# Purpose And Meaning 2/18/2020

\*\*Why am I any better at answering the meaning of life?\*\*

Because that's all I’ve been trying to answer.

Everyone who does anything does so with some meaning or purpose. That is an inherent truth. This meaning can take unlimited forms. We are often taught, implicitly or explicitly, that some purposes and meanings are superior to others. At a certain time in all of our lives we all come across thoughts of the inherent meaninglessness of life. Buddhism revolves around this idea.

“In Buddhism, the primary purpose of life is to end suffering. The Buddha taught that humans suffer because we continually strive after things that do not give lasting happiness. We desperately try to hold on to things - friends, health, material things - that do not last, and this causes sorrow..”1

Buddhists understand the temperance of our reality, and with this knowledge, devalue any of our worldly interests. Knowing that in due time your existence, and any others you have touched, will be gone. They believe that any meaning we construe is based on human desire, and will not last.

As humans we are not often swayed into an entirely different religion, more often than that we choose to stop practicing religion at all. (Converting to an entirely different religion may require a directed otherworldly experience/calling to the “correct” one. If there was a single religion that had a statistical anomaly of higher conversion from their birth religion I would be keen to look into it. Instead, most people who leave their religion, leave behind religion in general.) Meaning, for most of the population your religion is the same as your height, or your ethnicity. Something you were born into. Most of us assume that the religion our parents practiced is by default correct and that the other thousands of religions worldwide are incorrect in some form. As I grew up I came to understand that I was only Christian because my parents had been. How could I look my Muslim friend in the eye and tell him he is wrong, simply because he was born into a different family. I had the same evidence that he did, my parents believed in it, and my religion likely says to continue to have faith against all the doubts. A 2007 poll found, if you were born into a Catholic or Protestant family, that there is a slim chance you have changed religion completely. In fact only 3 percent of people born into these religious denominations ended up switching to an entire different religion. There is a 83% chance you would have stayed faithful within the Catholic and Protestant subgroups and a 14% chance you have become unaffiliated in any religion at all.2 The last decade has seen the movement of people away from religion at an increasing rate. To replace it a questioning of the true nature of our reality has been on a rise. This Google Trend graph, dating back to 2004, shows around a 10x increase in searches questioning life's purpose. Even with the 1000% increase over the past 13 years, our interest in the nature of our reality pales in comparison to the most famous distractions of life.Polls are an inaccurate representation of our true feelings with religion. Not just because in many religions the all knowing and powerful gods would not let you enter the afterlife without belief. And knowing this and knowing that just checking the right box could mean the difference between eternal heaven and eternal damnation in hell makes it an easy risk reward equation. This was subjectively true to me and later I confirmed the trends existence through polling my own friends and family. In my transition from Christianity to Agnosticism, I would still select Christian. Not that I truly believed or practiced Christianity, but just as my race is caucasian, my religion was Christian. I have quizzed my own non-practicing friends and found that they in fact have done the same, meaning poll results of practicing members of religion is skewed and there are less devoted members than it may seem. Not to mention the fact that one choice has an inherent benefit, no matter how small the chance compared to the other. God is always watching after all, and if I can check the right box to have a better chance at eternal life in heaven then you better believe I will be checking it. Knowing this lets take a look at the google trends search of two of the largest religions today. Eventually I came to the realization I had no more reason to believe in any certain religion/god than to believe in the notion that we exist in a simulation, or that aliens dropped us off here. Each has as much evidence as the last. Therefore, rather than picking one and taking the surrounding beliefs as overall truths I began to think of the inherent truths of our verifiable reality and think of what the best course of action would then be. Let’s begin with the fundamental argument that some things carry more importance than others. At any given moment, we are deciphering the importance of the objects and concepts before us - determining what matters and holds value. As we age, we begin to discover the bigger picture, observe the patterns of life, and gain a better understanding of how to assess importance. This is what I consider wisdom: the ability to construe importance with studied objectivity, rather than aligning one's reasoning with their emotions. We used to cry when our favorite toy was taken from us. Then cried when we did poorly on a test; some people cry when their favorite sports team loses. Whatever we give value to in our heads in turn gives power of the outcomes of the event, control over our emotions. That means when your favorite football wins a game, you feel excitement and feelings of victory for the work they did. As we age we change what we give a fuck about, go talk to your grandma and see if she cares if celebrity x broke up with celebrity y or who got chosen on the bachelorette. This is especially true with someone on their deathbed, given a time limit left on the person its seems that a fog clears and only the most important information is touched on. Maybe your grandpa/grandma’s dying words are in fact “I'm just happy to have seen the super bowl”, and I must mention, a high level of wisdom is not a guarantee of age, thinking you are wiser than someone because of your age is a fallacy. When evaluating what to give a fuck about it’s good to try to embrace a sense of scale. A breakup with a lover can be hard, it can feel like the world is ending, and sadly for some, they are so unable to see past the fog of anguish, that they end their life. Not taking into account that time will change things and they could live a happy life once again. When we take in a sense of scale, we can see that in time we will likely be happy again, we may find someone new or as time moves on release the emotions we had from that situation. When we have this clarity we are taking in a sense of scale, we see that our future will not be the same as our present, that time only flows in one direction, and that it’s only possible to change what we do in the present. As children we learned to embrace a sense of scale by seeing how our current actions could affect our future selves. If I do not do this homework I can spend the rest of the day having fun. Depending on your parenting style, the rate at which the consequences would hit varied. Some parents would know each assignment their children had and sit them down and watch them do it, while others did not bother. In highschool my parents gave me the freedom to know I had better get it done or there would be consequences. Of course I needed to test these consequences to confirm their existence, so after not turning in math assignments for weeks my report card represented this and consequences were given. The logical mindset to take was If I do this homework RIGHT NOW then I have no other tasks for the day and can focus on having fun. If you were me though, and were a grade A procrastinator, you were in math class scribbling “Yo tengo un perro” furiously before spanish class came and the homework was due. The due date was now in your face, and the fear of consequences with it. This took away the need for pure willpower and instead even the Iwanttohavefunallthetime part of my brain was on board, because it understood down the line if my grades dropped, Mom and Pop were going to restrict computer access and sleepovers again. However Iwanttohavefunallthetime never truly learned, because the homework assignment done the class before or the morning before never ended up costing him too much. That act still made it possible to get A’s and B’s which was the standard set for myself by my parents. The only true negative was the intruding thoughts of “I should just do that homework now to make sure it's on time” as I was outside enjoying hacking bushes with a sword. Let's leave highschool and go back a bit further to elementary school. Imagine your teacher sits you down and offers you a project. She says “I have a difficult assignment for you but if you complete it you will never have to do another homework again, go to class, or even schooling of any sort again. However... if you fail to complete it, it is likely you will never go outside again, never see mom or dad in their human form, never have another jolly rancher, you will open a mystery box no one has ever been able to talk about opening and on the other side, you may experience an entirely different reality, a heaven, even a hell, but to the best of my knowledge you will simply cease to exist.” What would you say? You would probably think about it long and hard, you may even think of saying yes, but then you think of the consequences. No more recess, no more candy, no more sleepovers. Ever. You would really rather just continue to do homework and make sure you get your recess and sleepovers. When you think about never being able to again, it makes you appreciate the time you do get to do those things. You go back to her and thank her for her offer but that you will continue to do your math homework every night. Ms. Smith however apologizes and says “I am sorry little buddy but you actually have no choice in taking on this assignment. You have an allotted amount of time. If you finish it you can enjoy a countless number of recesses, thousands, millions, billions if you want. Play around, do anything you can dream of in the entire playground. Your other option is to blow it off, you can use that allotted amount of time that you had for the project and have one more recess. You may not be able to do the swing sets AND the teeter-totter but whichever you pick, you could really enjoy it, knowing its temporary and the last time you’ll experience it because then you will open the mystery box, and what lies behind there is truly a mystery, it could be an eternity of suffering and pain or the opposite. You will always be able to go there even if you take the project route, but once you open it. You can never go back. Which would you like to do? Go play this once, or try to complete this project and be able to play every single day for as long as you want, knowing you can open the mystery box when you please.”