

Group 4

Chapter 6

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Existentialism

6.1 Kierkegaard and the Origins of Existentialism

Kierkegaard - as the key origin figure for existentialism

Definition:

Origins - the point or place where something begins, arises

Existentialism - a philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will.

Kierkegaard

He insists:

humans how to live ?

Not to build a rational system

Faith - meaningful living - requires subjective commitment rather than objective proof.

He opposes:

Danish Lutheran church and the philosophical project of Hegel (Both seek to make Christianity reasonable)

Example: People in the church can respectfully listen to a story about a father preparing to kill his son, but if a neighbor actually did it in real life, they would immediately think it's crazy/evil.

“Having to exist with the help of the guidance of pure thinking is like having to travel in Denmark with a small map of Europe...”

Real religious faith requires inwardness

My takeaway:

- The story exposes a gap between “respectable religion” and what faith actually demands.
- Not about “thinking is useless”
- A grand system is at the wrong scale for lived life.
- Existence involves concrete decisions, anxiety, risk—things a system can describe but cannot do for you.

How to solve?

= How to live?

the most fundamental questions facing a human being are essentially practical because the question “How shall I spend my life?” is inescapable.

My opinions:

You can't postpone living until you finish a perfect theory.

How should I live? purely objective proofs will always be incomplete

Even refusing to decide is still a way of living

6.3 Anguish and Bad Faith

severe mental or physical pain or suffering.

The Sources of Anguish

Nothingness and Absurdity

- We are "nothingness" because our essence is not defined yet.
- no external factor (like personality, history, or biology) can force us to act. We cannot use them as excuses.
- Our existence is just a "brute fact"—it's there, without a reason or explanation.

Overwhelming Responsibility

- Choosing for all mankind
- "*To be man means to reach towards being God. Or if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God'*
- Creator of values with great responsibility

Three ways of Escaping Anguish

1. Indecision
 - a. **decision not to choose is itself a choice,**
2. The Serious Minded
 - a. hiding behind "objective values" to avoid admitting they made a choice.
 - b. You are choosing the answer by choosing the advisor.
3. Bad Faith / Mauvaise Foi(waiter's example)
 - a. *"Instead of accepting their own subjectivity and freedom to choose, they may try to objectify themselves, adopt roles which they then act out, and think of themselves as mere functionaries."*

The Good Life

1. Manner of Choose
 - a. is not the content of the choice, but the *attitude* behind it.
2. Authenticity
 - a. "*A wholly authentic or truly human life is possible only for those who recognize the inescapability of freedom and its responsibility.*"
3. Value is Invented
 - a. "*Value always has to be invented. The one thing that counts is to know whether the invention is made in the name of freedom.*"

Conclusion

Freedom is not a gift of happiness, but a **condemnation**. We flee from the weight of this freedom through **Bad Faith**—hiding behind social roles like the 'model student' or the 'dutiful waiter.' Yet, the only noble way to live is to strip away these masks, acknowledge that '**It is I who chose this,**' and bear the consequences

6.5 acting in good faith

The value of an action depends on motivation and attitude, not just the result itself

“It’s the thought that counts.”

Gift

Case A : Expensive gift + reluctant, unwilling gesture

Case B : Inexpensive gift + sincere, thoughtful gesture

Most people would consider B to be more valuable

Good faith believed by Existentialism

Freedom

Responsibility

Rejection of external determinism: behavior is not ultimately determined by society, biology, or any other external factors

“Are you acting in good faith?”

The boy confessed his love. She asked: “*Do you really mean it?*” or “*why do you love me?*”

Maybe...

The boy thought the girl was very pretty/kind/graceful.

The girl was extremely and willing to buy him a Lamborghini.

The boy simply enjoyed spending time with her. → **emotional value**

It is hard to ignore external factors.



My thought

“behavior is not ultimately determined by society, biology, or any other external factors” -> too idealistic. It is difficult to separate choice from external influences.

It is hard to determine whether an action is purely in good faith; at best, we can compare actions as more or less sincere.

The more an agent acknowledges freedom, mixed motives, and responsibility, the greater the degree of good faith.

What Is Off With Existentialism: Freedom and Meaning

6.7 & § 2.2.10 – 2.2.12

The heart of existentialism

The human is one of inescapable freedom (though not just this), and hence inescapable responsibility

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The human is one of inescapable freedom (though not just this), and hence inescapable responsibility

- What are we free from?
- Why does it sounds bad?

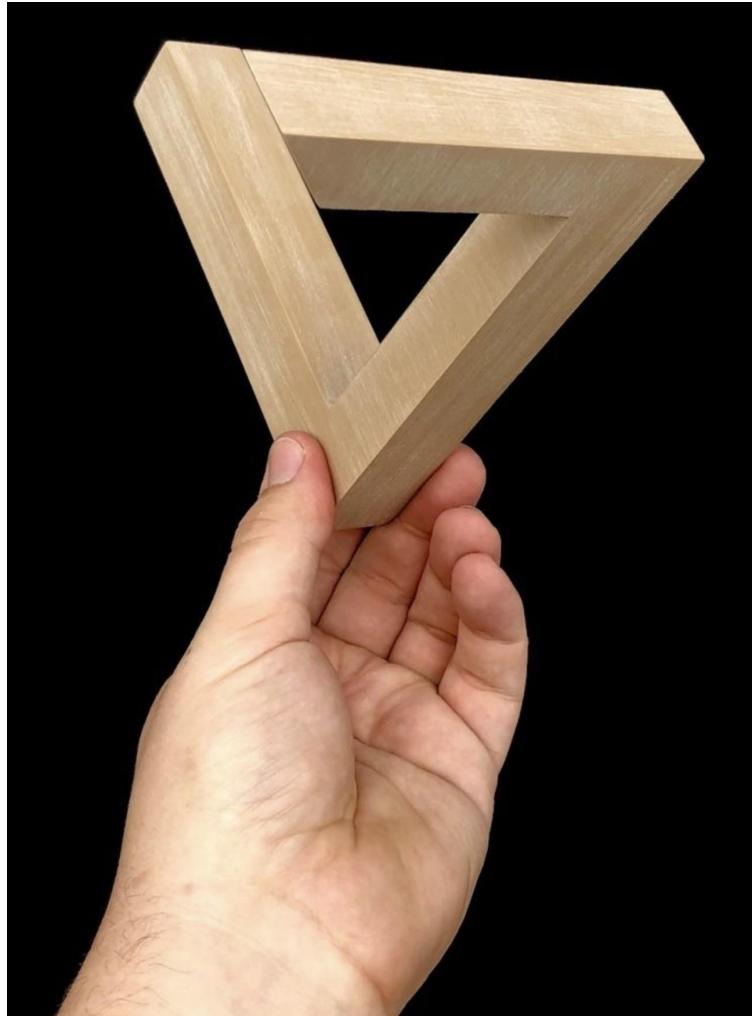
What is free?



Being not limited

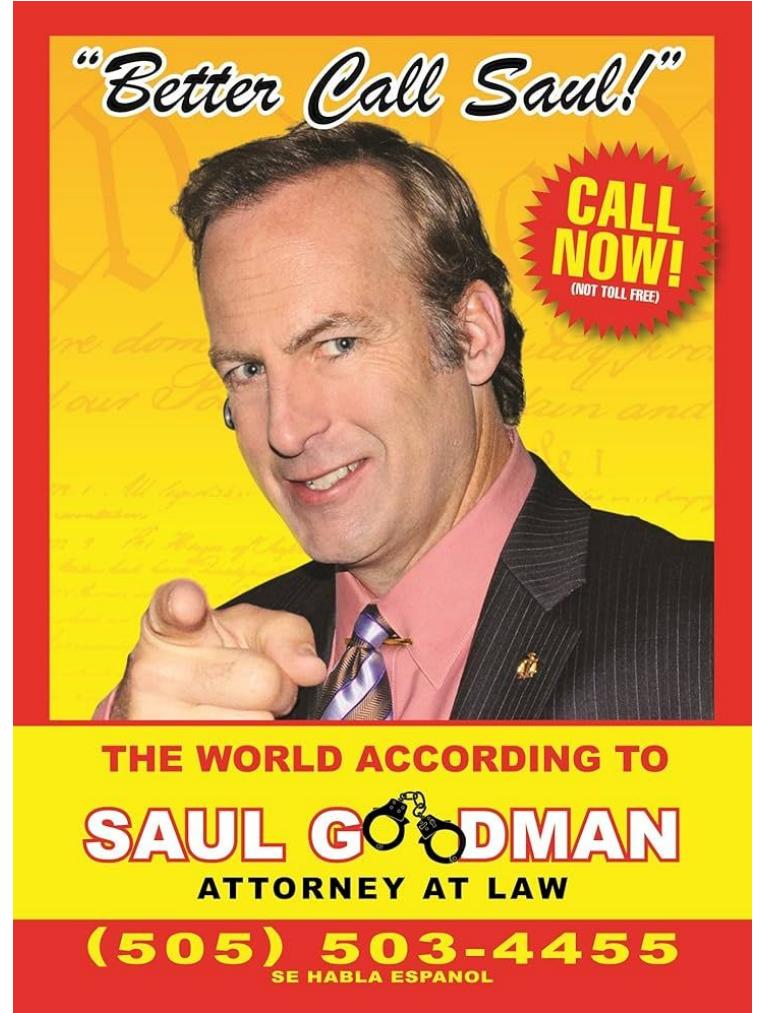
No absolute freedom

- You can't do what is impossible



No absolute freedom

- You can't do what is impossible
- You are bounded by the law



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To have complete control over one's own stance and meaning.

**Stance: a person's settled position or attitude toward something*

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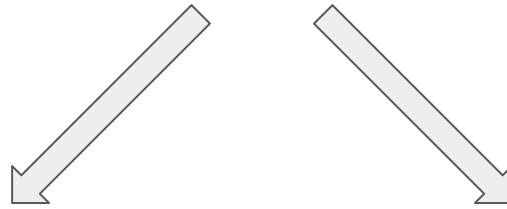
**Stance: a person's settled position or attitude toward something*

- Why does it sounds bad?

Not being created or planned

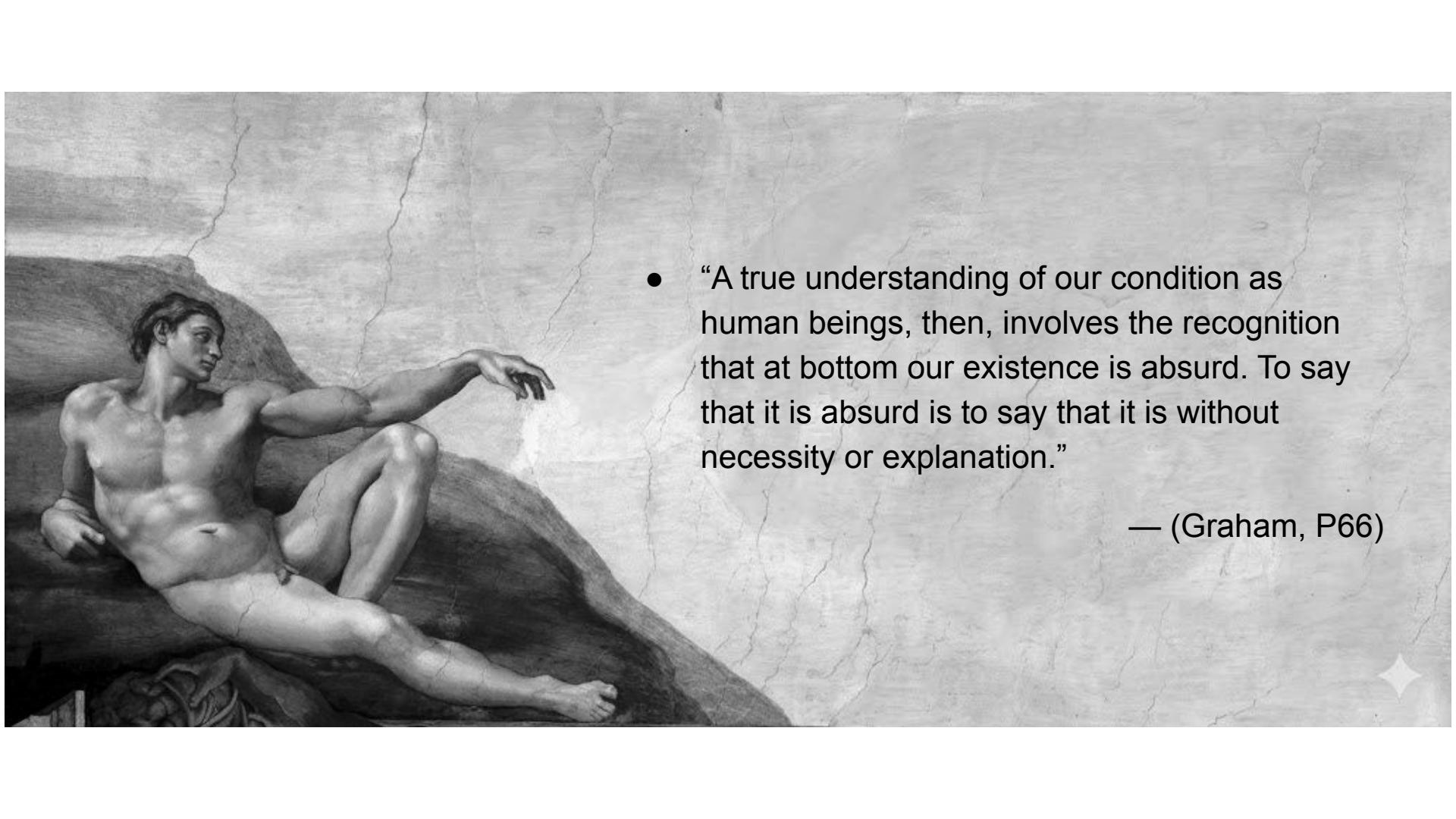


No necessity

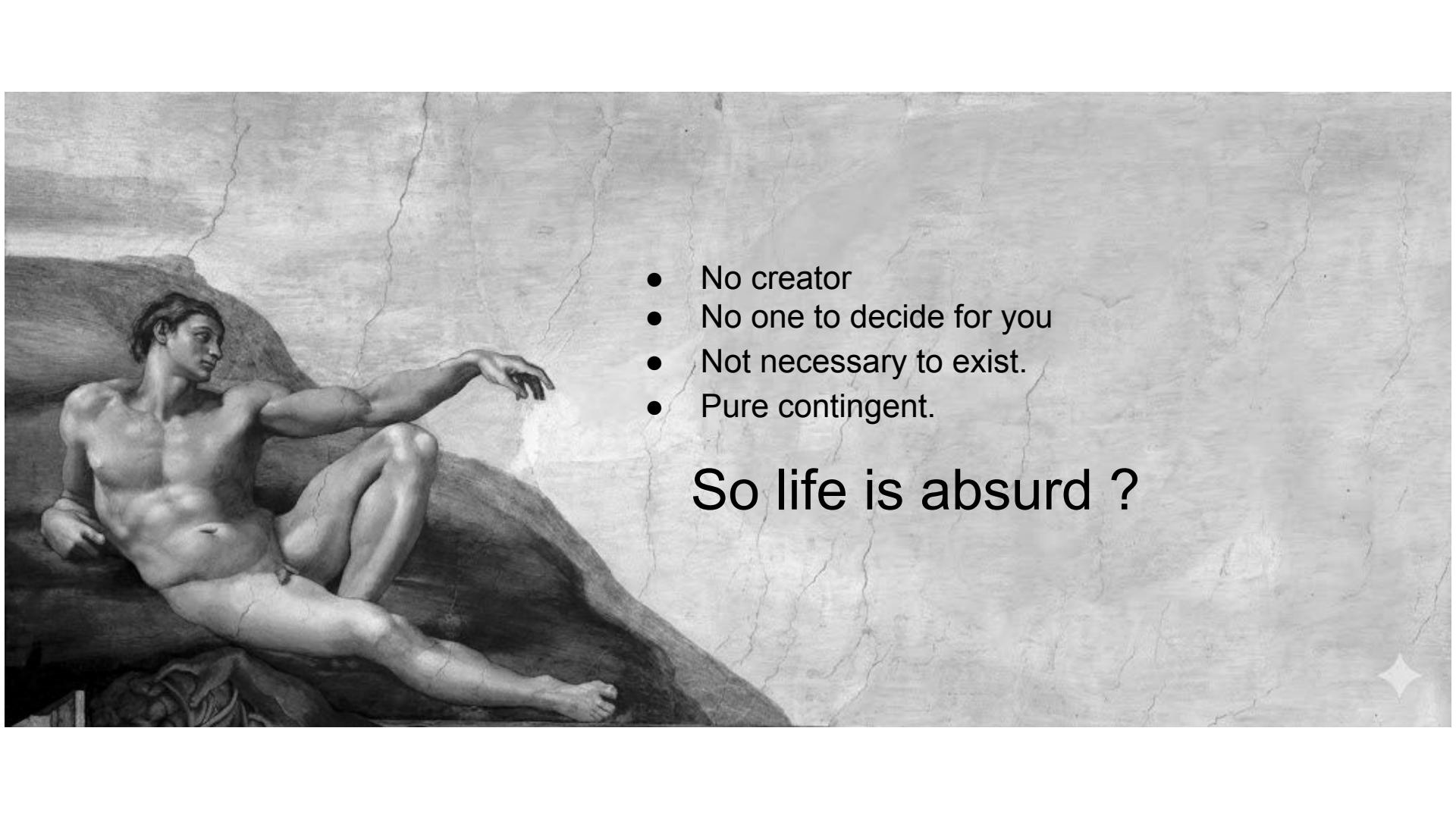


Freedom

Absurd

- 
- “A true understanding of our condition as human beings, then, involves the recognition that at bottom our existence is absurd. To say that it is absurd is to say that it is without necessity or explanation.”

— (Graham, P66)

- 
- A black and white engraving of a classical figure, possibly a deity or a philosopher, reclining on a large, craggy rock. The figure is shirtless, showing a well-defined muscular torso and legs. He is positioned on his left side, with his right arm resting behind his head and his left leg bent at the knee. His gaze is directed towards the right side of the frame. The background consists of a light-colored, textured surface with prominent vertical cracks, suggesting a rocky cliff or a wall.
- No creator
 - No one to decide for you
 - Not necessary to exist.
 - Pure contingent.

So life is absurd ?

Why absurd?

Fact layer:

- There is no explanation that shows it is "necessary";
- it is merely a "brute, contingent fact".

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The problem lies in value layer.

Life is absurd

Extreme disappointment



Life is absurd

We are contingent



Extreme disappointment



Life is absurd

Life should have a creator given ultimate meaning



But it doesn't because we are contingent



Extreme disappointment



Life is absurd

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But it doesn't because we are contingent?



Extreme disappointment



Life is absurd

Designed ≠ Not contingent

- A cell phone is designed by human
- But they are contingently made by contingently existed human

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Contingent ≠ Meaningless

- A cell phone is contingently built upon the contingency of human
- **Would you say a phone is meaningless?**

Life should have a creator given ultimate meaning ?



But it doesn't because we are contingent?



Extreme disappointment



Life is absurd

“To know the meaning of life, Professor Sadegh Angha teaches to ‘Gather all your energies and concentrate them on the source of life in your heart for your findings to become imperishable, so that you will live in balance and tranquility and know eternity.’ ”

— (Sadoghi, §2.2.10)

~~Life should have a creator given ultimate meaning?~~



But it doesn't because we are contingent?



Extreme disappointment



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~~Life is absurd~~

Takeaway

- Meaning is not predefined
- Freedom come with constraints
- Understand our freedom
- Be sincere to yourself
- Accept the responsibility of making decisions

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You have complete control over your own stance and meaning.

Thank you