

Essay

Dialog on the Meaning of Life

Introduction

Flex your imagination. You are a disembodied soul that has yet to see this world. You know nothing about what life you may live. You know nothing about what talents you might be born with, about whether you will be able or disabled, about whether you will be rich or poor. You do not know what country you will be born in and you know nothing about the parents you will be born to. In short, you have no idea whether you will be born to a long life of comfort and ease or a short life of pain and trouble. You could be born to a wealthy family in New York or an impoverished family in a war torn country. You don't know.

The only thing you are aware of are two angels nearby. They offer you a choice. You can choose a body, to be born, live a life and die. Or you can choose to fade away into the peaceful nothingness from which you emerged. The angels disagree about what you should do. One tries to convince you that life is meaningless, that it is better to be nothing at all than to be a being who is born, lives a while, and dies. The other disagrees. They claim that regardless of the circumstances of your life, God's existence guarantees that it will be something full of meaning and purpose.

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to help you practice the following skills that are essential to your success in this course and others.

1. Charitably explaining arguments for opposing claim.
2. Explaining why you think one argument succeeds where another fails.
3. Explaining difficult concepts in your own words.

Task

Write a dialogue between you and the two angels. Your dialogue must contain the following three elements:

- The first angel must explain Tolstoy's initial argument that life is meaningless. This angel must discuss internal and external value.
- The second angel must explain Tolstoy's subsequent religious conversion and argument that life is meaningful. This angel must explain in what way God's existence would address Tolstoy's initial worry.
- You must choose between life and nothing and explain that choice. Tell them why you found one argument convincing, the other unconvincing.

NB: Failure to include any of these elements in your dialog will lose you points.

Word Count

Your dialog must be 500-750 words long. Essays shorter than 500 words or longer than 750 words will lose points.

Further Instruction

- This assignment covers material contained in Ch.9.1–9.3.
- Note that this is a dialog. Imagine the way dialogs go. There is some back and forth. There is humor. There are jibes. Characters have names. Write your dialog accordingly. See any play for some ideas on format.
- Allow your characters to question each other, rebut each other, etc.
- Your choice between the two positions should be guided by your evaluation of both arguments. Don't merely say which conclusion you accept. This part of the dialog should focus on assessing the logic and premises of the respective arguments.

Plagiarism

Please review the plagiarism policy on the syllabus. It is critical that you prepare your assignment by yourself. Use only the textbook and handouts—it will take you less time to work through these materials than to find and read other sources. I will be checking for significant overlaps between submission as well as checking answers against Wikipedia, internet search results, standard essay sites, etc. If you include material in your essay without citing it, you will receive 0 for the assignment. A second violation will result in a 0 for the course, a report to the Dean, and a petition for a note to be added to your permanent academic record.

Due Date

Please consult the syllabus for the due date.

Late Submissions

Per the policies outlined in the syllabus, late work will not be accepted. Any request for special treatment will be ignored. If you foresee difficulties submitting work on time, either because of personal or work commitments, then you should start this paper early and submit it early.

Format

Please submit the file as a word file.

Grading

Please find the rubric and explanation of it [here](#).

Resources

Please find links to writing resources [here](#)