

the principles of real identity, of the continuity of existence, of constant causality or legality, and of the temporal continuity of becoming, or, in general, by means of fundamental a priori forms or principles, which constitute the organization of human cognitive powers but from whose transcendental validity by no means necessarily follows its transcendent reality.

Liebmann distinguished three types of theories, which seek explanatory principles in the immediate empirical data, in hypotheses by which the phenomena are deduced, or in absolute metaphysical realities. He rejected the first and third, and admitted the hypotheses, if and as long as the facts confirm them. This is true not only of scientific but also of philosophical theories, especially of critical metaphysics as a “strict discussion of human views, human hypotheses on the essence of things.” Liebmann concentrated on the theories of science and their metaphysical pronouncements or assumptions. He claimed, for example, that the biological point of view is more than a mere postulation of an as-if; it is a positive affirmation of entelechies. Darwinism abounds with metascientific problems and teleological claims; but not even the transcendental philosopher can escape the problems posed by nature, with its own immanent logic (*Weltlogik*), its dynamic causality that achieves an increase in perfection, even though he knows that every hypothesis and system is a product of the specifically human thinking apparatus. A study of space and time that Liebmann undertook to come to grips with non-Euclidean viewpoints led him to problems that appeared to Windelband as idle fancies.

In dealing with the problem of the multiplicity of subjects, Liebmann developed but did not elaborate upon a distinction between three conceptions of the ego: the metaphysical substrate, an objective never attained by dogmatic metaphysics; the individual ego, a tacit assumption of psychology; and the transcendental ego, a “typical” subject of the intelligence of the human species and a fundamental condition of the empirical world. The problem of psychophysical parallelism led him to postulate a coincidence of natural and logical laws on the metaphysical plane of *natura naturans*, but he did not draw the necessary methodological distinctions to adequately treat this problem.

See also Avenarius, Richard; Darwinism; Determinism and Freedom; Fichte, Johann Gottlieb; German Philosophy; Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich; Herbart, Johann Friedrich; Kant, Immanuel; Natural Law; Neo-Kantianism; Schiller, Friedrich; Schopenhauer, Arthur; Windelband, Wilhelm.

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LIFE, MEANING AND VALUE OF

To the questions “Is human life ever worthwhile?” and “Does (or can) human life have any meaning?” many religious thinkers have offered affirmative answers with the proviso that these answers would not be justified unless two of the basic propositions of most Western religions were true—that human life is part of a divinely ordained cosmic scheme and that after death at least some human beings will be rewarded with eternal bliss. Thus, commenting on Bertrand Russell’s statement that not only must each individual human life come to an end but that life in general will eventually die out, C. H. D. Clark contrasts this “doctrine of despair” with the beauty of the Christian scheme. “If we are asked to believe that all our striving is without final consequence,” then “life is meaningless and it scarcely matters how we live if all will end in the dust of death.” According to Christianity, on the other hand, “each action has vital significance.” Clark assures us that “God’s grand design is life eternal for those who walk in the steps of Christ. Here is the one grand incentive to good living.... As life is seen to have purpose and meaning, men find release from despair and the fear of death” (*Christianity and Bertrand Russell*, p. 30). In a similar vein, the Jewish existentialist Emil Fackenheim claims that “whatever meaning life acquires” is derived from the encounter between God and man. The meaning thus

conferred upon human life “cannot be understood in terms of some finite human purpose, supposedly more ultimate than the meeting itself. For what could be more ultimate than the Presence of God?” It is true that God is not always “near,” but “times of Divine farness” are by no means devoid of meaning. “Times of Divine nearness do not light up themselves alone. Their meaning extends over all of life.” There is a “dialectic between Divine nearness and Divine farness,” and it points to “an eschatological future in which it is overcome” (“Judaism and the Meaning of Life”).

Among unbelievers not a few maintain that life can be worthwhile and have meaning in some humanly important sense even if the religious world view is rejected. Others, however, agree with the religious theorists that our two questions must be given negative answers if there is no God and if death means personal annihilation. Having rejected the claims of religion, they therefore conclude that life is not worthwhile and that it is devoid of meaning. These writers, to whom we shall refer here as “pessimists,” do not present their judgments as being merely expressions of certain moods or feelings but as conclusions that are in some sense objectively warranted. They offer reasons for their conclusions and imply that anybody reaching a contradictory conclusion is mistaken or irrational. Most pessimists do not make any clear separation between the statements that life is not worthwhile and that life is without meaning. They usually speak of the “futility” or the “vanity” of life, and presumably they mean by this both that life is not worth living and that it has no meaning. For the time being we, too, shall treat these statements as if they were equivalent. However, later we shall see that in certain contexts it becomes important to distinguish between them.

Our main concern in this entry will be to appraise pessimism as just defined. We shall not discuss either the question whether life is part of a divinely ordained plan or the question whether we survive our bodily death. Our question will be whether the pessimistic conclusions are justified if belief in God and immortality are rejected.

SCHOPENHAUER'S ARGUMENTS

Let us begin with a study of the arguments offered by the pessimists, remembering that many of these are indirectly endorsed by religious apologists. The most systematic and probably the most influential, though in fact not the gloomiest, of the pessimists was Arthur Schopenhauer. The world, he wrote, is something that ought not to exist: The truth is that “we have not to rejoice but rather to mourn at the existence of the world; that its non-

existence would be preferable to its existence; that it is something which ought not to be.” It is absurd to speak of life as a gift, as so many philosophers and thoughtless people have done. “It is evident that everyone would have declined such a gift if he could have seen it and tested it beforehand.” To those who assure us that life is only a lesson, we are entitled to reply: “For this very reason I wish I had been left in the peace of the all-sufficient nothing, where I would have no need of lessons or of anything else” (*The World as Will and Idea*, Vol. III, p. 390).

Schopenhauer offers numerous arguments for his conclusion. Some of these are purely metaphysical and are based on his particular system. Others, however, are of a more empirical character and are logically independent of his brand of metaphysical voluntarism. Happiness, according to Schopenhauer, is unobtainable for the vast majority of humankind. “Everything in life shows that earthly happiness is destined to be frustrated or recognized as illusion.” People either fail to achieve the ends they are striving for or else they do achieve them only to find them grossly disappointing. But as soon as a man discovers that a particular goal was not really worth pursuing, his eye is set on a new one and the same illusory quest begins all over again. Happiness, accordingly, always lies in the future or in the past, and “the present may be compared to a small dark cloud which the wind drives over the sunny plain: before and behind it all is bright, only it itself always casts a shadow. The present is therefore always insufficient; but the future is uncertain, and the past is irrevocable” (*ibid.*, p. 383). Men in general, except for those sufficiently rational to become totally resigned, are constantly deluded—“now by hope, now by what was hoped for.” They are taken in by “the enchantment of distance,” which shows them “paradises.” These paradises, however, vanish like “optical illusions when we have allowed ourselves to be mocked by them.” The “fearful envy” excited in most men by the thought that somebody else is genuinely happy shows how unhappy they really are, whatever they pretend to others or to themselves. It is only “because they feel themselves unhappy” that “men cannot endure the sight of one whom they imagine happy.”

On occasions Schopenhauer is ready to concede that some few human beings really do achieve “comparative” happiness, but this is not of any great consequence. For aside from being “rare exceptions,” these happy people are really like “decoy birds”—they represent a possibility that must exist in order to lure the rest of humankind into a false sense of hope. Moreover, happiness, insofar as it exists at all, is a purely “negative” reality. We do not

become aware of the greatest blessings of life—health, youth, and freedom—until we have lost them. What is called pleasure or satisfaction is merely the absence of craving or pain. But craving and pain are positive. As for the few happy days of our life—if there are any—we notice them only “after they have given place to unhappy ones.”

Schopenhauer not infrequently lapsed from his doctrine of the “negative” nature of happiness and pleasure into the more common view that their status is just as “positive” as that of unhappiness and pain. But he had additional arguments that do not in any way depend on the theory that happiness and pleasure are negative. Perhaps the most important of these is the argument from the “perishableness” of all good things and the ultimate extinction of all our hopes and achievements in death. All our pleasures and joys “disappear in our hands, and we afterwards ask astonished where they have gone.” Moreover, a joy that no longer exists does not “count”—it counts as little as if it had never been experienced at all:

That which *has been* exists no more; it exists as little as that which has *never* been. But of everything that exists you may say, in the next moment, that it has been. Hence something of great importance in our past is inferior to something of little importance in our present, in that the latter is a *reality*, and related to the former as something to nothing. (“The Vanity of Existence,” in *The Will to Live*, p. 229)

Some people have inferred from this that the enjoyment of the present should be “the supreme object of life.” This is fallacious; for “that which in the next moment exists no more, and vanishes utterly, like a dream, can never be worth a serious effort.”

The final “judgment of nature” is destruction by death. This is “the last proof” that life is a “false path,” that all man’s wishing is “a perversity,” and that “nothing at all is worth our striving, our efforts and struggles.” The conclusion is inescapable: “All good things are vanity, the world in all its ends bankrupt, and life a business which does not cover its expenses” (*The World as Will and Idea*, Vol. III, p. 383).

THE POINTLESSNESS OF IT ALL

Some of Schopenhauer’s arguments can probably be dismissed as the fantasies of a lonely and embittered man who was filled with contempt for humankind and who was singularly incapable of either love or friendship. His own misery, it may be plausibly said, made Schopenhauer

overestimate the unhappiness of human beings. It is frequently, but not universally, true that what is hoped for is found disappointing when it is attained, and while “fearful envy” of other people’s successes is common enough, real sympathy and generosity are not quite so rare as Schopenhauer made them out to be. Furthermore, his doctrine that pleasure is negative while pain is positive, insofar as one can attach any clear meaning to it, seems glaringly false. To this it should be added, however, that some of Schopenhauer’s arguments are far from idiosyncratic and that substantially the same conclusions have been endorsed by men who were neither lonely nor embittered and who did not, as far as one can judge, lack the gift of love or friendship.

DARROW. Clarence Darrow, one of the most compassionate men who ever lived, also concluded that life was an “awful joke.” Like Schopenhauer, Darrow offered as one of his reasons the apparent aimlessness of all that happens. “This weary old world goes on, begetting, with birth and with living and with death,” he remarked in his moving plea for the boy-murderers Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold, “and all of it is blind from the beginning to the end” (*Clarence Darrow—Attorney for the Damned*, edited by A. Weinberg, New York, 1957). Elsewhere he wrote: “Life is like a ship on the sea, tossed by every wave and by every wind; a ship headed for no port and no harbor, with no rudder, no compass, no pilot; simply floating for a time, then lost in the waves” (“Is Life Worth Living?,” p. 43). In addition to the aimlessness of life and the universe, there is the fact of death. “I love my friends,” wrote Darrow, “but they all must come to a tragic end.” Death is more terrible the more one is attached to things in the world. Life, he concludes, is “not worth while,” and he adds (somewhat inconsistently, in view of what he had said earlier) that “it is an unpleasant interruption of nothing, and the best thing you can say of it is that it does not last long” (“Is the Human Race Getting Anywhere?,” p. 53).

TOLSTOY. Lev Tolstoy, unlike Darrow, eventually came to believe in Christianity, or at least in his own idiosyncratic version of Christianity, but for a number of years the only position for which he could see any rational justification was an extreme form of pessimism. During that period (and there is reason to believe that in spite of his later protestations to the contrary, his feelings on this subject never basically changed) Tolstoy was utterly overwhelmed by the thought of his death and the death of those he cared for and, generally, by the transitory nature of all human achievements. “Today or tomorrow,” he

wrote in "A Confession," "sickness and death will come to those I love or to me; nothing will remain but stench and worms. Sooner or later my affairs, whatever they may be, will be forgotten, and I shall not exist. Then why go on making any effort?" Tolstoy likened the fate of man to that of the traveler in the Eastern tale who, pursued by an enraged beast, seeks refuge in a dry well. At the bottom of the well he sees a dragon that has opened its jaws to swallow him. To escape the enraged beast above and the dragon below, he holds onto a twig that is growing in a crack in the well. As he looks around he notices that two mice are gnawing at the stem of the twig. He realizes that very soon the twig will snap and he will fall to his doom, but at the same time he sees some drops of honey on the leaves of the branch and reaches out with his tongue to lick them. "So I too clung to the twig of life, knowing that the dragon of death was inevitably awaiting me, ready to tear me to pieces.... I tried to lick the honey which formerly consoled me, but the honey no longer gave me pleasure.... I only saw the unescapable dragon and the mice, and I could not tear my gaze from them. And this is not a fable but the real unanswerable truth."

These considerations, according to Tolstoy, inevitably lead to the conclusion that life is a "stupid fraud," that no "reasonable meaning" can be given to a single action or to a whole life. To the questions "What is it for?" "What then?" "Why should I live?" the answer is "Nothing can come of it," "Nothing is worth doing," "Life is not worthwhile."

What ways out are available to a human being who finds himself in this "terrible position"? Judging by the conduct of the people he observed, Tolstoy relates that he could see only four possible "solutions." The first is the way of ignorance. People who adopt this solution (chiefly women and very young and very dull people) have simply not or not yet faced the questions that were tormenting him. Once a person has fully realized what death means, this solution is not available to him. The second way is that of "Epicureanism," which consists in admitting the "hopelessness of life" but seizing as many of life's pleasures as possible while they are within reach. It consists in "disregarding the dragon and the mice and licking the honey in the best way, especially if much of it is around." This, Tolstoy adds, is the solution adopted by the majority of the people belonging to his "circle," by which he presumably means the well-to-do intellectuals of his day. Tolstoy rejects this solution because the vast majority of human beings are not well-to-do and hence have little or no honey at their disposal and also because it is a matter of accident whether one is among those who have

honey or those who have not. Moreover, Tolstoy observes, it requires a special "moral dullness," which he himself lacked, to enjoy the honey while knowing the truth about death and the deprivations of the great majority of men. The third solution is suicide. Tolstoy calls this the way of "strength and energy." It is chosen by a few "exceptionally strong and consistent people." After they realize that "it is better to be dead than to be alive, and that it is best of all not to exist," they promptly end the whole "stupid joke." The means for ending it are readily at hand for everybody, but most people are too cowardly or too irrational to avail themselves of them. Finally, there is the way of "weakness." This consists in seeing the dreadful truth and clinging to life nevertheless. People of this kind lack the strength to act rationally and Tolstoy adds that he belonged to this last category.

STRENGTHS OF THE PESSIMIST POSITION. Is it possible for somebody who shares the pessimists' rejection of religion to reach different conclusions without being plainly irrational? Whatever reply may be possible, any intelligent and realistic person would surely have to concede that there is much truth in the pessimists' claims. That few people achieve real and lasting happiness, that the joys of life (where there are any) pass away much too soon, that totally unpredictable events frequently upset the best intentions and wreck the noblest plans—this and much more along the same lines is surely undeniable. Although one should not dogmatize that there will be no significant improvements in the future, the fate of past revolutions, undertaken to rid man of some of his apparently avoidable suffering, does not inspire great hope. The thought of death, too, even in those who are not so overwhelmed by it as Tolstoy, can be quite unendurable. Moreover, to many who have reflected on the implications of physical theory it seems plain that because of the constant increase of entropy in the universe all life anywhere will eventually die out. Forebodings of this kind moved Bertrand Russell to write his famous essay "A Free Man's Worship," in which he concluded that "all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins." Similarly, Wilhelm Ostwald observed that "in the longest run the sum of all human endeavor has no recognizable significance." Although it is disputed whether physical theory really has such gloomy implications, it would perhaps be wisest to assume that the position endorsed by Russell and Ostwald is well-founded.

COMPARATIVE VALUE JUDGMENTS ABOUT LIFE AND DEATH

Granting the strong points in the pessimists' claims, it is still possible to detect certain confusions and dubious inferences in their arguments. To begin with, there is a very obvious inconsistency in the way writers like Darrow and Tolstoy arrive at the conclusion that death is better than life. They begin by telling us that death is something terrible because it terminates the possibility of any of the experiences we value. From this they infer that nothing is really worth doing and that death is better than life. Ignoring for the moment the claim that in view of our inevitable death nothing is "worth doing," there very plainly seems to be an inconsistency in first judging death to be such a horrible evil and in asserting later on that death is better than life. Why was death originally judged to be an evil? Surely because it is the termination of life. And if something, y , is bad because it is the termination of something, x , this can be so only if x is good or has positive value. If x were not good, the termination of x would not be bad. One cannot consistently have it both ways.

To this it may be answered that life did have positive value prior to one's realization of death but that once a person has become aware of the inevitability of his destruction life becomes unbearable and that this is the real issue. This point of view is well expressed in the following exchange between Cassius and Brutus in William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (III.i.102–105):

CASSIUS. Why he that cuts off twenty years of life—
Cuts off so many years of fearing death.

BRUTUS. Grant that, and then is death a benefit:
So are we Caesar's friends that have abridged
His time of fearing death.

There is a very simple reply to this argument. Granting that some people after once realizing their doom cannot banish the thought of it from their minds, so much so that it interferes with all their other activities, this is neither inevitable nor at all common. It is, on the contrary, in the opinion of all except some existentialists, morbid and pathological. The realization that one will die does not in the case of most people prevent them from engaging in activities which they regard as valuable or from enjoying the things they used to enjoy. To be told that one is not living "authentically" if one does not brood about death day and night is simply to be insulted gratuitously. A person who knows that his talents are not as great as he would wish or that he is not as handsome as he would have liked to be is not usually judged to live "inauthenti-

cally," but on the contrary to be sensible if he does not constantly brood about his limitations and shortcomings and uses whatever talents he does possess to maximum advantage.

There is another and more basic objection to the claim that death is better than life. This objection applies equally to the claim that while death is better than life it would be better still not to have been born in the first place and to the judgment that life is better than death. It should be remembered that we are here concerned with such pronouncements when they are intended not merely as the expression of certain moods but as statements that are in some sense true or objectively warranted. It may be argued that a value comparison—any judgment to the effect that A is better or worse than B or as good as B —makes sense only if *both* A and B are, in the relevant respect, in principle open to inspection. If somebody says, for example, that Elizabeth Taylor is a better actress than Betty Grable, this seems quite intelligible. Or, again, if it is said that life for the Jews is better in the United States than it was in Germany under the Nazis, this also seems readily intelligible. In such cases the terms of the comparison are observable or at any rate describable. These conditions are fulfilled in some cases when value comparisons are made between life and death, but they are not fulfilled in the kind of case with which Tolstoy and the pessimists are concerned. If the conception of an afterlife is intelligible, then it would make sense for a believer or for somebody who has not made up his mind to say such things as "Death cannot be worse than this life" or "I wonder if it will be any better for me after I am dead." Achilles, in the *Iliad*, was not making a senseless comparison when he exclaimed that he would rather act

... as a serf of another,

A man of little possessions, with scanty means of subsistence,

Than rule as a ghostly monarch the ghosts of all the departed.

Again, the survivors can meaningfully say about a deceased individual "It is better (for the world) that he is dead" or the opposite. For the person himself, however, if there is no afterlife, death is not a possible object of observation or experience, and statements by him that his own life is better than, as good as, or worse than his own death, unless they are intended to be no more than expressions of certain wishes or moods, must be dismissed as senseless. At first sight the contention that in the circumstances under discussion value comparisons between life and death are senseless may seem implausible because of the widespread tendency to think of death as a shadowy kind

of life—as sleep, rest, or some kind of homecoming. Such “descriptions” may be admirable as poetry or consolation, but taken literally they are simply false.

IRRELEVANCE OF THE DISTANT FUTURE

These considerations do not, however, carry us very far. They do not show either that life is worth living or that it “has meaning.” Before tackling these problems directly, something should perhaps be said about the curious and totally arbitrary preference of the future to the present, to which writers such as Tolstoy and Darrow are committed without realizing it. Darrow implies that life would not be “futile” if it were not an endless cycle of the same kind of activities and if instead it were like a journey toward a destination. Tolstoy clearly implies that life would be worthwhile, that some of our actions at least would have a “reasonable meaning,” if the present life were followed by eternal bliss. Presumably, what would make life no longer futile as far as Darrow is concerned is some feature of the destination, not merely the fact that it is a destination; and what would make life worthwhile in Tolstoy’s opinion is not merely the eternity of the next life but the “bliss” that it would confer—eternal misery and torture would hardly do. About the bliss in the next life, if there is such a next life, Tolstoy shows no inclination to ask “What for?” or “So what?” But if bliss in the next life is not in need of any further justification, why should any bliss that there might be in the present life need justification?

THE LOGIC OF VALUE JUDGMENTS. Many of the pessimists appear to be confused about the logic of value judgments. It makes sense for a person to ask about something “Is it really worthwhile?” or “Is it really worth the trouble?” if he does not regard it as intrinsically valuable or if he is weighing it against another good with which it may be in conflict. It does not make sense to ask such a question about something he regards as valuable in its own right and where there is no conflict with the attainment of any other good. (This observation, it should be noted, is quite independent of what view one takes of the logical status of intrinsic value judgments.) A person driving to the beach on a crowded Sunday, may, upon finally getting there, reflect on whether the trip was really worthwhile. Or, after undertaking a series of medical treatments, somebody may ask whether it was worth the time and the money involved. Such questions make sense because the discomforts of a car ride and the time and money spent on medical treatments are not usually judged to be valuable for their own sake. Again, a woman

who has given up a career as a physician in order to raise a family may ask herself whether it was worthwhile, and in this case the question would make sense not because she regards the raising of a family as no more than a means, but because she is weighing it against another good. However, if somebody is very happy, for any number of reasons—because he is in love, because he won the Nobel Prize, because his child recovered from a serious illness—and if this happiness does not prevent him from doing or experiencing anything else he regards as valuable, it would not occur to him to ask “Is it worthwhile?” Indeed, this question would be incomprehensible to him, just as Tolstoy himself would presumably not have known what to make of the question had it been raised about the bliss in the hereafter.

It is worth recalling here that we live not in the distant future but in the present and also, in a sense, in the relatively near future. To bring the subject down to earth, let us consider some everyday occurrences: A man with a toothache goes to a dentist, and the dentist helps him so that the toothache disappears. A man is falsely accused of a crime and is faced with the possibility of a severe sentence as well as with the loss of his reputation; with the help of a devoted attorney his innocence is established, and he is acquitted. It is true that a hundred years later all of the participants in these events will be dead and none of them will then be able to enjoy the fruits of any of the efforts involved. But this most emphatically does not imply that the dentist’s efforts were not worthwhile or that the attorney’s work was not worth doing. To bring in considerations of what will or will not happen in the remote future is, in such and many other though certainly not in all human situations, totally irrelevant. Not only is the finality of death irrelevant here; equally irrelevant are the facts, if they are facts, that life is an endless cycle of the same kind of activities and that the history of the universe is not a drama with a happy ending.

This is, incidentally, also the answer to religious apologists like C. H. D. Clark who maintain that all striving is pointless if it is “without final consequence” and that “it scarcely matters how we live if all will end in the dust of death.” Striving is not pointless if it achieves what it is intended to achieve even if it is without final consequence, and it matters a great deal how we live if we have certain standards and goals, although we cannot avoid “the dust of death.”

THE VANISHED PAST. In asserting the worthlessness of life Schopenhauer remarked that “what has been exists as little as what has never been” and that “something of great

importance now past is inferior to something of little importance now present.” Several comments are in order here. To begin with, if Schopenhauer is right, it must work both ways: If only the present counts, then past sorrows no less than past pleasures do not “count.” Furthermore, the question whether “something of great importance now past is inferior to something of little importance now present” is not, as Schopenhauer supposed, a straightforward question of fact but rather one of valuation, and different answers, none of which can be said to be mistaken, will be given by different people according to their circumstances and interests. Viktor Frankl, the founder of “logotherapy,” has compared the pessimist to a man who observes, with fear and sadness, how his wall calendar grows thinner and thinner as he removes a sheet from it every day. The kind of person whom Frankl admires, on the other hand, “files each successive leaf neatly away with its predecessors” and reflects “with pride and joy” on all the richness represented by the leaves removed from the calendar. Such a person will not in old age envy the young. “No, thank you,” he will think. “Instead of possibilities, I have realities in my past” (*Man’s Search for Meaning*, pp. 192–193).

This passage is quoted not because it contains any great wisdom but because it illustrates that we are concerned here not with judgments of fact but with value judgments and that Schopenhauer’s is not the only one that is possible. Nevertheless, his remarks are, perhaps, a healthy antidote to the cheap consolation and the attempts to cover up deep and inevitable misery that are the stock in trade of a great deal of popular psychology. Although Schopenhauer’s judgments about the inferior value of the past cannot be treated as objectively true propositions, they express only too well what a great many human beings are bound to feel on certain occasions. To a man dying of cancer it is small consolation to reflect that there was a time when he was happy and flourishing; and while there are undoubtedly some old people who do not envy the young, it may be suspected that more often the kind of talk advocated by the prophets of positive thinking is a mask for envy and a defense against exceedingly painful feelings of regret and helplessness in the face of aging and death and the now-unalterable past.

THE MEANINGS OF THE “MEANING OF LIFE”

Let us now turn to the question whether, given the rejection of belief in God and immortality, life can nevertheless have any “meaning” or “significance.” Kurt Baier has

called attention to two very different senses in which people use these expressions and to the confusions that result when they are not kept apart. Sometimes when a person asks whether life has any meaning, what he wants to know is whether there is a superhuman intelligence that fashioned human beings along with other objects in the world to serve some end—whether their role is perhaps analogous to the part of an instrument (or its player) in a symphony. People who ask whether history has a meaning often use the word in the same sense. When Macbeth exclaimed that life “is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/Signifying nothing,” he was answering this cosmic question in the negative. His point evidently was not that human life is part of a scheme designed by a superhuman idiot but that it is not part of any design. Similarly, when Fred Hoyle, in his book *The Nature of the Universe* (rev. ed., New York, 1960), turns to what he calls “the deeper issues” and remarks that we find ourselves in a “dreadful situation” in which there is “scarcely a clue as to whether our existence has any real significance,” he is using the word *significance* in this cosmic sense.

On the other hand, when we ask whether a particular person’s life has or had any meaning, we are usually concerned not with cosmic issues but with the question whether certain purposes are to be found in his life. Thus, most of us would say without hesitation that a person’s life had meaning if we knew that he devoted himself to a cause (such as the spread of Christianity or communism or the reform of mental institutions), or we would at least be ready to say that it “acquired meaning” once he became sufficiently attached to his cause. Whether we approve of what they did or not, most of us would be ready to admit—to take some random examples—that Dorothea Dix, Louis Pasteur, V. I. Lenin, Margaret Sanger, Anthony Comstock, and Winston Churchill led meaningful lives. We seem to mean two things in characterizing such lives as meaningful: We assert, first, that the life in question had some dominant, overall goal or goals that gave direction to a great many of the individual’s actions and, second, that these actions and possibly others not immediately related to the overriding goal were performed with a special zest that was not present before the person became attached to his goal or that would not have been present if there had been no such goal in his life.

It is not necessary, however, that a person should be devoted to a cause, in the sense just indicated, before we call his life meaningful. It is sufficient that he should have some attachments that are not too shallow. This last expression is of course rather vague, but so is the use of

the word *meaning* when applied to human lives. Since the depth or shallowness of an attachment is a matter of degree, it makes perfectly good sense to speak of degrees of meaning in this context. Thus, C. G. Jung writes that in the lives of his patients there never was “sufficient meaning” (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, New York and Toronto, 1963, p. 140). There is nothing odd in such a locution, and there is equally nothing odd in saying about a man who has made a partial recovery from a deep depression that there is now again “some” meaning in his life.

Although frequently when people say about somebody that his life has or had meaning, they evidently regard this as a good thing, this is not invariably the case. One might express this point in the following way: Saying that attachment to a certain goal has made a man’s life meaningful is not tantamount to saying that the acts to which the goal has given direction are of positive value. A man might himself observe—and there would be nothing logically odd about it—“As long as I was a convinced Nazi (or communist or Christian or whatever) my life had meaning, my acts had a zest with which I have not been able to invest them since, and yet most of my actions were extremely harmful.” Even while fully devoted to his cause or goal the person need not, and frequently does not, regard it as intrinsically valuable. If challenged he will usually justify the attachment to his goal by reference to more fundamental value judgments. Thus, somebody devoted to communism or to medical research or to the dissemination of birth-control information will in all likelihood justify his devotion in terms of the production of happiness and the reduction of suffering, and somebody devoted to Christianity will probably justify his devotion by reference to the will of God.

Let us refer to the first of the two senses we have been discussing as the “cosmic” sense and to the second as the “terrestrial” sense. (These are by no means the only senses in which philosophers and others have used the word *meaning* when they have spoken of the meaning or meaninglessness of life, but for our purposes it is sufficient to take account of these two senses.) Now if the theory of cosmic design is rejected it immediately follows that human life has no meaning in the first or cosmic sense. It does not follow in the least, however, that a particular human life is meaningless in the second, or terrestrial, sense. This conclusion has been very clearly summarized by Baier: “Your life or mine may or may not have meaning (in one sense),” he writes, “even if life as such has none (in the other).... The Christian view guarantees a meaning (in one sense) to every life, the scientific view [what

we have simply been calling the unbeliever’s position] does not in any sense” (*The Meaning of Life*, p. 28). In the terrestrial sense it will be an open question whether an individual’s life has meaning or not, to be decided by the particular circumstances of his existence. It may indeed be the case that once a person comes to believe that life has no meaning in the cosmic sense his attachment to terrestrial goals will be undermined to such an extent that his life will cease to be meaningful in the other sense as well. However, it seems very plain that this is by no means what invariably happens, and even if it did invariably happen the meaninglessness of a given person’s life in the terrestrial sense would not logically follow from the fact, if it is a fact, that life is meaningless in the cosmic sense.

This is perhaps the place to add a few words of protest against the rhetorical exaggerations of certain theological writers. Fackenheim’s statement, quoted earlier, that “whatever meaning life acquires, it derives from the encounter between God and man” is typical of many theological pronouncements. Statements of this kind are objectionable on several grounds. Let us assume that there is a God and that meetings between God and certain human beings do take place; let us also grant that activities commanded by God in these meetings “acquire meaning” by being or becoming means to the end of pleasing or obeying God. Granting all this, it does not follow that obedience of God is the only possible unifying goal. It would be preposterous to maintain that the lives of all unbelievers have been lacking in such goals and almost as preposterous to maintain that the lives of believers never contain unifying goals other than obedience of God. There have been devout men who were also attached to the advance of science, to the practice of medicine, or to social reform and who regarded these ends as worth pursuing independently of any divine commandments. Furthermore, there is really no good reason to grant that the life of a particular person becomes meaningful in the terrestrial sense just because human life in general has meaning in the cosmic sense. If a superhuman being has a plan in which I am included, this fact will make (or help to make) my life meaningful in the terrestrial sense only if I know the plan and approve of it and of my place in it, so that working toward the realization of the plan gives direction to my actions.

IS HUMAN LIFE EVER WORTHWHILE?

Let us now turn to the question of whether life is ever worth living. This also appears to be denied by the pessimists when they speak of the vanity or the futility of human life. We shall see that in a sense it cannot be estab-

lished that the pessimists are “mistaken,” but it is also quite easy to show that in at least two senses that seem to be of importance to many people, human lives frequently are worth living. To this end, let us consider under what circumstances a person is likely to raise the question “Is my life (still) worthwhile?” and what is liable to provoke somebody into making a statement like “My life has ceased to be worth living.” We saw in an earlier section that when we say of certain acts, such as the efforts of a dentist or a lawyer, that they were worthwhile we are claiming that they achieved certain goals. Something similar seems to be involved when we say that a person’s life is (still) worthwhile or worth living. We seem to be making two assertions: First, that the person has some goals (other than merely to be dead or to have his pains eased) which do not seem to him to be trivial and, second, that there is some genuine possibility that he will attain these goals. These observations are confirmed by various systematic studies of people who contemplated suicide, of others who unsuccessfully attempted suicide, and of situations in which people did commit suicide. When the subjects of these studies declared that their lives were no longer worth living they generally meant either that there was nothing left in their lives about which they seriously cared or that there was no real likelihood of attaining any of the goals that mattered to them. It should be noted that in this sense an individual may well be mistaken in his assertion that his life is or is not worthwhile any longer: He may, for example, mistake a temporary indisposition for a more permanent loss of interest, or, more likely, he may falsely estimate his chances of achieving the ends he wishes to attain.

DIFFERENT SENSES OF “WORTHWHILE.” According to the account given so far, one is saying much the same thing in declaring a life to be worthwhile and in asserting that it has meaning in the “terrestrial” sense of the word. There is, however, an interesting difference. When we say that a person’s life has meaning (in the terrestrial sense) we are not committed to the claim that the goal or goals to which he is devoted have any positive value. (This is a slight oversimplification, assuming greater uniformity in the use of “meaning of life” than actually exists, but it will not seriously affect any of the controversial issues discussed here.) The question “As long as his life was dedicated to the spread of communism it had meaning *to him*, but was it really meaningful?” seems to be senseless. We are inclined to say, “If his life had meaning to him, then it had meaning—that’s all there is to it.” We are not inclined (or we are much less inclined) to say something of this kind when we speak of the worth of a person’s life. We

might say—for example, of someone like Adolf Eichmann—“While he was carrying out the extermination program, his life *seemed* worthwhile to him, but since his goal was so horrible, his life *was not* worthwhile.” One might perhaps distinguish between a “subjective” and an “objective” sense of “worthwhile.” In the subjective sense, saying that a person’s life is worthwhile simply means that he is attached to some goals that he does not consider trivial and that these goals are attainable for him. In declaring that somebody’s life is worthwhile in the objective sense, one is saying that he is attached to certain goals which are both attainable and of positive value.

It may be held that unless one accepts some kind of rationalist or intuitionist view of fundamental value judgments one would have to conclude that in the objective sense of “worthwhile” no human life (and indeed no human action) could ever be shown to be worthwhile. There is no need to enter here into a discussion of any controversial questions about the logical status of fundamental value judgments. But it may be pointed out that somebody who favors a subjectivist or emotivist account can quite consistently allow for the distinction between ends that only seem to have positive value and those that really do. To mention just one way in which this could be done: One may distinguish between ends that would be approved by rational and sympathetic human beings and those that do not carry such an endorsement. One may then argue that when we condemn such a life as Eichmann’s as not being worthwhile we mean not that the ends to which he devoted himself possess some nonnatural characteristic of badness but that no rational or sympathetic person would approve of them.

THE PESSIMISTS’ SPECIAL STANDARDS. The unexciting conclusion of this discussion is that some human lives are at certain times not worthwhile in either of the two senses we have distinguished, that some are worthwhile in the subjective but not in the objective sense, some in the objective but not in the subjective sense, and some are worthwhile in both senses. The unexcitingness of this conclusion is not a reason for rejecting it, but some readers may question whether it meets the challenge of the pessimists. The pessimist, it may be countered, surely does not deny the plain fact that human beings are on occasions attached to goals which do not seem to them trivial, and it is also not essential to his position to deny (and most pessimists do not in fact deny) that these goals are sometimes attainable. The pessimist may even allow that in a superficial (“immediate”) sense the goals which people try to achieve are of positive value, but he would add that because our lives are not followed by eternal bliss

they are not “really” or “ultimately” worthwhile. If this is so, then the situation may be characterized by saying that the ordinary man and the pessimist do not mean the same by “worthwhile,” or that they do mean the same in that both use it as a positive value expression but that their standards are different: The standards of the pessimist are very much more demanding than those of most ordinary people.

Anybody who agrees that death is final will have to concede that the pessimist is not mistaken in his contention that judged by his standards, life is never worthwhile. However, the pessimist is mistaken if he concludes, as frequently happens, that life is not worthwhile by ordinary standards because it is not worthwhile by his standards. Furthermore, setting aside the objection mentioned earlier (that there is something arbitrary about maintaining that eternal bliss makes life worthwhile but not allowing this role to bliss in the present life), one may justifiably ask why one should abandon ordinary standards in favor of those of the pessimist. Ordinarily, when somebody changes standards (for example, when a school raises or lowers its standards of admission) such a change can be supported by reasons.

But how can the pessimist justify his special standards? It should be pointed out here that our ordinary standards do something for us which the pessimist's standards do not: They guide our choices, and as long as we live we can hardly help making choices. It is true that in one type of situation the pessimist's standards also afford guidance—namely, in deciding whether to go on living. It is notorious, however, that whether or not they are, by their own standards, rational in this, most pessimists do not commit suicide. They are then faced with much the same choices as other people. In these situations their own demanding standards are of no use, and in fact they avail themselves of the ordinary standards. Schopenhauer, for example, believed that if he had hidden his antireligious views he would have had no difficulty in obtaining an academic appointment and other worldly honors. He may have been mistaken in this belief, but in any event his actions indicate that he regarded intellectual honesty as worthwhile in a sense in which worldly honors were not. Again, when Darrow had the choice between continuing as counsel for the Chicago and North Western Railway and taking on the defense of Eugene V. Debs and his harassed and persecuted American Railway Union, he did not hesitate to choose the latter, apparently regarding it as worthwhile to go to the assistance of the suppressed and not worthwhile to aid the suppressor. In other words, although no human action is worthwhile, some human

actions and presumably some human lives are less unworthwhile than others.

IS THE UNIVERSE BETTER WITH HUMAN LIFE THAN WITHOUT IT?

We have not—at least not explicitly—discussed the claims of Schopenhauer, Eduard von Hartmann, and other pessimists that the nonexistence of the world would be better than its existence, by which they mean that a world without human life would be better than one with it.

ARGUMENTS OF A PHENOMENOLOGIST. Some writers do not think that life can be shown to have meaning in any philosophically significant sense unless an affirmative answer to this question can be justified. Thus, in his booklet *Der Sinn unseres Daseins* the German phenomenologist Hans Reiner distinguishes between the everyday question about what he calls the “need-conditioned” meaning of life, which arises only for a person who is already in existence and has certain needs and desires, and the question about the meaning of human life in general. The latter question arises in concrete form when a responsible person is faced with the *Zeugungsproblem*—the question whether he should bring a child into the world. Reiner allows that a person's life has meaning in the former or “merely subjective” sense as long as his ordinary goals (chiefly his desire for happiness) are attained. This, however, does not mean that his life has an “objective” or “existential” (*seinshaft*) meaning—a significance or meaning that “attaches to life as such” and which, unlike the need-conditioned meaning, cannot be destroyed by any accident of fate. The philosopher, according to Reiner, is primarily concerned with the question of whether life has meaning in this objective or existential sense. “Our search for the meaning of our life,” Reiner writes, “is identical with the search for a logically compelling reason (*einen einsichtigen Grund*) why it is better for us to exist than not to exist” (*Der Sinn unseres Daseins*, p. 27). Again, the real question is “whether it is better that mankind should exist than that there should be a world without any human life” (p. 31). It may be questioned whether this is what anybody normally means when he asks whether life has any meaning, but Reiner certainly addresses himself to one of the questions raised by Schopenhauer and other pessimists that ought to be discussed here.

Reiner believes that he can provide a “logically compelling reason” why a world with human life is better than one without it. He begins by pointing out that men differ

from animals by being, among other things, “moral individuals.” To be a moral individual is to be part of the human community and to be actively concerned in the life of other human beings. It is indeed undeniable that people frequently fail to bring about the ends of morally inspired acts or wishes, but phenomenological analysis discloses that “the real moral value and meaning” of an act does not depend on the attainment of the “external goal.” As Immanuel Kant correctly pointed out, the decisive factor is “the good will,” the moral intent or attitude. It is here that we find the existential meaning of life: “Since that which is morally good contains its meaning and value within itself, it follows that it is intrinsically worth while. The existence of what is morally good is therefore better than its non-existence.” (*Der Sinn unseres Daseins*, pp. 54–55). But the existence of what is morally good is essentially connected with the existence of free moral individuals, and hence it follows that the existence of human beings as moral agents is better than their nonexistence.

Unlike happiness, which constitutes the meaning of life in the everyday or need-conditioned sense, the morally good does not depend on the accidents of life. It is not within a person’s power to be happy, but it is “essentially” (*grundsätzlich*) in everybody’s power to do what is good. Furthermore, while all happiness is subjective and transitory, leaving behind it no more than a “melancholy echo,” the good has eternal value. Nobody would dream of honoring and respecting a person for his happiness or prosperity. On the other hand, we honor every good deed and the expression of every moral attitude, even if it took place in a distant land and among a foreign people. If we discover a good act or a good attitude in an enemy we nevertheless respect it and cannot help deriving a certain satisfaction from its existence. The same is true of good deeds carried out in ages long past. In all this the essentially timeless nature of morality becomes evident. Good deeds cease to exist as historical events only; their value, on the other hand, has eternal reality and is collected as an indestructible “fund.” This may be a metaphysical statement, but it is not a piece of “metaphysical speculation.” It simply makes explicit what the experience of the morally good discloses to phenomenological analysis (*Der Sinn unseres Daseins*, pp. 55–57).

REPLIES TO REINER. There is a great deal in this presentation with which one could take issue. If one is not misled by the image of the ever-growing, indestructible “fund,” one may wonder, for example, what could be meant by claiming that the value of a good deed is “eternal,” other than that most human beings tend to approve

of such an action regardless of when or where it took place. However, we are here concerned primarily with the question whether Reiner has met the challenge of the pessimists, and it seems clear that he has not. A pessimist like Schopenhauer or Darrow might provisionally grant the correctness of Reiner’s phenomenological analysis of morality but still offer the following rejoinder: The inevitable misery of all or nearly all human beings is so great that even if in the course of their lives they have a chance to preserve their inner moral natures or their good will, the continued torture to which their lives condemn them would not be justified. Given the pessimist’s estimate of human life, this is surely not an unreasonable rejoinder. Even without relying on the pessimist’s description of human life, somebody while accepting Reiner’s phenomenological analysis might reach the opposite conclusion. He might, for example, share the quietist strain of Schopenhauer’s teachings and object to the whole hustle and bustle of life, concluding that the “peace of the all-sufficient nothing”—or, more literally, a universe without human life—was better in spite of the fact that moral deeds could not then be performed. Since he admits the “facts” of morality on which Reiner bases his case but considers the peace of the all-sufficient nothing more valuable than morality, it is not easy to see how an appeal to the latter would show him to be mistaken. What phenomenological analysis has not disclosed, to Reiner or, as far as is known, to anybody else, is that doing good is the only or necessarily the greatest value.

WHY THE PESSIMIST CANNOT BE ANSWERED. The conclusion suggests itself that the pessimist cannot here be refuted, not because what he says is true or even because we do not know who is right and who is wrong but because the question whether a universe with human life is better than one without it does not have any clear meaning unless it is interpreted as a request for a statement of personal preference. The situation seems to be somewhat similar to what we found in the case of the question “Is my life better than my death?” when asked in certain circumstances. In some contexts indeed when we talk about human life in general, the word *better* has a reasonably clear meaning. Thus, if it is maintained that life for the human race will be better than it is now after cancer and mental illness have been conquered, or that human life will be better (or worse) after religion has disappeared, we understand fairly well what is meant, what facts would decide the issue either way. However, we do not really know what would count as evidence for or against the statement “The existence of human life as such is better than its nonexistence.” Sometimes it is

claimed that the question has a fairly clear meaning, namely, whether happiness outweighs unhappiness. Thus, von Hartmann supports his answer that the nonexistence of human life is better than its existence, that in fact an inanimate world would be better than one with life, with the argument that as we descend the scale of civilization and “sensitivity,” we reach ever lower levels of misery. “The individuals of the lower and poorer classes and of ruder nations,” he writes, “are happier than those of the elevated and wealthier classes and of civilized nations, not indeed because they are poorer and have to endure more want and privations, but because they are coarser and duller” (*Philosophy of the Unconscious*, Vol. III, p. 76). The “brutes,” similarly, are “happier (i.e., less miserable)” than man, because “the excess of pain which an animal has to bear is less than that which a man has to bear.” The same principle holds within the world of animals and plants:

How much more painful is the life of the more finely-feeling horse compared with that of the obtuse pig, or with that of the proverbially happy fish in the water, its nervous system being of a grade so far inferior! As the life of a fish is more enviable than that of a horse, so is the life of an oyster than that of a fish, and the life of a plant than that of an oyster. (Ibid.)

The conclusion is inevitable: The best or least undesirable form of existence is reached when, finally, we “descend beneath the threshold of consciousness”; for only there do we “see individual pain entirely disappear” (*Philosophy of the Unconscious*, Vol. III, pp. 76–77). Schopenhauer, also, addressing himself directly to the “*Zeugungsproblem*,” reaches a negative answer on the ground that unhappiness usually or necessarily outweighs happiness. “Could the human race continue to exist,” he asks (in *Parerga und Paralipomena*, Vol. II, pp. 321–322), if “the generative act were ... an affair of pure rational reflection? Would not rather everyone have so much compassion for the coming generation as to prefer to spare it the burden of existence, or at least be unwilling to take on himself the responsibility of imposing such a burden in cold blood?” In these passages Schopenhauer and von Hartmann assume that in the question “Is a world with human life better than one without human life?” the word *better* must be construed in a hedonistic or utilitarian sense—and the same is true of several other philosophers who do not adopt their pessimistic answer. However, while one may stipulate such a sense for “better” in this context, it is clear that this is not what is meant prior to the stipulation. Benedict de Spinoza, for example, taught that the

most miserable form of existence is preferable to nonexistence. Perhaps few who have directly observed the worst agonies and tortures that may be the lot of human beings or of animals would subscribe to this judgment, but Spinoza can hardly be accused of a self-contradictory error. Again, Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy is usually and quite accurately described as an affirmation of life, but Nietzsche was very careful not to play down the horrors of much of life. While he did not endorse Schopenhauer’s value judgments, he thought that, by and large, Schopenhauer had not been far wrong in his description of the miseries of the human scene. In effect Nietzsche maintained that even though unhappiness is more prevalent than happiness, the existence of life is nevertheless better than its nonexistence, and this surely is not a self-contradiction.

It is important to point out what does not follow from the admission that in a nonarbitrary sense of “better,” the existence of the human race cannot be shown to be better than its nonexistence: It does not follow that I or anybody else cannot or should not prefer the continued existence of the human race to its nonexistence or my own life to my death, and it does not follow that I or anybody else cannot or should not enjoy himself or that I or anybody else is “irrational” in any of these preferences. It is also impossible to prove that in some nonarbitrary sense of “better,” coffee with cream is better than black coffee, but it does not follow that I cannot or should not prefer or enjoy it or that I am irrational in doing so. There is perhaps something a trifle absurd and obsessive in the need for a “proof” that the existence of life is better than its nonexistence. It resembles the demand to have it “established by argument” that love is better than hate.

Perhaps it would be helpful to summarize the main conclusions reached in this essay:

- (1) In certain familiar senses of “meaning,” which are not usually regarded as trivial, an action or a human life can have meaning quite independently of whether there is a God or whether we shall live forever.
- (2) Writers such as Tolstoy, who, because of the horror that death inspires, conclude that death is better than life, are plainly inconsistent. Moreover, the whole question of whether my life is better than my death, unless it is a question about my preference, seems to be devoid of sense.
- (3) Those who argue that no human action can be worthwhile because we all must eventually die

ignore what may be called the “short-term context” of much of our lives.

- (4) Some human lives are worthwhile in one or both of the two senses in which “worthwhile” is commonly used, when people raise the question of whether a given person’s life is worthwhile. The pessimists who judge human life by more demanding standards are not mistaken when they deny that by their standards no human life is ever worthwhile. However, they are guilty of a fallacious inference if they conclude that for this reason no human life can be worthwhile by the usual standards. Nor is it clear why anybody should embrace their standards in the place of those commonly adopted.
- (5) It appears that the pessimists cannot be answered if in order to answer them one has to be able to prove that in some nonarbitrary sense of the word *better*, the existence of life is better than its nonexistence. But this admission does not have any of the gloomy consequences that it is sometimes believed to entail.

See also Baier, Kurt; Death; Happiness; Hartmann, Eduard von; Jung, Carl Gustav; Kant, Immanuel; Lenin, Vladimir Il’ich; Meaning; Nietzsche, Friedrich; Ostwald, Wilhelm; Pessimism and Optimism; Russell, Bertrand Arthur William; Schopenhauer, Arthur; Suicide; Tolstoy, Lev (Leo) Nikolaevich.

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Eduard von Hartmann’s position is stated in Vol. III of *Die Philosophie des Unbewussten*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1869), translated by W. C. Coupland as *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (London, 1884), in *Zur Geschichte und Begründung des Pessimismus* (Berlin, 1892), and in *Philosophische Fragen der Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Haacke, 1885), Ch. 5. Clarence Darrow’s pessimism is expounded in *The Story of My Life* (New York: Scribners, 1932) and in two pamphlets, “Is Life Worth Living?” and “Is the Human Race Getting Anywhere?” (Girard, KS, no date). Tolstoy’s views are stated in “A Confession,” in *A Confession, the Gospel in Brief and What I Believe*, translated by Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1940). Gloomy implications are derived from the second law of thermodynamics by Bertrand Russell in “A Free Man’s Worship” (1903), which is available in several books, perhaps most conveniently in Russell’s *Mysticism and Logic* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1918), and by Wilhelm Ostwald, *Die Philosophie der Werte* (Leipzig: Kröner, 1913). F. P. Ramsey, in “How I Feel,” in *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1931), agrees with Russell and Ostwald about the physical consequences of the second law but does not share their gloomy response. Stephen Toulmin, “Contemporary Scientific Mythology,” in Toulmin et al., *Metaphysical Beliefs* (London: SCM Press, 1957), questions whether the second law has the physical consequences attributed to it by Russell, Ostwald, and many others. L. J. Russell, “The Meaning of Life,” *Philosophy* 28 (1953): 30–40, contains some interesting criticisms of the view that eternal existence could render any human actions meaningful.

The fullest discussions of the questions of the meaning and value of life by contemporary analytic philosophers are Kurt Baier, *The Meaning of Life* (Canberra, 1957), parts of which are reprinted in *Twentieth Century Philosophy—The Analytic Tradition*, edited by Morris Weitz (New York: Free Press, 1966); Ronald W. Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox* (London: Watts, 1958), Ch. 8; and Antony Flew, “Tolstoi and the Meaning of Life,” in *Ethics* 73 (1963): 110–118. Baier, Hepburn, and Flew support the position that life can be meaningful even if there is no God and no afterlife. This position is also defended in Eugen Dühring, *Der Werth des Leben* (Leipzig, 1881), Chs. 6–7, and more recently in Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness* (New York: Liveright, 1930), Ch. 2; Ernest Nagel, “The Mission of Philosophy,” in *An Outline of Man’s Knowledge of the Modern World*, edited by Lyman Bryson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960); Sidney Hook, “Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life,” in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 33 (1960): 5–26; Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2 vols. (5th rev. ed.,

London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1966), Vol. II, Ch. 25; and Kai Nielsen, "Examination of an Alleged Theological Basis of Morality," in *Iliff Review* 21 (1964): 39–49. Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus are frequently (and rather inaccurately) described as "nihilists," but in effect they also take the position that although the universe is "absurd," human life can be meaningful. Sartre's views are found in *Being and Nothingness*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), Pt. 4. Camus's views are stated in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, translated by Justin O'Brien (New York: Knopf, 1955). Views very similar to those of Sartre and Camus are advocated by Flew and R. W. Hepburn in their BBC discussion "Problems of Perspective," which is printed in *Plain View* 10 (1955): 151–166. C. D. McGee, *The Recovery of Meaning—An Essay on the Good Life* (New York: Random House, 1966), Ch. 1, contains a lively and detailed discussion of some of the issues treated in the present entry. The author reaches similar conclusions but devotes far more attention to the "malaise" that inspires questions about the meaning of life. In a similar vein, Ilham Dilman, "Life and Meaning," in *Philosophy* 40 (1965): 320–333, concentrates on the psychological situations that prompt people to ask whether their own lives or the lives of others have meaning. Moritz Schlick, *Vom Sinn des Lebens* (Berlin, 1927), is concerned primarily with psychological questions, arguing that modern life tends to be spoiled by overemphasis on the achievement of distant goals. Sigmund Freud in several places alludes to the question of the meaning of life and usually dismisses it as senseless and pathological. "The moment a man questions the meaning and value of life," he wrote in a letter to Marie Bonaparte, "he is sick.... By asking this question one is merely admitting to a store of unsatisfied libido to which something else must have happened, a kind of fermentation leading to sadness and depression" (*Letters of Sigmund Freud*, translated by James Stern and Tania Stern, edited by E. L. Freud, New York: Dover, 1960, p. 436).

The Polish Marxist Adam Schaff deals with some of the issues discussed in the present entry in his *A Philosophy of Man* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1963). Schaff's views are criticized from a Christian point of view in Christopher Hollis, "What Is the Purpose of Life?," in *Listener* 70 (1961): 133–136. There is a discussion of the "meaning of life" from the point of view of fascism in Mario Palmieri, *The Philosophy of Fascism* (Chicago: Dante Alighieri Society, 1936). The "phenomenological" position of Hans Reiner, which was discussed in the final section of this entry, is stated in his *Der Sinn unseres Daseins* (Tübingen, 1960). Other more recent German works include *Sinn und Sein*, edited by Richard Wisser (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1960); Reinhart Lauth, *Die Frage nach den Sinn des Daseins* (Munich, 1953); and Johannes Hessen, *Der Sinn des Lebens* (Cologne, 1933).

Psychological studies of people who attempted or who committed suicide are contained in Margarethe von Andics, *Suicide and the Meaning of Life* (London: Hodge, 1947); Louis I. Dublin and Bessie Bunzel, *To Be or Not to Be* (New York: H. Smith and R. Haas, 1933); and E. Stengel, *Suicide and Attempted Suicide* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1965).

Will Durant, *On the Meaning of Life* (New York: R. Long & R.R. Smith, 1932), consists of answers by various eminent men, including Mohandas Gandhi, H. L. Mencken, Russell, and George Bernard Shaw, to the question of what they take to be the meaning of life.

Paul Edwards (1967)

LIFE, MEANING AND VALUE OF [ADDENDUM]

Paul Edwards primarily addresses the "pessimist view" that if there is no God and death is final, life has no meaning. The focus here will be on subsequent philosophical work and on issues he leaves unaddressed. Some account of nonmonotheistic religion (Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and Advaita Vedanta Hinduism) should be given, especially since religious perspectives are now taken more seriously by many in the analytic philosophical tradition.

Thomas Nagel (1986) argues both that (1) human life viewed objectively is insignificant though viewed subjectively is significant and that (2) it is our capacity to recognize both (1) and our constitutional self-absorption, which makes us irreducibly absurd and our lives ironic. Against (1) David Wiggins (2002) argues that for our strivings to matter, even subjectively, there must be something we can "invest with overwhelming *importance*," and that this entails both that values are objective, though "lit up by the focus one brings to the world", and that happiness is not supremely important. Robert Nozick (1989) shares this view and imagines a hermetically sealed "experience machine" that can undetectably provide apparently real and happy experiences involving others. Would a life be better lived inside the machine in a state of perpetual happiness or outside, with the tribulation and joys of genuine connection to others? Nozick argues for the latter, distinguishing between intrinsic value and meaning. The measure of a thing's intrinsic value is the degree of its diversity and the degree of the organic unity of that diversity. Meaning comes from a thing's connection to other things with intrinsic value—the greater their value and the stronger the connection, the greater the meaning. Thus, value is proportional to both internal integration and the strength of external connections to things of great value.

Turning to religious accounts, Philip Quinn (2000) distinguishes axiological and teleological questions. He argues that an integrated life might have intrinsic or "axiological value" though it lacked any overt connection to a