

Meaningness: All Dimensions

	<i>The mistaken metaphysical assumption</i>	<i>What it denies and what it fixates</i>	<i>Pattern of thinking</i>	<i>Sales pitch and emotional appeal</i>	<i>How a confused stance causes suffering</i>	<i>Obstacles to maintaining a stance</i>	<i>Likely next stances</i>	<i>Antidotes and counter-thoughts</i>	<i>Intelligent features of a confused stance</i>
	Each stance, or basic attitude toward meaningness, is a transient pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting. The Meaningness practice involves learning to recognize these patterns. Then you know what stance you are in at any moment, and ways to shift from any confused stance to a complete one.	A confused stance is based on an underlying mistaken metaphysical assumption. The assumption is usually unthought: not understood, or entirely outside awareness. Typically the assumption draws a distinction that is a false dilemma; so confused stances mainly come in pairs, which share the underlying assumption but take opposite sides of it. Surfacing the assumption, and seeing how it is wrong, makes it possible to understand and adopt the corresponding complete stance.	Each confused stance wrongly denies something about meaningness, and fixates something else. Stances allied with eternalism deny the nebulousity of a dimension of meaningness, and fixate a pattern. Stances allied with nihilism deny the pattern and fixate the dimension's non-existence. Recognizing how nebulousity and pattern work together moves one into the complete stance for that dimension.	When you adopt a stance, a characteristic texture of thinking, feeling, and perhaps acting comes with it. The stance makes that way of being seem sensible. Also, that way of being makes the stance seem sensible. For example, nihilism usually makes you depressed. Likewise, when you are depressed for other reasons, nihilism may seem obviously right.	The "sales pitch" is a slogan that encapsulates the language used to promote the stance. A confused stance's emotional appeal is the reason it is attractive. Each confused stance plays to some need for security, excitement, or self-aggrandizement. Noticing that you are getting sucked in by the emotional promise made by a confused stance, and knowing that it cannot deliver on them, helps free you from it. The complete stances are, unfortunately, less emotionally appealing. (Otherwise, we'd adopt them easily.) However, they are more realistic.	Confused stances distort experience by fixating and denying particular sorts of meaningness. When these mistaken perceptions collide with reality, emotional pain results. Each confused stance produces a characteristic pattern of misunderstanding and misery. A confused stance's patterns of collision with reality—the obstacles to maintaining it—are resources for switching into a complete stance. Unfortunately there are obstacles to adopting the complete stances, as well. Generally, complete stances are conceptually obscure, and appear emotionally unsatisfying.	Because stances are unstable, we frequently stumble from one to another, without being clearly aware that we are doing this. In fact, all of the confused stances described in this book will be thoroughly familiar to every reader. When a particular obstacle to maintaining one stance arises, there are typical routes into likely next stances. Knowing this, one can recognize an upcoming transition into a confused stance, and re-direct oneself into a complete stance instead.	These are ways of getting yourself out of a confused stance. Simply recognizing that you are caught in one, and remembering that there is a better alternative, is often most of the battle. Beyond that, one can notice particular confused patterns, and cut through them with specific counter-thoughts. 1 Counter-thoughts can work in two ways. Some move from a confused stance to the complete stance. Others destabilize the confused stance, to make it less attractive so that you are more likely to jump to the complete stance spontaneously. (In those cases, though, one needs to guard against simply moving to a different confused stance.)	Each confused stance is intelligent in some way. If it did not have a powerful logic to it, an almost-truth, we would not get stuck in it. Each approximates a complete stance, which is actually correct. Noticing how the confused stance you have adopted is nearly right is helpful in several ways: • It avoids "I'm a bad person because I fell into a confused stance again," which is discouraging, and more likely to make you abandon the practice than to continue. • It lets you see why you've adopted it. • It helps point the way to a complete stance that shares the same accurate insight. • It is the basis for appropriation—the use of a confused stance to communicate the corresponding complete stance.

Meaning and meaninglessness

Unity, diversity, and separateness

Purpose

Self

Personal value

<i>Stance</i>	<i>Eternalism</i>	<i>Nihilism</i>	<i>Meaning/ness</i>	<i>Monism</i>	<i>Dualism</i>	<i>Participation</i>	<i>Mission</i>	<i>Materialism</i>	<i>Enjoyable usefulness</i>	<i>The authentic, true, deep self</i>	<i>Selflessness</i>	<i>Intermittently continuing</i>	<i>Specialness</i>	<i>Ordinariness</i>	<i>Nobility</i>	<i>Stance</i>
<i>Summary</i>	Everything is given a fixed meaning by an eternal ordering principle (Cosmic Plan)	Nothing is really meaningful	Meaning is nebulous, yet patterned; meaningfulness and meaninglessness intermingle	All is One	I am clearly distinct from everything and everyone else	Reality is indivisible but diverse	Only eternal purposes are meaningful	Only mundane purposes are meaningful	All purposes are meaningful, when they are. Do things that are useful and enjoyable.	The hidden, true self is directly connected to the Cosmic Plan, bypassing social constrictions	There is, or should be, no self	Selfness comes and goes; it varies over time and has no essential nature	I have a distinct and superior value given by the eternal ordering principle	My value comes from being like everyone else	Developing all my abilities in order to serve others	<i>Summary</i>
<i>What it denies</i>	Nebulousity; meaninglessness	Pattern; meaningfulness		Differences, boundaries, specifics, individuality	Connection, dynamic interplay, unbounded responsibility		Value of mundane purposes	Value of eternal purposes		Nebulousity of self	Patterns of self; the self/other boundary; natural self-interest		Shared humanity	Unusualness		<i>What it denies</i>
<i>What it fixates</i>	Meaning	Meaninglessness		Unity; also over-emphasizes connection	Boundaries, separateness, limitations, definitions		Value of eternal purposes	Value of mundane purposes		The patterns of selfness; the self/other boundary	Discontinuity; absence of self/other boundary		Personal value	Personal value		<i>What it fixates</i>
<i>The sales pitch</i>	You are guaranteed a good outcome if you follow the rules	You don't have to care! Don't get fooled again	Accurate understanding of meaningness allows both freedom and purpose	You are God	Clarity gives you control		Find and follow your true mission, and the universe resonates with you	He who dies with the most toys, wins	There is no scoreboard	Your true self is much more exciting than your yucky regular one	You can get rid of your yucky regular self	The patterned self is unproblematic once its nebulousity is accepted	You are better than they are	Don't put on airs	Be all you can be	<i>The sales pitch</i>
<i>Emotional appeal</i>	Certainty; understanding; control. Reassurance that if you act in accordance with Cosmic Plan, everything will be well.	Intelligence. Also, nothing means anything, so not getting what you want is not a problem.		I am all-powerful, all-knowing, immortal, invulnerable	I am not contaminated by other beings, and have only specific, limited responsibility for them		Exciting, personal, transcendent purpose lifts you out of mundanity	Get what you want		I'm much better than I thought I was	I have nothing to lose		Reinforces ego	No need to live up to potential		<i>Emotional appeal</i>
<i>Pattern of thinking</i>	Deliberate stupidity; sentimentality; self-righteousness	Contempt; rage; intellectualization; depression; anxiety	Joyful realism	Willful stupidity	Distrust	Engagement	Fantasy; non-ordinary methods for seeking the supposed true mission	Grim self-interest	Flow	Romantic idolization of fantasy self	Willful blindness to continuity and self-interest	Humorous affection for one's foibles; absence of anxiety	Disdain; self-aggrandisement	Fearfulness, laziness	Impeccability	<i>Pattern of thinking</i>
<i>Likely next stances</i>	Mission	Materialism		Eternalism, mission, true self, specialness	Can combine with either eternalism or nihilism		Eternalism; specialness, true self	Nihilism; ordinariness	Nobility, intermittently continuing	Eternalism, monism, specialness	Nihilism, ordinariness	Nobility, enjoyable usefulness	Mission, true self	Materialism	Enjoyable usefulness	<i>Likely next stances</i>
<i>Accomplishment</i>	Unify your self with Cosmic Plan	Total apathy	Wizardry	Directly perceive all things as One	Perfect independence	Self and other neither distinct nor identical	Sacrifice all mundane purposes to eternal mission (saintliness)	Exclusive self-interest	Renaissance person	Authenticity in sense of living from true self instead of regular self	Egolessness	Conjuring supple, playful magic in the shared self/other space	Autoapotheosis	Baaaaaa	Heroism	<i>Accomplishment</i>
<i>How it causes suffering</i>	Action based on imagined meanings fails; narrowed scope for action; Cosmic Plan makes insane, harmful demands	Have to blind self to meaningfulness; undermines any practical action		Have to blind self to diversity of physical reality	Alienation due to being cut off from world and others		Can never find your supposed true mission; neglect mundane aspects of life	Can never get enough; alienation from others and from authentic creativity		Attempts to retrieve supposed true self fail; attempts to live up to it fail	Neglecting practical personal affairs		Ego-trips; role anxiety; need for constant confirmation	Suppression of individuality		<i>How it causes suffering</i>
<i>Obstacles to maintaining the stance</i>	Difficulty of blinding oneself to manifestations of nebulousity, and submitting to Cosmic Plan	Difficulty of blinding self to manifestations of pattern, and abandoning all desires	Unappealing due to complexity and uncertainty	Obviousness of diversity	Obviousness of connection	Difficulty of understanding the philosophical view	Reasonable self-interest	Compassion, creativity	Is that it? No hope of completing purpose, so no hope for salvation or basis for self-congratulation	Non-existence of true self	Manifestations of regular self	Fear of discontinuity; cannot repair or remove self	Familiarity of experience; maintaining image is exhausting	Unusual impulses; cannot conform to herd	Selfishness; fear; laziness	<i>Obstacles to maintaining the stance</i>
<i>Antidotes; counter-thoughts</i>	Curiosity; realism; intelligence; enjoyment of nebulousity, meaninglessness, un-knowing	Enjoyment of pattern; recovery of passion		Appreciation of diversity	Appreciation of connectedness		Mundane purposes matter to me	I do care about others, and about creative work		No essential nature, no coherent true self	I have much in common with who I was and will be		Recognition of shared humanity	Recognition of potential and uniqueness		<i>Antidotes; counter-thoughts</i>
<i>Intelligent aspect</i>	There is meaning, and it is not merely subjective, so nihilism is wrong	There are no inherent, objective, or eternal meanings, so eternalism is wrong		I am not entirely separate from anything	The world is endlessly diverse		Eternal purposes are valid; materialism is unsatisfying	Mundane purposes are valid; mission is a fantasy		Recognizes negative social conditioning & possibility of spontaneity	Recognizes lack of essential nature or durable continuity		Recognition of potential and uniqueness	Recognition of shared humanity		<i>Intelligent aspect</i>
<i>Positive appropriation after resolution</i>	Respect for pattern is a compassionate aspect of realism	Recognition of nebulousity is a wisdom aspect of nihilism; nearly-correct understanding of defects of eternalism		Provisional understanding of indivisibility	Points toward appreciation of diversity		Creativity and generosity are aspects of enjoyable usefulness	Material satisfaction and accomplishment are aspects of enjoyable usefulness		Points toward power of nobility: we can be much more than we generally pretend	Points toward generosity of nobility		Nobility does rise above the ordinary	Humility is an aspect of nobility		<i>Positive appropriation after resolution</i>

Capability

Ethics

Social Authority

Sacredness

Contingency

<i>Stance</i>	<i>Total responsibility</i>	<i>Victim-think</i>	<i>Light-heartedness</i>	<i>Ethical eternalism</i>	<i>Ethical nihilism</i>	<i>Ethical responsiveness</i>	<i>Reasonable respectability</i>	<i>Romantic rebellion</i>	<i>Freedom</i>	<i>Religiosity</i>	<i>Secularism</i>	<i>Kadag</i>	<i>Causality</i>	<i>Chaos</i>	<i>Flow</i>	<i>Stance</i>
<i>Summary</i>	We each create our own reality and are responsible for everything that happens in it	It's not my fault and I am too weak to deal with it	Playfully co-create reality in collaboration with each other and the world	The Cosmic Plan dictates a fixed ethical code according to which we ought to live	Ethics is a meaningless human invention and has no real claim on us	Ethics is centrally important to humans, and is not a matter of choice, but is fluid and has no definite source	Contribute to social order by conforming to traditions	Make an artistic statement by defying authority	Value social order as a resource; satirize it as an impediment	The sacred and the profane are clearly distinct in the Cosmic Plan	Sacredness is mere superstition; nothing is sacred	Because nothing is inherently sacred, everything can be sacred	Everything happens for the best, in accord with the Cosmic Plan. (Except free will lets us do evil.)	The universe is random; nothing happens for any particular reason	There are no ultimate causes, and causation is nebulous, but we naturally observe patterns	<i>Summary</i>
<i>What it denies</i>	Contingency, limits	Responsibility, capability, freedom		Ambiguity of ethics; freedom; courage; creativity	Ethical imperativeness		Nebulousity of social order	Value of social order		Nebulousity of sacredness; vastness	Sacredness; vastness		Pointless suffering	Interpretability		<i>What it denies</i>
<i>What it fixates</i>	Responsibility	Overwhelming power of circumstances		Ethical code (rules/laws)	Absence of ethical absolutes		Social order	Heroic status of the counter-culture		The sacred	Arbitrariness of perception of sacredness		Reasons	[Nothing]		<i>What it fixates</i>
<i>The sales pitch</i>	Perfect circumstances can be achieved with sufficient effort	You are oppressed and therefore blameless		Cosmic justice guarantees reward/punishment if you obey/defy the ethical code	Do as thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law	Ethical anxiety is unnecessary	Law'n'order	Death to the oppressors!		Avoid contamination through ritual purity	Freed from religion, we can get on with practical projects	The good bits of religion without the dogma	There is no need to suffer, so long as you conform to the Cosmic Plan	[This is a hard sell] God is dead.	Dance with reality	<i>The sales pitch</i>
<i>Emotional appeal</i>	Fantasy of control over future	No need to make any effort	No need for self-criticism or for anxiety	Avoiding blame; preventing others from harming/offending you	Take what you want; don't let morality get in the way		It's safe	It's sexy		Personal superiority through religious conformity; minimize uncanniness of vastness by codifying it	Don't have to think about that uncomfortable religion stuff; pretend you don't see vastness and hope it goes away	Can neither dismiss nor grab onto sacredness	Can pretend there is no pointless suffering	[This may be only a theoretical possibility]		<i>Emotional appeal</i>
<i>Pattern of thinking</i>	Aggressive, paranoid	Fearful, depressed, emotionally manipulative	Effortless accomplishment	Self-righteousness	Arrogance	Light-hearted concern	Emotional constriction	Confused romantic passion, testosterone poisoning	Political maturity	Self-righteousness	Pretending not to care about meaning; apathy	Awe	Kitsch	Despair	Realism	<i>Pattern of thinking</i>
<i>Likely next stances</i>	Specialness, true self, mission	Ordinariness, materialism	Nobility, ethical responsiveness	Religiosity, mission	Secularism, materialism	Light-heartedness, nobility	Ordinariness; dualism	Specialness; mission; nihilistic rage; true self	Nobility, light-heartedness, kadag	Reasonable respectability, mission, specialness	Materialism, ordinariness	Freedom	Eternalism, religiosity	Nihilism, secularism		<i>Likely next stances</i>
<i>Accomplishment</i>	King of the Universe	Have all needs met by exploiting others' pity	Effortless creativity	Remorseless soldier of God	Sociopathy	Ethical maturity	Pillar of society	Romantic martyrdom		Perfect ritual purity	Total inability to experience awe	Ability to experience anything as sacred	Pollyanna, Candide	La Nausé (Sartre)	Maximal ability to influence events, without attachment to outcome	<i>Accomplishment</i>
<i>How it causes suffering</i>	Hypervigilance; can't meet infinite requirements with finite capacity	Resentment, depression, neglect of opportunities		Harmful actions are sometimes required by the supposed rules; beneficial ones may not be promoted	Without ethics, harmful actions are just rational self-interest		Complicity in oppression; abandoning of responsibility and moral maturity	Opposes realistic action to ameliorate conditions; justifies violence		Paranoia about contamination; resources and opportunities wasted; tribalist vilification	Flatness of existence in the absence of the sacred		Denying pointless suffering makes it hard to alleviate	[Theoretically, inability to take practical action]		<i>How it causes suffering</i>
<i>Obstacles to maintaining the stance</i>	Obviousness of limits	Obviousness of opportunities	Hard to let go of need to be reassured about outcomes	Situations in which ethical rules are unclear or promote obvious harm	Natural concern for others	Requires close attention to particulars; no guarantee of blamelessness	Social conventions stifle expression and opportunity	Silly; doomed by definition	Urgency of social imperatives	Obvious mundanity of religious forms	Spontaneous religious feelings	Innate reactions of disgust	Obviousness of pointless suffering (our own and others')	Obviousness of causality	No guarantees	<i>Obstacles to maintaining the stance</i>
<i>Antidotes; counter-thoughts</i>	Letting go of fantasies of accomplishment; willingness to fail	Gratitude; letting go of payoffs; walking away; practical action		Allowing ethical ambiguity	Respecting ethical imperatives		Who cares what they think?	I'm being silly and just striking a pose to look cool		Purity is a matter of perception, not truth	I do sometimes experience awe		Lots of stuff just happens	[Probably not necessary]		<i>Antidotes; counter-thoughts</i>
<i>Intelligent aspect</i>	Recognition of possibility	Recognition of limits		Recognizes the importance of ethics	Recognizes the ambiguity of ethics		Recognizes value of social order	Recognizes arbitrary and restrictive character of social order		Recognition of sacredness	Recognition that nothing is inherently sacred		Things often do make sense	Things often are inherently uninterpretable		<i>Intelligent aspect</i>
<i>Positive appropriation after resolution</i>	Experience depends more on our own perception & action than is usually thought	Because we have finite capabilities, we can cut ourselves some slack		Points toward nobility	Points toward ethical maturity	Creativity and generosity are aspects of enjoyable usefulness	Points toward kingly qualities of nobility; society as a beneficial structure	Points toward warrior qualities of nobility; charismatically involving; makes splendid art	Points toward power of nobility; we can be much more than we generally pretend	Sacredness matters	Narrow religion is harmful; something better is available	Nobility does rise above the ordinary	Points toward pragmatic competence	Points toward comfort with uncertainty		<i>Positive appropriation after resolution</i>