts pressure on the body and that is not desirable. The comfortable chair minimizes feeling. It seems that the optimal chair would be no chair at all, or perhaps one made of air having the ability to float or something along these lines, for then there would be no feeling at all. Perhaps, that is why alcohol and pills are so popular, as they minimize feeling. However, pleasure seems to be feeling in the positive sense, contrary to pain which is feeling in the negative sense. When one eats ice cream, one enjoys the taste. For a brief moment, one forgets about the meaning of anything and lets the sweetness envelop them. Soon enough, though, one falls back into the dullness of comfort, or the misery of pain. One could try to eat ice

cream and chase pleasures at all moments, but the mind has a way of becoming desensitized to pleasures and soon all that's left is the dullness of comfort, with the impossibility of pleasure. In fact, deprived of what once used to be pleasure, comes pain. Take for example, any street drug. They are intensely pleasurable at first until the user becomes tolerant. They then are reliant on the drug to not feel the intense pain of withdrawal. This is true of all things, including comfortable chairs to a lesser extent. Pleasure can only exist in contrast to pain and dullness--not on its own. Thus, it cannot be worth living for on its own.

What about power and money? Can I live for these? The only value which these seem to have is to demand or buy pleasure and comfort, both of which I have addressed above as not ultimately meaningful on their own. In fact, power and money only end up isolating one from one's fellow human beings. Others desire the power and money that is possessed, thus the possessor must always be on guard against the envious, consequently destroying any sense of community with others. I would prefer to have genuine

friends whom I can trust than to have power or money.

Maybe love is worth living for. What is love, though? According to the dictionary, love is: a deep, tender, ineffable feeling of affection and solicitude toward a person, such as that arising from kinship, recognition of attractive qualities, or a sense of underlying oneness. So, love, is more or less, a feeling for another person. Of what value is this? Is it pleasurable? As discussed above, there is not much to be said for that. I have, however, admitted that genuine friends are more to be desired than things. But, in the end, friends, or loved ones, are much like the comfortable chair or ice cream. One surrounds oneself with friends so as to avoid being alone and having to face oneself. Or, one enjoys having friends because they bring a bit of pleasure into their life. In any case, it is difficult to see love, as it is commonly understood, as motivation to go on.

Is philosophy, the love of wisdom, a suitable reason to live? This is too easily dismissed. Modern philosophy proposes that life is meaningless and that perhaps it should be embraced. The quest Socrates began so many years ago to the light at the end of the tunnel has ended. Truth has been given up on, and meaning has gone along with it.

Like the fool, the wise man too must die! -Ecclesiastes 2:16

Such investigation wearies the mind. The meaning of life has seemingly evaded thinkers since the beginning of the recorded word. All my experiences seem to be naught but “a chasing after the wind.” If there is not some universal giver of meaning that is independent of the world of sensory data, then can there be any meaning? In other words touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight are all meaningless. There is no empirical experience which has given meaning to my life. Any meaning I perceive in reality is either imposed onto it by my mind or put there by something beyond that which can be sensed in any scientific meaning of the word.

Am I appealing to the mystical or supernatural to justify my existence? No, I am appealing to that by which all nature derives its very essence: God. But, from whence does knowledge of an invisible being come from if not from the senses? If only I could conclude as Solomon does that:

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments.

-Ecclesiastes 12-14

But, can I? Solomon warns not to add any words to his teaching; else one may never escape the dilemma of a meaningless existence. But, how can I find the truth of the matter and is it even worth trying?

If you have any questions, criticisms, or comments, please contact either Chris Dunn or Dr. Nordenhaug. Anyone interested in writing a brief article for *The Philosopher's Stone*, please contact either of us (it doesn't have to be good, however it does have to be thoughtful).

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