CHAPTER I

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Introduction

The notion of the Meaning of Life must be as old as mankind. It constitutes a philosophical question concerning the purpose and significance of human existence. It is deeply mixed with the philosophical and religious conceptions of existence, consciousness, and happiness, and touches on many other issues, such as symbolic meaning, ontology, value, purpose, ethics, good and evil, free will, conceptions of God, the existence of God, the soul and the afterlife. The concept can be expressed through a variety of related questions, such as why are we here? What is life all about? What is the meaning of it all? etc. Questions about the meaning of life have been expressed broadly in a variety of ways, including the following. What is the meaning of life? What's it all about? What are we here for? What is the origin of life? What is the nature of life? What is the nature of reality? What is the purpose of life? What is one's purpose in life? What is the significance of life? What is meaningful and valuable in life? What is the value of life? What is the reason to live? What are we living for? It has been the subject of much philosophical, scientific, and theological speculation throughout history and there have been a large number of answers from many different cultural backgrounds.

This chapter addresses the main concept of the title with a view to make clear the problems and questions involved in the whole work. The question of how meaning of life is to be understood, concept of life and, theories and school of thought that concerns the title are explored.

In so far as history can be traced back, in one or the other forms of these questions might have struck people harshly or pleasantly. In general, these questions arise from dissatisfaction with life, a moment of fears\(^1\), where people have difficulty in understanding why particular things happen or why the world is the way it is. In such juncture, they seek broader understandings that might

help them make meaning out of it. Whereas some attributed to the progress and development and discoveries that took place from then on till now in various fields. Even the sense and promises of religious belief are seen to be affected by such paradigm shift.

People no longer readily accept the once accepted practices and traditions. The question ‘why?’ has been put forth in almost every questionable issues, but answers are not always available\(^2\). As such, people may turn to philosophy or theology or to any other discipline to provide broad, universal responses to these dissatisfactions. Britton has pointed out the common mistake which people commit while talking about the meaning of life. He writes;

“One of the very odd things about ‘the meaning of life’ is that people commonly do not make a sharp distinction between a question about everything and a question about themselves\(^3\).

He says that why does the universe exist? And why do I exist? are separate questions though they are closely connected. They are connected because we questioned the existence of the universe because we are in it. Here our main concern is to unravel the answer to the second question. The emphases of particular questions, and of the answers given to them, are heavily influenced by cultural, religious\(^4\) and philosophical preconceptions. This suggests that the meaning of life is dependent on certain values of one’s station\(^5\) and so it varies for each person.

There has been a variation of what this notion is, from then on till now. Keeping in view of the question of variations, this thesis is undertaken to see, why some people are tilted and tempted to give a bleak answers to the question of this notion. An attempt would be made mainly on what, why and


how Aristotle and the Zeliangrong have to say, concerning the title, to see if it can withstand those views against this notion. Aristotle is considered in this pursuit for he is relevant up to date and the Zeliangrong for the need to aflame of the then of what life was meant to them. The object is to view the millennial and centuries old concepts of life.

Before we can tackle the meaning of life, we have got to know the meaning of the ‘meaning’ that is used in this context. Meaning is an intention, aim, or design. When we speak of the meaning of the term ‘meaning’ in the context of the meaning of life, it is not to be taken in its literal sense of the term. When people talk about the meaning of life, they do so in the sense of life’s purpose, justification, or goal, not as a “meaning” in the sense in which words has meaning. When we say we want to know what life means, we are really saying we want to know what it is for. What purpose does it serve? What should you live for? It could be for wealth, power, service, longevity, reason, love, faith, family, god, virtue, happiness, fulfillment, comfort, contentment, integrity. The list may go on as the person wishes. Ultimately if we want to get closer to the “best possible life” for us, we have to pick our own context. We can’t merely inherit the default context of our society and live up to what others expect of us. If we try to conform, we are going to waste our life compared to what we might have done with it, if we chose a better context. As such meaning cannot be communicated to us through an intermediate. We have got to experience it directly. We also cannot depend on others or on a system to identify what it is to be that would constitute meaning to our life. We have to know what it is on our own for ourselves.

The word ‘life’ has probably been around ever since mankind began using language. It is a word of fundamental importance to all of us, and seldom do we make it through an entire day without putting it to use. We do so, however, with only a sketchy and subjective idea of what life actually means. Thus, the question “What is the origin of life?” has been and till date a mystery to mankind. Scores of researchers devote their time to the study of biochemical evolution to unravel the mystery of the origin of life on earth and the origin of
the universe itself. As a result many theories have come up to solve these questions. The major theories\(^6\) accounting for the origin of life on earth are;

1. Life was created by a supernatural being at particular time (Special Creation).
2. Life arose from the non-living matter on numerous occasions by a process of spontaneous generations (Abiogenesis).
3. Life arose from the pre-existing living cells (Biogenesis)
4. Life has no origin (Steady State)
5. Life arrived on this Planet from elsewhere (Cosmozoan)
6. Life arose according to chemical and physical laws (Biochemical Evolution)

According to the special creation, God creates life on earth by an act of His will. This view compels us to believe that God had some wants, and to fulfill it He created life. But it is believed by some that God as perfect has no wants to fulfill. So according to them, in assigning this task to God, we are limiting Him. According to the theory of abiogenesis\(^7\), matter reigns supreme in the universe. There was no life at all but only enumerable lifeless material atoms moving about in the space. Life appeared spontaneously from inanimate matter by the working of forces, molar, chemical and electrical, attached to the atoms. It is through the combination, reaction and interaction of different matters that originated life on earth. If water from a pond is exposed to light and air, it would soon be swarmed with living bacteria. So they say that the appearance of the bacteria in water indicates that life arises out of non-life (matter).

Based on these or similar theories, some philosophers say that, since life was entirely coincidental, one cannot expect life to have any meaning at all, other than its own self-perpetuation — reproduction. The theory of biogenesis is diametrically opposed to the theory of abiogenesis. According to biogenesis life

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appeared or originated from antecedent life. They say if we sterilize the water taken from a pond and hermetically seal it up in a test tube, in order to avoid any contact with air and dried germ cells which float in the air, any form of life in the water would be impossible. There are still many other theories that had attempted to explain how life came into being on this earth. Many of these theories and the way they explained the existing diversity of species cover similar ground but with varying emphasis. One of the major controversies among these theories is the relationship between scientific and theological views on the history of life. It may not be wrong to say that both the views are worlds apart. If we accept either of them, the other one stand rejected automatically.

In this pursuit, what is more important is to accept the given present scenario. It may be either through a special creation, or evolved from pre-existing living organism or evolved through reaction and interaction of different non-living matters. Human being exists. So now, what we have to accept is that there is a being called human. For unknown reasons- scientific- these beings has been scattered on almost all over the face of the earth. It is either, because of the environment or the social and cultural practices, they have different features like colour of the skin, language, tradition, value system, thought pattern, belief, etc,. One undeniable fact is that in spite of the enumerable differences, they are human beings whose origin can safely be assumed to be from the same antecedent.

As a matter of fact, the search and counter search for the origin of life, as has been, will be continued by many in future. We may not be able to find a complete and a clear cut acceptable- to all the human race- answer to this quest. As of now, the question of origin of life in this present pursuit may not be able to go deeper in to it. So the question of how life came into being on this earth will be diverted to why man as part of the whole living organisms exists in this universe.
Krishnamurti writes "By life, we mean, not just one layer of consciousness, but the total process of existence which is our relationship to things, to people, to ideas. That is what we mean by life— not an abstract thing"\(^8\). For the present concern this simple but lucid definition of life may serve the addressed subject matter.

It is an obvious truism that, life is either meaningful or not meaningful. When we say that life is meaningful we must have reasons for saying so. Meaningfulness of life is claimed by thinkers and philosophers in the past. Common answers to the meaning of life include: happiness or flourishing; love; compassion; pleasure; power; knowledge; understanding; or wisdom; being blessed; or achieving union with God or the divine; but there are many who believe that there is no meaning of life. But what is the meaning of life? Many theories have come up to answer that fundamental question, but unfortunately those theories lack one thing or the other, and the issue remains unsolved. All the views on the meaning of life fail to clear the confusion. In spite of the given fact that, all are human beings, who could possibly have shared the same origin and have the same potentials by birth, why do they have so much differences with regard to the meaning of life. The present study is intended to concentrate in finding the reasons for such varied views. There might be several reasons contributing toward such immense differences. So, we will try to find out which stands crucial to this concept.

Man's reflective mind is very inquisitive about the meaningfulness of life, and legitimately so, as all his activities are directed towards the goal of meaningful life. In The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus maintained that it is the most urgent question in life. He writes:

"If I ask myself how to judge that this question is more urgent than that, I reply that one judges by the actions it entails. I have never seen anyone die for the ontological argument. Galileo, who held a scientific truth of

\(^8\) J. Krishnamurti, What are You Doing with Your Life, Chennai: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 2004, p. 60
great importance, abjured it with the greatest of ease as soon as it endangered his life. In a certain sense, he did right. That truth was not worth the stake. Whether the earth or sun revolves around the other is a matter of profound indifference. To tell truth, it is a futile question. On the other hand, I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying). I therefore conclude that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions.

So what makes life meaningful is a fundamental and lively philosophical question which needs critical enquiry. When we ponder on this concept, to ascertain a particular trend of what it is, the meaning seems to recede away in the midst of diverse and multitude views offered by different thinkers. It is one of the most complex concepts. When we talk of the meaning of life, we are not talking about a single individual life but as a whole. There are certain difficulties to ascertain and assert that such and such are the cases. One obvious reason could be that, not even two individuals live the same kind of life, even in the same society at the same time, with same wants and desires. If we examine, we will come to know that their wants, interests and desires vary in degree, magnitude and intensity.

So how are we supposed to figure out how to live? Do we simply guess and hope for the best? Is there any rational system, criteria or sane way to make such an immense and crucial decision?

In such cases people may involve in purification of the self or other objects, or renunciation of behaviors or objects considered to be imperfect, in order to 'make oneself worthy' of the solution. This often involves practices or rituals, as in religion or may be simple idealization, as in the ancient Greek notion of arête and modern self-help practices of visualizing positive outcomes. In some cases, this may entail imitation or emulation of divine figures. Britton

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brought up a very mundane kind of issue which people believed would give meaning to their life. People hope that finding a job of their own choice would make them live a meaningful life. But this he says is a false hope; it is bound to be disappointed. The job is not designed to satisfy the worker but for some other ends.¹⁰

The search for a rational explanation of life appears to have begun with the Hebrews. They found rational explanations in the actions of one God. For them the Bible is the literature of faith, not of scientific observation or historical demonstration. God's existence as a speculative problem has no interest for them. What is problematical for them is the human condition and destiny before God. The great biblical themes are about God, his revealed works of creation, provision, judgment, deliverance, his covenant, and his promises. Their belief centres in the one and only God, the Creator of all that exists. All mankind is viewed as a unity, with no race existing for itself alone. God's will and purpose are viewed as just, loving, and ultimately prevailing. The future is God's, when his rule will be fully established.¹¹

The Greeks followed in seeking rational explanations, beginning with the pre-Socratics. The pre-Socratics posed the major philosophical question: what is the world all about? Centuries later Socrates has shifted the focus from trying to explain the world to a consideration of how we should live. For post-Socratic Greeks, one supreme question dominated the whole field of ethics, that of supreme good of human life, which is eudaimonia- happiness. Happiness is acting well and perfect success in action.

There are some groups who maintain that life has a meaning, but that meaning has to be acquired only if one fulfills the plan that has been set-aside to each and every individual by an impersonal fate. They said that we can find the meaning of life in "faith" alone. But those people who believe entirely in science totally reject this view again. For them it does not make any sense to

¹⁰ Karl Britton, Philosophy and the Meaning of Life, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 6
believe in an external entity that exists outside human experience. Even if one has to admit and accept such an entity to have existence, their question is, how do we know that such an entity has set such and such plan for human being in order that man would find the meaning of life in that being?

Scientific contributions are more indirect; by describing the empirical facts about the universe, science provides some context and sets parameters for conversations on related topics. An alternative, human-centric, and not a cosmic/religious approach is the question "What is the meaning of my life?" The value of the question pertaining to the purpose of life may be considered to be coincidental with the achievement of ultimate reality, if that is believed by one to exist.

Again the question "What is the significance of life?" has turned philosophers toward the study of significance itself and how it is derived and presented. The question has also been extensively explored by those who attempt to explain the relationship of life to its environment, and vice versa. Thus, from a scientific point of view, the significance of life is what it is, what it does, and what mechanisms are behind it. In psychology and biology, significance only exists within human and animal minds; significance is subjective and is an emotional function of brains, making it impossible to exist outside of people's thoughts and feelings.

While scientific approaches to the meaning of life aim to describe empirical facts about human existence, philosophers are more concerned about the relationship between ideas. For example, philosophers have considered such questions as: 'Is the question "What is the meaning of life?" a meaningful question?" What does the question "What is the meaning of life?" mean? and 'If there are no objective values, then is life meaningless?' Some philosophical disciplines and school of thought have also aimed to develop an understanding of life that explains, regardless of how we came to be here, what we should do now that we are here. We will not be dealing in details with the other aspects of what the following theories professes and its criticisms but concentrate mainly on the basics that concerns our subject.
Cynicism

In the Hellenistic period, the Cynic philosophers said that the purpose of life is living a life of Virtue that agrees with Nature. In teaching people how to be virtuous, Antisthenes demarcated two categories of objects:

(1) External goods, embracing such elements as personal property, sensual pleasure, and other luxuries; and
(2) Internal goods, including the truth and knowledge of the soul.

He advocated great restraint on the part of an individual tempted to take pleasure in external goods, and he encouraged his students to accept the burden of physical and mental pain that accompanies the soul's search for its own inner wealth. Diogenes advocates shamelessness (performing actions that were harmful to no one but unconventional in certain circumstances), outspokenness (to further his cause), and training in austerity. He strove to destroy social conventions (including family life) as a way of returning to a "natural" life. Happiness depends upon being self-sufficient and master of one's mental attitude; suffering is consequence of false judgments of value, which cause negative emotions and a concomitant vicious character.

In general it proposes a new morality based on minimizing creaturely needs in pursuit of self sufficiency, achieved in part by physical training, and on maximizing both freedom of speech and freedom of action in open defiance of the most entrenched social taboo; and an anti-politics which sees existing government as a betrayal of human nature, and traditional culture as an obstacle to happiness. The Cynical life rejects conventional desires for wealth, power, health, and fame, by being free of the possessions acquired in pursuing the conventional. As reasoning creatures, people could achieve happiness via rigorous training, by living in a way natural to human beings. The world equally

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belongs to everyone, so suffering is caused by false judgments of what is valuable and what is worthless per the customs and conventions of society.\textsuperscript{14}

**Stoicism**

It views the world as permeated by rationality and has been divinely planned as the best possible organization of matter. Moral goodness and happiness are achieved, if at all, by replicating that perfect rationality in oneself, and by finding out and enacting one's own assigned role in the cosmic scheme of things. The world is an ideally good organism, whose own rationality soul governs it for the best. The world is a physical continuum, infinitely divisible and unpunctuated by any void, although surrounded by an infinite void. Stoics ethics starts from our natural appropriation first of ourselves and later of those around us, which makes other-concern integral to human nature. Certain conventionally prized items, like honour and health, are commended by nature and should be sought, but not for their own sake. They are instrumentally preferable, because learning to choose rationally between them is a step towards the eventual goal of 'living in agreement with nature'. The patterns of action which promote such a life were systematically codified as 'proper functions'. The goal or end is defined as that for the sake of which everything is done, while it is not itself done for the sake of any further thing. This is identified with happiness or living well. Stoicism teaches that living according to reason and virtue is to be in harmonize with the universe's divine order, entailed by one's recognition of the universal logos (reason), an essential value of all people. The meaning of life is freedom from suffering.\textsuperscript{15}

The Stoic ethical foundation is that good lies in the state of the soul, itself, exemplified in wisdom and self-control, thus improving one's spiritual well-being: Virtue consists in a will which is in agreement with Nature. The principle applies to one's personal relations thus: to be free from anger, envy, and jealousy.

\textsuperscript{14} Edward Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of philosophy (Cynicism by Bracht Branham)*


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, pp. 141-156
Stoicism argues that pleasure or pain ought not to be a factor in living the good life and doing the right thing. The motivation for doing the right thing ought to be that it is the right thing to do, not because of some pleasure or peace of mind it might bring. Consequently, for the Stoics, one has to grow indifferent to pleasure and pain, and find a purer motive for the right thing. Duty becomes a paradigm of proper moral behavior for the Stoics. One does your duty simply because duty commands you to do it, not because of the consequences it might bring. However, despite the emphasis on duty, and the stress on indifference to pleasure and pain, the Stoics do seem to argue that there is a certain enjoyable quality to life that results from the exercise of duty, and the indifference to pleasure.

**Epicureanism**

Philosophy was, for Epicurus, the art of living, and it aimed at the same time both to assure happiness and to supply means to achieve it. Epicureanism is a system of ethics embracing every conception or form of life that can be traced to the principles of his philosophy. They are often branded as hedonism. In popular parlance, Epicureanism means devotion to pleasure, comfort, and high living, with a certain nicety of style. Several fundamental concepts characterize the philosophy of Epicurus. In ethics, the basic concepts are the identification of good with pleasure and of the supreme good and ultimate end with the absence of pain from the body and the soul—a limit beyond which pleasure does not grow but changes; the reduction of every human relation to the principle of utility, which finds its highest expression in friendship, in which it is at the same time surmounted; and, in accordance with this end, the limitation of all desire and the practice of the virtues, from which pleasure is inseparable, and a withdrawn and quiet life.

In principle, Epicurus' ethic of pleasure is the exact opposite of the Stoic's ethic of duty. The consequences, however, are the same: in the end, the Epicurean is forced to live with the same temperance and justice as the Stoic. Of utmost importance, however, is one point of divergence: the walls of the
Stoic's city are those of the world, and its law is that of reason; the limits of the Epicurean's city are those of a garden, and the law is that of friendship. Though this garden can also reach the boundaries of earth, its centre is always a man.

The object of ethics is to determine the end and the means necessary to reach it. Taking his cue from experience, Epicurus looked to the animal kingdom for his answer. He concluded from this cue that the chief end is pleasure. He distinguished two kinds—a "kinetic" pleasure of sense and a "static" pleasure, consisting in the absence of pain and taught that the pleasure of sense is good, though it is not good merely as motion but rather as a motion favourable to the nature of the receiving sense organ. In essence, pleasure is the equilibrium of the being with itself, existing wherever there is no pain.

Epicurus concluded that "freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind" is the ultimate aim of a happy life. The damages and the advantages following the realization of any desire must be measured in a calculus in which even pain must be faced with courage if the consequent pleasure will be of longer duration.

Having thus given order to his life, however, the wise man must also provide himself with security. This he achieves in two ways, firstly, by reducing his needs to a minimum and withdrawing, far from human competition and from the noise of the world, to live hidden; and secondly, by adding the private compact of friendship to the public compact from which laws arise. To be sure, friendship stems from utility; but, once born, it is desirable in itself. Epicurus then added that "for love of friendship one has even to put in jeopardy love itself; for every existence, being alone, needs the other. To eat and drink without a friend he wrote is to devour like the lion and the wolf. Thus, the utility sublimates itself and changes into love. But as every love is intrepid, the wise man, if his friend is put to torture, suffers as if he himself were there and, if necessary, will die for his friend.

If man's unhappiness stemmed only from his own vain desires and from worldly dangers, for a body, resort to simple life style. But besides these
sources of unhappiness there are two great fears, fear of death and fear of the
gods. These fears can be eliminated by the study of physics.\textsuperscript{16} According to
them cosmic phenomena do not convey divine threats. The study of physics is
said to give 'static' pleasure and freedom from disturbance (ataraxia). So to
them death, "is nothing to us, so long as we exist, death is not with us; but
when death comes, then we do not exist."

One should choose only those pleasures that lead to greater pleasures;
and avoid those that eventually incur pain. The ultimate goal according to
Epicureanism is peace of mind. To attain this, the body must aim for a state of
repose. A person should also avoid heavy responsibilities, ambitions and
serious involvements. The mind must also be put in a state of repose. It
promotes an egocentric ethic; both familial and civic connections are
discouraged. It subordinates virtue to pleasure; the only reason to act virtuously
is if it brings pleasure.\textsuperscript{17}

**Existentialism**

Existentialism is a general name for a number of thinkers, in the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who made the concrete individual central to
their thought. Existentialism arose as a backlash against philosophical and
scientific systems that treat all particulars, including humans, as members of a
genus or instances of universal laws. It claims that our own existence as unique
individuals in concrete situations cannot be grasped adequately in such
theories, and that systems of this sort conceal from us the highly personal task
of trying to achieve self-fulfillment in our lives. They therefore start out with a
detail description of the self as an 'existing individual', understood as an agent
involves in a specific social and historical world. One of their chief aims is to
understand how the individual can achieve the richest and most fulfilling life in
the modern world.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 340
\textsuperscript{17} "Epicureanism." Encyclopædia Britannica from *Encyclopædia Britannica 2007 Ultimate
Existentialists hold widely differing views about human existence, but there are a number of recurring themes in their writings. First, humans have no pre-given purpose of essence laid out for them by god or by nature; it is up to each one of us to decide who and what we are through our own actions. Second, people decide their own fates and are responsible for what they make of their lives. Humans have free will. Our choices are free in the sense that

1. No outside factors determine our will,
2. In any particular case we could have acted otherwise than we did, and
3. We are therefore responsible for our choices in the way that justifies moral praise and blame.
4. And finally, humans are concerned with identifying the most authentic and fulfilling way of life possible for individuals.\textsuperscript{18}

According to Existentialism, existence is always particular and individual—always my existence, your existence, his existence. Existence is primarily the problem of existence; it is, therefore, also the investigation of the meaning of Being. This investigation is continually faced with diverse possibilities, from among which the existent must make a selection, to which he must then commit himself. Because these possibilities are constituted by man's relationships with things and with other men, existence is always a being-in-the-world—\textit{i.e.}, in a concrete and historically determinate situation that limits or conditions choice. Man is therefore called Dasein ("there being") because he is defined by the fact that he exists, or is in the world and inhabits it.

Another way of expressing this thesis is the affirmation of Heidegger and Sartre that "existence precedes essence," which signifies that man does not have a nature that determines his modes of being and acting but that, rather, these modes are simply possibilities from which he may choose and on the basis of which he can project himself. In this sense, Heidegger has said that "Dasein is always its own possibility," and Sartre has written: "It is true that the possible is—so to speak—an option on being, and if it is true that the possible

can come into the world only through a being which is its own possibility, this implies for human reality the necessity of being its being in the form of an option on its being."

As possibility, human existence is the anticipation, the expectation, and the projection of the future. The future is its fundamental temporal dimension, to which the present and the past are subordinate and secondary; existence is always stretched out toward the future. As possibility, existence is also transcendence, being beyond, because all of its constitutive possibilities organize it beyond itself toward the other beings of the world and toward the world in its totality. To transcend thus means to move toward something that is not one's own existence; i.e., toward things and toward other men, with which man is related in every situation in which he finds himself.19

Arthur Schopenhauer offered a bleak answer by determining one's life as a reflection of one's will and the will as being an aimless, irrational, and painful drive. However, he saw salvation, deliverance, or escape from suffering in aesthetic contemplation, sympathy for others, and asceticism. Soren Kierkegaard invented the term "leap of faith" and argued that life is full of absurdity and the individual must make his or her own values in an indifferent world.20 For Kierkegaard, an individual can have a meaningful life (at least one free of despair) if the individual relates the self in an unconditional commitment to something- infinite- that gives your life an ultimate content and meaning, and devotes his or her life to the commitment despite the inherent vulnerability of doing so.

Now let us see why the theory of existentialism is brought into the picture. Why do the existentialists hold that the universal laws or God pre-designed the essence and meaning of humans? Is it the case that human lives are to be justified, if there is such pre-designing entity, in line with such entity?

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These questions are posed with a view that the essence or the meaning of life does not necessarily rely on such entity. Even if we accept that there is such thing as God standing out of the human realm and is the underlying ground for our existence, the sense of the 'essence' with which the existentialists are concern would not be undermined, but rather to those people who favour such entity would have even meaningful life. And to those who do not, like Nietzsche, who claim that God is dead or God has nothing to do with human or vice-versa, it would not rob away the meaning of their life though the extent of meaningfulness may be lesser.

The existentialists espoused that we make ourselves through the freedom of choices and are responsible to it. And that is that. To the existentialists, man must be like the 'tabula rasa' of Locke, where experiences of the choices chose by man become who that man becomes. In this present pursuit, we would not go deep into their philosophy, but, besides highlighting their views on the meaning of life, we would be employing some of their principle in a very restricted sense. The area that we would take in building up this thesis would focus on their statement that, man makes himself. This need not necessarily negate or reject the concept of objectivism. So here what we want to say is that, whether we accept that there is an external entity or not, in either of the cases, it is the act of man that will be counted as determining factor to say either life is meaningful or meaningless.

Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition founded by Charles Sanders Pierce, William James and John Dewey during the first quarter of the 20th century, based on the principle that the usefulness, workability, and practicality of ideas, policies, and proposals are the criteria of their merit. Their enquiry is not to represent reality, but rather to enable us to act more effectively. All three of the founding pragmatists combined a naturalistic, Darwinian view of human beings with a deep distrust of the problems which philosophy had inherited from Descartes, Hume and Kant. They hope to save philosophy from metaphysical
idealism, but also to save moral and religious ideals from empiricist or positivist skepticism.\(^1\) It stresses the priority of action over doctrine, of experience over fixed principles, and it holds that ideas borrow their meanings from their consequences and their truths from their verification. Thus, ideas are essentially instruments and plans of action. Existence is fundamentally concerned with action, which some Pragmatists exalted to an almost metaphysical level. Changes being an inevitable condition of life, Pragmatists have called attention to the ways in which change can be directed for individual and social benefit. They have consequently been most critical of moral and metaphysical doctrines in which change and action are relegated to the "merely practical," on the lowest level of the hierarchy of values. Some Pragmatists anticipated the more concrete and life-centred philosophy of Existentialism by arguing that only in acting—confronted with obstacles, compelled to make choices, and concerned to give form to experience—is man's being realized and discovered. For James this meant that the Pragmatist turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action. It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality, and the pretence of finitude in truth.

The pragmatic meaning of an idea, belief, or proposition is said to reside in the distinct class of specific experimental or practical consequences that result from the use, application, or entertainment of the notion. As Peirce commented, "Our idea of anything is our idea of its sensible effects." Two propositions for which no different effects can be discerned have merely a verbal appearance of dissimilarity, and a proposition for which no definite theoretical or practical consequences can be determined is pragmatically meaningless. For Pragmatists "there is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice." Meaning thus has a

\(^{21}\) Edward Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of philosophy (Pragmatism by Richard Rorty)*
predictive component, and some Pragmatists came close to identifying the meaning of a term or proposition with the process of its verification.

Pragmatism posits that anything useful and practical is not always true, arguing that what most contributes to the most human good in the long course is true. In practice, theoretical claims must be practically verifiable, i.e. one should be able to predict and test claims and, that, ultimately, the needs of mankind should guide human intellectual inquiry.

Pragmatic philosophers suggest that rather than a truth about life, we should seek a useful understanding of life. William James argued that truth could be made but not sought. Thus, the meaning of life is a belief about the purpose of life that does not contradict one's experience of a purposeful life. Roughly, this could be applied as: The meaning of life is those purposes which cause you to value it. To a pragmatist, the meaning of life, your life, can be discovered only through experience.

Pragmatism objects to the view that human concepts and intellect represent reality, and therefore stands in opposition to both formalist and rationalist schools of philosophy. Rather, pragmatism holds that it is only in the struggle of intelligent organisms with the surrounding environment that theories and data acquire significance.22

Theistic views about the meaning of life

There are many different interpretations to the "Word of God", and therefore many interpretations to the meaning of life. We will pick only the Christian and Hindu views for our discussion. Reaching Heaven in the afterlife can be seen as a universal meaning of life or goal for followers of Christianity.

Most people who believe in a personal God would agree that it is God "in whom we live and move and have our being". The notion here is that they respond to a higher authority who will give their lives meaning and provide purpose through a relationship with the divine. Although belief is also based on knowing God "through the things he has made," the decision to believe in such an authority is called the "leap of faith", and to a very large degree this faith defines the faithful's meaning of life.

An example of how religion creates purpose can be found in the biblical story of creation in the Old Testament of the Bible: the purpose for man comes from his relationship to God and in this relationship he is told to "Be fruitful, and multiply; fill the earth, and subdue it" Genesis 1:28. This indicates that subsequent to the goal of being in personal relationship with God, the propagation of the human race, the care and population of the earth, and the control of the earth (but as man sinned, he lost the full ability to do so, characterized by the fact that animals are not under full control) are the first three commandments God has set for man.

Another Biblical example is given in Micah 6:8, which states "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." However, instructions given by God and the meaning of life (or the purpose of one's existence), are not necessarily the same thing.

In Hinduism we get a sense of a more spiritual outlook on life and the self. The chief concern in Hinduism is the discovery of spiritual enlightenment and/or Brahman. In order to reach and understand Brahman you have to understand the "self". In Brahman the body is just a shell, something to house your spirit. Through self-discipline and the stopping of your natural desires you may reach Brahman. The Indians find some spiritual meaning and define the questions that they are seeking answers to and work from there.
The ultimate good to be aim at the old Hindus thought to be liberation, absorption into the It, or Nirvana—a state of mind rather than a physical state. Only by complete annihilation of the ego could the individual gain Nirvana.  

**Subjective and Objective Meaning**

Although discussions about the meaning of life are often associated with considerations about our place in the universe, there are also contexts in which the intelligibility of the contrast between meaningful and meaningless lives appears to be wholly independent of the cosmic issue.

Some says that a wholly subjective account of meaning cannot do justice to the ordinary use of the term. As Wiggins points out, the idea of distinction between a meaningful life and meaningless one is not equivalent to the more obvious and uncontroversial difference between a life that is subjectively satisfying and fulfilling and one that is not. When we wonder whether our lives have meaning, we are not engaged in a wholly introspective enterprise, and when we search for a way to give meaning to our lives, we are not looking for a pill that will make us happy.

Accounts of meaning in life need not be restricted to purely subjective and purely objective alternatives, however. The most natural paradigms of meaningful lives are both abundantly fulfilling subjectively and admirable or worthwhile as judged from points of view external to the agents themselves. The kind of life most comfortably describe as meaningful appears to be one in which there is a happy connection between a subject’s lively interests and the range of things that are worthy of interest. Meaning seems to arise when subjective attraction meshes with objective attractiveness.

Whether and how this kind of meaningfulness relates to the concern that seems most naturally to call for a connection to some divine or cosmic purpose are difficult issues. Moreover, the notion of ‘objective attractiveness’ (or

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objective worth or value), to which this conception of meaningfulness makes reference, is notoriously controversial. Whether such a notion is intelligible, particularly in absence of a religious metaphysics, constitutes a major philosophical question on its own.\textsuperscript{24}

In this present generation devotion and subservience to religion are largely replaced by notions of natural rights and the potentialities of reason, and universal ideals of love and compassion gave way to civic notions of freedom, equality, and citizenship. The meaning of life changed as well, focusing less on humankind's relationship to God and more on the relationship between individuals and their society. This era is filled with theories that equate meaningful existence with the social order. It considers individual liberty to be the most important goal, because only through ensured liberties are the other inherent rights protected.

This kind of concepts about life gain its footing on the writings of numerous scholars who espouse that life has its origin in this universe itself through several (unsolved) mechanisms. This then led some of them to say that the need to believe in the existence of god does not arise. Human beings are just evolving beings- of an organism. Since it was not created by any external being with certain purpose, life ends here and now. So it is meaningless to talk about the meaning of life. And some say that, by bringing in the external forces into the realm of human where human mind cannot discern its essence and authority, the question of meaning of life losses its meaning. And there is another group who claims that there is meaning, but they do not share the same views as to what really is the meaning of life. The present quest is intended to locate the foibles and the common features (if there is any) amongst the diverse and scores of views offered by them. In this pursuit, the views of Aristotle and the Zeliangrong will be employed.

We owe so much to the Greeks as far as knowledge is concerned. We will see that most of the writings, which date back to the Greek’s era, are still very much relevant today in many disciplines. As a matter of fact, Aristotle is considered as, the ancient Greek philosopher and scientist, one of the two greatest intellectual figures produced by the Greeks (the other being Plato). He surveyed the whole of human knowledge as it was known in the Mediterranean world in his day.

More than any other thinker, Aristotle determined the orientation and the content of Western intellectual history. He was the author of a philosophical and scientific system that through the centuries became the support and vehicle for both medieval Christian and Islamic scholastic thought: until the end of the 17th century, Western culture was Aristotelian. Even after the intellectual revolutions of centuries to follow, Aristotelian concepts and ideas remained embedded in Western thinking.

Aristotle's intellectual range was vast, covering most of the sciences and many of the arts. He worked in physics, chemistry, biology, zoology, and botany; in psychology, political theory, and ethics; in logic and metaphysics; in history, literary theory, and rhetoric. His greatest achievements were in two unrelated areas: he invented the study of formal logic, devising for it a finished system, known as Aristotelian syllogistic, that for centuries was regarded as the sum of logic; and he pioneered the study of zoology, both observational and theoretical, in which his work was not surpassed until the 19th century. So using such personality as a vehicle, who himself have done a numerous work on the concern title, may be of a great help in this quest.

No one has approached the question of the meaning of life, from the philosophical standpoint, as far as the Zeliangrong are concerned. When we look at the development and progress taking place in this age, the advancement in technology have not failed to mesmerize any conscious being.

We look at them and stand amazed, guessing at the systematized, digitized and programmed mechanisms. But all these are not unfolded before us within the blink of an eye. Everything has its basis. Nothing comes out of nowhere. It has to have something as a base, either it be progress or regress. In the context of the Zeliangrong, the social structure and culture of the then, and now have changed a lot. How advanced or modernized one may be at the moment, but as a conscious being, history is something which one cannot neglect. So there is the need to explore and find out their views about their life. The effort of this undertaking is to enlighten the people, about their own cultural and traditional values which were once so dear to them; any infringement of which they would not hesitate to lay down their life. It is in fact, a question which everyone talks about it in almost every day discourses but as a matter of fact, very few give a serious thought about it; even those who ponder on it, do not bother much about what the past had to do with it but concern only of their present affairs.

In order to give or curve out a universal niche or acceptable concept-meaning of life- may not be an easy enterprise. But nevertheless, there is nothing wrong or harm in trying to find a better way to live the best possible and meaningful life. So keeping this notion in line, the thesis is directed in an attempt to explore, the general views and in particular Aristotle and the Zeliangrong, to say that such and such life or such life is a meaningful life or such is the meaning of life.