

Keynotes

James Tartaglia: Neutral Nihilism

Existential nihilism, to the effect that human life has no purpose, is usually considered a terrible prospect, such that if it were true, then there would be no reason for us to carry on living. However, ‘Sunny Nihilism’, a popular online phenomenon in recent years, sees nihilism as a source of joy, since it removes the burden of meaning from our lives. I shall argue that both negative and positive evaluations of nihilism are confused, and that if nihilism is true, as I think it is, then this is a non-evaluative, neutral fact about our situation.

Kieran Setiya: Meaning and the Afterlife

Despite its conventional association with philosophy, the question of life’s meaning is often dismissed as nonsense by contemporary philosophers—or replaced with questions about meaningful lives—and for most earlier philosophers, the question doesn’t arise. In this talk, I’ll use the surprisingly recent origins of “the meaning of life” to explain what it could be. Drawing on a Romantic tradition in which the human future stands in for eschatology, I’ll argue that life could have a secular meaning, one that depends on progress towards justice, and thus depends on us.

Tatjana Schnell: An Empirical Approach to Meaning in Life Meaning in life is a latent construct. It cannot be directly observed – neither *in* the person who holds it nor *by* the person who holds it. As interdisciplinary empirical research shows, meaning is attributed when something is perceived as referring to a superordinate level. This is evident on the various levels of human orientation, from perception, action and goals to sources of meaning and meaning in life. The associated processes are subjective but integrated into a psychosocial logic that limits arbitrariness. Meaning in life can be experienced as meaningfulness, crisis of meaning, or existential indifference. Meaningfulness is expressed in four *elements* of meaning: coherence, purpose, significance, and belonging. These can be based on very different *sources* of meaning. A number of studies illustrate which sources of meaning in which configuration are most likely to convey a sense of meaningfulness and which patterns are more likely to be associated with a crisis of meaning or existential indifference. Research thus suggests that people understand and experience meaning in very similar ways - even transculturally. And yet these are subjective, dynamic and relational processes that take place in specific realities of life, namely in the interaction between person, (perception of) situation and (perception of) environment.

Markus Rüter: Meaning Objectivism and the Relativity Challenge

Objectivism is a prominent theory in the meaning-of-life literature, arguing that meaningfulness is entirely contingent on elements with objective value. Theories differ on what constitutes objective value: a widely accepted objectivist view, consequentialism, suggests that producing specific consequences is essential for imparting meaning to life. Various perspectives offer nuanced interpretations of this central claim (Smuts 2013, Bramble 2015). Alternatively, theories often classified under the label deontology argue that some endeavors are inherently worthwhile, irrespective of their outcomes, being "significant in themselves" (Metz 2013, 200; also Wielenberg 2005). Many critiques have been directed at objective theories, targeting either specific forms or their foundational structure (Metz 2013, ch. 10 & 11). My talk will confront a challenge of the latter kind, aiming to question all forms of

objectivism. Specifically, I will examine a challenge suggesting that objectivism fails to accommodate a sufficient amount of value relativity. We might call this the Relativity Challenge. Although this criticism is put forward for different purposes and under different labels (see for instance, Johansson/Svensson 2022), its main tenet can be summarized as follows: Objectivism proposes that we have to meet objective criteria to grant meaningfulness to one's life. This implies that these criteria are normatively binding for everyone, in all situations, and independent of the time spot where one is applying them. However, as critics interject, this does not reflect our common sense intuitions about the relativity of meaningfulness. Determining whether an endeavor is meaningful depends in part on the agent, the circumstances, and the timing. It matters whose actions or lives we are evaluating, under which circumstances they are, and at what point in time they are acting. Thus, they conclude, objectivism cannot be correct. In my talk, I will argue that this line of criticism is an overstatement and that objectivism is more capable of addressing the Relativity Challenge than is often assumed. To demonstrate this, I will follow these steps: First, I will clarify my understanding of the basic terms "meaningfulness" and "objectivism". Second, I will outline the basic structure of the Relativity Challenge and how it is represented in the literature. Third, I will illustrate how objectivism can meet the challenge. Here, I draw on ideas from Derek Parfit (2011) and Jamie Dreier (2018), particularly the concept that values may have indexical references (e.g., to persons, times, places, or worlds). This, I assume, allows objectivism to accommodate many intuitions on the relativity of value without forsaking its foundational stance. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of this integration, mention further challenges for objectivism, and suggest future research directions.

Ellie Palmer: Morality and the Posthumous Self

Prior to the growing global secularisation, the belief in the afterlife, immortality, something akin to the 'soul', and some form of persistence of our existence post-bodily-death were common worldviews embraced across a wide array of cultural and religious traditions. However, as the world gradually loses faith in any God, these ideas traditionally associated with religiosity are simultaneously lost, resulting in a shift in how human beings perceive death. Whilst it is now less common for us in a more secular society not to presume the existence of the soul, Cartesian dualist sentiments remain. We have hung onto the Platonic notion propelled by the Cartesians that the soul is not dependent on the physical body; all we have done is replace 'soul' for 'self'. We have developed a supremacy of mind over body which has created a disconnect between our selves and the world, leading to a general lack of concern for the external, physical realm in which our bodies, other people and the environment are situated, thus creating the perfect breeding ground for a starkly individualistic societal system of ethics to prevail. In an age plagued by global conflict and the impending climate crisis, the necessity to address this disjunct could not be more prevalent. One brick-wall frequently faced by ethicists is translating any concern into practice with a species that is hardwired to prioritise its own self-centred interests. I argue, however, that there is another way to frame one's thinking such that care for the external world, and our moral actions reflecting this, is intrinsic: through the reframing of self as essentially spatial and relational, and ultimately temporally extended beyond the death of our consciousness. The adoption of this view enables us to stop restricting our desires, commitments and goals to avoid those which are potentially threatened by our own deaths or unable to be achieved within our lifetime, greatly altering the meaning of our lives. Ultimately, referring to the Japanese concept of 'aidagara' or 'betweenness', I claim that the

understanding self in this spatial, interconnected and temporally extended way in turn helps to expand the sphere of things that we care about and therefore leads to more future and community-minded ethics.

François-Lucien Vulliermet: Inamorata: Love, Loss, and the Meaning of Life

While the question of life's meaning is paramount, centuries of philosophy have not brought a decisive answer. Despite the importance and relevance of the question, there is no clear answer to what the objective extrinsic meaning of life would be, notwithstanding that it may very be possible that there is not such of a thing as a "true life's meaning." Leaving aside the more metaphysical aspects of the question, this paper looks at the question from a more practical perspective grounded on the assumption that, to live, life's meaning is necessary. Not having a metaphysical answer does not prevent people from trying to define; from having an understanding and a conception of what the meaning of life is. Love is one of life's essential component, be it envisioned as an ideal, or from a more practical perspective in every day's life. With this idea in mind, this paper suggests a typology of life's meaning based on the reactions in face of a lost love. As a matter of fact, if love, for many, embeds a vision, an objective of life, losing it means much more than losing a relationship or a loved one: it equals losing some of life's meanings, which is necessary to live. Thus, the paper suggests that life's meaning comes at the intersection of four cardinal points: - Faith, emphasizing life's meaning in the perspective of a following one - Death, as acknowledging life is meaning-less - (Life)Lust, for which the body encapsulates all possible meaning - Reason, locating meaning in the exercise of mental faculties quintessentially human The typology established, or the framework proposed, aims at capturing any divergent existing conceptions universally as linked to one of them, and only diverging in some minor specificities.

Jozef Majernik: "Life as an Experiment" in Nietzsche's Gay Science

When it comes to the issue of meaning of life after the death of God, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche formulated multiple very interesting proposals. The best known of these are the 'existentialist' conceptions of "be yourself!" (Schopenhauer as Educator) and "becoming what one is" (especially in *Ecce Homo*) that encourage us to unfold the productive uniqueness inherent in each of us. In this paper I will, however, focus on a less well known Nietzschean conception of leading one's life: namely the idea of life as "an experiment of the seeker for knowledge" (*The Gay Science* § 324). This idea points toward an ethos of experimentalism, which involves trying out different practices of self-formation and even entire ways of life with the goal of finding such conditions of everyday existence and conduct of life as are most conducive to one's active and productive happiness. Book IV of *The Gay Science*, the original conclusion of Nietzsche's "free spirit" trilogy, is a prime locus of this conception of the free-spirited life as experimental self-formation. Of particular importance are, among others, §§ 289–290 on the justification of and satisfaction with one's way of life, §§ 304–308 on the primacy of activity and everydayness, and the concluding aphorisms (§§ 340–342), which present the reader with a series of challenges by which various ways of life can be assessed. Through a discussion of these and related key passages, I will elucidate the notion of

experimentalism on three levels: as 1) an overall justification of our existence that does not depend on any higher authority, and thus an emancipation from the Christian God; 2) a way of seeking a morality or a plan for life that suits our nature or character; and 3) experimenting with the conditions in which we live and work on a daily basis, in the most immediate and practical sense. Nietzschean experimentalism thus provides a novel form of meaning for individual human life which is particularly well suited for our period and for the intellectually curious among us.

Roland Kipke: Meaning in the Life of Children

Are children able to live meaningful lives? Surprisingly, this question is rarely addressed in the philosophical debate about meaning in life. Children are often mentioned, but usually only in terms of their contribution to the meaningfulness of adult's lives. (Grand)Children are also mentioned when it comes to what remains after our death. In neither case, however, do children appear as subjects of meaningful lives. Is the answer to this question so obvious as to be uninteresting? This is unlikely because different theories of meaningful life give different answers, at least implicitly. While some theories, especially subjectivist ones, have no difficulty in attributing to children the possibility of a meaningful life, some objectivist theories implicitly exclude this by their conditions of meaningfulness. For example, when they make certain higher cognitive abilities or, like some narrative theories, certain life trajectories a condition of a meaningful life. To answer the question of whether children can live meaningful lives, one could apply a certain theory. In my talk, however, I will take a different approach. Starting from the assumption that it seems highly implausible to deny the possibility of a meaningful life for children in principle, I will evaluate theories of meaningful life in terms of their ability to ascribe meaning to children's lives. I therefore regard the meaning of children's lives as a touchstone for theories of meaningful life. Here is how I will proceed: First, without presupposing any particular theory, I will propose several arguments supporting the notion that children can indeed live meaningful lives. These include how we react to the death of children, and that meaning ultimately refers to the whole of life, including childhood. In a second step, I will examine some theories of meaningful life to see whether they are able to ascribe meaning to children's lives. Third, in the conclusion, I will discuss what we can learn from using this touchstone about how meaning in life should be understood from an objectivist perspective.

Thomas Payre: A Sartrean Exploration of Meaningfulness in Mindless Actions

Mindless actions, often labelled automatic or habitual, seemingly lack the conscious intentions typically associated with meaningful endeavours. This situation motivates an exploration into whether actions performed without active awareness or deliberate intent can possess intrinsic significance – that is significance in and of themselves – thus contributing to the broader discussions on the meaning of life. This paper aims to explore the interplay between mindless actions and meaningfulness. Rather than dismissing mindless actions as devoid of significance, the focus will be on uncovering potential layers of meaning embedded within these seemingly habitual or ‘automatic behaviours. Using themes from Sartrean existentialism, and probing the contextual nature of meaning as a form of what Sartre calls a ‘project,’ this paper will shed

light on the possibility of finding significance in actions performed without explicit conscious intention. To address this complex issue, the paper will draw upon insights from the analysis of 'bad faith' and 'authenticity' in Being and Nothingness. Key passages such as the 'café waiter' and counting cigarettes will guide my analysis; Sartre's emphasis on conscious choice (which he claims is always free), the café waiter's manifestation of the significance of automatic or 'played' existence, and theories on meaning as grounded in a freely chosen 'project,' will be pivotal in my attempt to understand the potential meaningfulness intrinsic to so-called mindless actions. In this paper, I will navigate the Sartrean framework, by initially defining mindless actions as a non-thetic form of consciousness, and probing the conventional understanding of meaningfulness (as part of a project, as a form of authenticity). Delving into Sartre's analysis of the café waiter's as being in bad faith, I will explore the notion of meaningfulness in daily routines (played and automatic existences) and existentialist theories of meaning to unravel the relationship between mindless actions and meaning. First considering a non-Sartrean account of mindless actions, I would like to question whether all mindless actions inherently bear meaning, before demonstrating how the Sartrean framework can be a useful tool to understand their meaning. Finally, presenting a synthesized perspective that reconciles the tension between mindless actions and meaningfulness, I will conclude that such actions can indeed carry intrinsic significance and implications for understanding the broader meaning of life.

John Adams: Memory, Wonder and Longing: How the Past Gives Meaning to Our Lives

While some might be able to take an upbeat approach to life, for many existence is filled with anxiety, failure and bitterness. The external world of the present can seem lifeless, empty and shallow, while the future (which, of course, doesn't even exist) might seem at best uncertain, our fears about it tormenting us daily. But the past has a weight, a force, a strange power (and existence) that the present and future lack. Our experiences from our youth seem so much more meaningful, significant and deep than all that we experience in adulthood. As Giuseppe Lampedusa might have put it, people were kind to us when we were young, we experienced a love and warmth that is almost completely lacking in our adult lives, and the world of our childhood was filled with mystery, joy and excitement. In this paper I contemplate experiences (whether good or bad), impressions and feelings from our past and what they say to us in our adult lives (what they say about our lives). We can never forget the world we have left behind and it will remain with us until we die, its people and experiences guiding and comforting us through our troubled existence.

Annemarie van Stee: Not Altogether Meaningless Lives

In this paper I argue that the question of meaning in life is (at least) two questions: one about existential choice and one about existential crisis. Most contemporary philosophers take meaningful living to depend on the central activities in an individual's life. Marie Curie, and Nelson Mandela are held up as examples of particularly meaningful lives, given the quality of the activities they devoted themselves to. But also in less 'perfectionistic' examples such as visiting a brother in hospital or helping a friend move (the term is Iddo Landau's, the examples

are Susan Wolf's), it is the activities individuals develop that provide meaning to their lives. Such views on meaning in life implicitly assume that people live under circumstances allowing them to develop activities of their own choosing. These views primarily address a question about the basis for deciding what to devote oneself to, in order for one's life to be meaningful. I call this the existential choice question of meaning in life. I argue that the existential choice question is different from what I call the existential crisis question of meaning in life. This is a question about reasons to go on living, or in other words, about what makes someone's life not altogether meaningless. The crisis question is discussed less often in the contemporary literature, and where it is, it is mostly conflated with the existential choice question. Often indeed, the two questions do not come apart. Yet, some people live under circumstances in which it is next to impossible for them to develop worthwhile activities of their choosing and they still find ample reason to go on living and claim to experience meaningfulness. Vice versa, individuals exist who actively contribute to many worthy causes and yet they still wonder what the point of it all is. In both types of cases, the existential choice and existential crisis questions of meaning in life come apart. Discussing such cases, I argue the crisis question deserves more attention, as it is not exceptional, more urgent and more fundamental than the choice question. I argue too that contemporary views on meaning in life that focus on individuals and the central activities they devote their lives to cannot adequately address the crisis question. Along the way, I show how philosophers have much to learn about meaning in life from accounts of people experiencing meaningfulness under harsh circumstances.

Giulia Codognato: Human Nature, Practices, and Common Good: How Human Beings Flourish

Is it right for an agent to simply act according to what seems good to her, or are there normative criteria independent of the agent's will? I will argue that, from a Thomistic perspective, it is possible to identify some normative criteria for human beings that depend on their nature and that should also be recognised as good to be pursued from the first-person perspective. If an agent consciously acts according to these criteria, she flourishes. "Flourishing" does not designate "well-being" in a generic sense but refers to a notion that was introduced by Anscombe (1958a), and which has become common among those who have reconsidered Aristotelian and Thomistic teleological ethics in the contemporary debate. According to the Thomistic perspective, for human beings to flourish means to realize their nature: human beings should act virtuously, that is, they should act in accordance with what is proper to human beings qua human beings, by virtue of their nature. I will argue that if and only if agents act in accordance with their natural inclinations (Aquinas, 2017, I-II, q. 94, a. 2), they flourish, that is, they consciously actualise the powers that they have by virtue of their nature. Natural inclinations are tendencies that human beings have by virtue of their nature and that they can actualise through their agency. However, although natural inclinations are shared by all human beings, how agents flourish depends on their practices. By "practice" we mean that agents act according to a rule within a context that they share with other people and in which an action acquires a meaning. Indeed, human beings flourish differently depending on the contexts, historical times, and geographical places in which they live. Thus, human agency is always

placed within a context that agents can understand and in which they can operate (Anscombe 1957, 1958a, 1958b). To flourish, human beings should pursue the common good by living in a political community in which good practices are pursued (MacIntyre, 2016).

Natalia Tomashpolskaia: Border situations as stimuli to search for the meaning of life on example of Wittgenstein's war experience. Between existential and semantic meaning

'There are no atheists in foxholes.' This aphorism is as relevant as possible according to Wittgenstein's war experience. He truly sought support for himself in the faith in God while in the midst of the horrors of war. 'From about the middle of the War questions of values and the philosophy of life had become increasingly important to Wittgenstein' (Griffin 1992, 81). 'The period of war was a crisis in Wittgenstein's life' (von Wright 1955, 534). In his war-time notebooks, both coded and normal, we can find an answer to the question why Russell was so surprised, when he realised this change in Wittgenstein. By the end of the war the topic of the last paragraphs of *Tractatus* about value, mystical, and the meaning of life became central for Wittgenstein. Therefore, in this respect, it is important and essential to be aware of the crucial points in Wittgenstein's biography (and there are few of them) to understand his philosophy. According to his Notebooks, Wittgenstein became concerned with the problem of life and its meaning since summer 1916, if 'one is living in eternity and not in time' (NB 1961, 74e). Since summer 1916 notes about God, the meaning of life had begun to appear in his Notebooks. 'To believe in a God means to understand the question about the meaning of life. To believe in a God means to see that the facts of the world are not the end of the matter. To believe in God means to see that life has a meaning.' (08.07.1916, NB 1961, 74e) 'That something about it is problematic, which we call its meaning. That this meaning does not lie in it but outside it.' [Cf. 6.41.] 'That life is the world.' [Cf. 5.621.] 'The meaning of life, i.e. the meaning of the world, we can call God. And connect with this the comparison of God to a father. To pray is to think about the meaning of life.' (NB 1961, 72e) In a note dated 7.7.1916, he first mentioned an of 'unsayable'. 'Isn't this the reason why men to whom the meaning of life had become clear after long doubting could not say what this meaning consisted in?' (NB 1961, 74e). In *Tractatus* 6.13 Wittgenstein writes '[...] Logic is transcendental,' and in 6.421 'It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.)' Wittgenstein distinguishes between *Bedeutung* and *Sinn* or meaning and sense. Logic for Wittgenstein is the possibility or the condition of the meaning or sense. Without logic it would be impossible to say or think anything meaningful. Without logic there could be no meaningful propositions. Now what it could mean to say that ethics is transcendental? My suggestion would be that ethics is like logic, the condition of the possibility of meaning or sense. But the type of meaning or sense that we are talking about here is not what is sometimes called semantic meaning as the meaning of a proposition but rather something that we might call existential meaning in the sense of the meaning of life. It has often been noticed that in many languages the word meaning is used in these seemingly different ways – the word 'meaning' is used in semantic and existential sense. It does not contradict his later ideas that 'A word has meaning only in the context of a sentence' (BT 2005, 76e) because we distinguish between attitudes.

Masahiro Morioka: Phenomenological Structures of “a Life” in the Philosophy of Life’s Meaning

In the field of the philosophy of life’s meaning, the meaning of the word “meaning” in the phrase “meaning in life” has been much discussed, but the meaning of the word “life” has not been deeply investigated. In my talk, I would like to explore the latter topic from the perspective of contemporary phenomenology. Phenomenology can be understood as the philosophical study of one’s subjective, lived experience. This suggests that it has a close relationship with non-objectivism in the philosophy of the meaning of life. Phenomenologists have discussed the basic structures of subjective, lived experience in the context of perception/cognition. I transfer some of their structures to the context of meaning in life and propose some new features of lived experience. The first is “the dynamic rearrangement of a lived timeline.” Heidegger points out that in our lived experience, the glasses on my nose are sometimes father than the painting on the wall that I look at with great interest. Something similar can be observed with a temporal life seen from the inside. For example, the time of a traumatic event was frozen at that moment and reappears from time to time as if it were happening here and now. In our lived experience, the traumatic time is situated closer than many events that are objectively much closer. The second is “life affordance.” Originally, affordances were thought of as possibilities for action offered by the environment. I want to define life affordances as the set of possibilities that one’s life provides for one’s actions that are taken toward that particular life. They include understanding (“What has my life been all about?”), evaluating (Affirming or negating my life), and transforming (Thinking about how to live and changing my life accordingly). The third is “life enaction.” How we perceive our lives is heavily constructed by our active engagement with our own lives, that is, life enaction. This means that the meaning of our lives looks different depending on how we live our lives here and now. A static interpretation of meaning in life, which is sometimes seen in an academic discussion, may be wrong from this perspective. I would like to relate the above discussion to the meaning of the word “life” in the philosophy of meaning in life.

Patrick Derns: Meaning, Life, and Morality-friends or foes?

In my paper I want to explore if the meaning of life, or perhaps its value, has an inexorable connection to it being a moral one. That is, does life having meaning because it is, as it were, a moral affair, or can the most pernicious actors claim to be living the most meaningful life. This, at first, might seem to be a counterintuitive notion; for many cultures associate their heroes, credulity, and sense of probity not around villainous line steppers, but rather those who are virtuous in defending the rights and interest of their people; are kind to the weak; and mostly, those who do right when it is easier to do wrong. Plato, in book one of the republic, broaches this very same topic: “Is justice (morality) the advantage the stronger.” He reaches the conclusion that morality and justice are tied together, and that philosopher kings are the most propitious to a well-run society. However, Plato associates the pursuit of knowledge with morality and ethics, but this is not my question. Can the ignorant, but morally pure, live meaningful lives; does one need to be a philosopher to be moral, or can one follow their own sense of right and wrong and still be said to be living a meaningful life? Also, existentialist tackled this question, and they did it well; however, in my paper, I hope to approach this set of questions from a, perhaps, updated perspective. The rise of instantaneous communication, relaxing of stiff hierarchical structures in society, and the rise new technologies (nuclear technology, medical advancements, AI tech) have broken the paradigm of moral thinking the

last 100 years. So then, with so much materialism, individualism, and “progress” abound, does it all (life) become meaningless without a grounded sense of morality? Moreover, if morality plays no role in making life meaningful, then what does?

Oluwaseun Sanwoolu: Finding meaning in close personal relationships with AI

Research has shown that nearly one in four adults are lonely and lacking meaningful relationships. This epidemic has been linked to multiple factors, and no doubt closely connected to close personal relationships. However, because of our dependency on technology in many aspects of life, we have also turned to technology to fix this problem—loneliness. In doing so, people are replacing humans with technologies such as chat bots, artificially infused robots and so on in close personal relationships. I maintain that this raises a new problem of its own. In this paper, I examine why it is morally wrong to replace humans with tech emergent in close personal relationships like friendships and romantic relationships. I want to argue that meaningful relationships cannot be built with Artificial Intelligence. Particularly, I will argue that the dynamics of human-to-human relationships such that it allows for fostering meaningful connections, makes the AI incapable of replacing humans in close personal relationships. So, I will examine crucial concepts that make for meaningful relationships such as the ability to exclude qua special obligations for example, in close personal relationships and posit that the AI cannot carry out these special obligations. As a result, I deal with questions that ask what makes a relationship meaningful, and if we can have meaningful relationships such as friendships and romantic relationships with the AI. Ultimately, my claim is that for us to have meaningful and deep connections, technology ought not replace humans in close personal relationships.

Jonah Goldwater: “The Hierarchy Account of Meaning in Life”

The goal of this paper is to introduce a novel and descriptively adequate conception of meaning in life. Its core claim is that lives and actions seem meaningful when they seem to fit into an idealized hierarchy. For example, sacrifice is perceived as meaningful when it serves an apparently “higher” ideal. Rituals are perceived as meaningful when they fit into an idealized narrative of cosmos or culture. More generally, the hierarchy account possesses several theoretical upshots or benefits, while satisfying core desiderata for a theory of meaning. The first is that the account unifies and explains a maximally broad range of examples of meaningfulness, ranging from the folk emphasis on raising children to the philosopher’s more rarefied conception of meaning as typified by great achievements or contributions to objective truth or goodness. Further theoretical benefits include maintaining distinctions between meaning and adjacent concepts such as happiness, importance, and morality, while accommodating the relevant psychological literature. For example, psychologists note that meaning and happiness are often inversely related, as when sacrificing for one’s children increases meaning at the cost of happiness. The hierarchy account’s posit that meaning, unlike happiness, requires putting something above oneself explains why the experience of meaning often contains a poignant or bittersweet phenomenology that happiness lacks. The hierarchy account can also contribute to the recent interest in “anti-meaning”, which is not simply the

absence of meaning but its converse. Because meaning on the hierarchy account requires fitting into an idealized hierarchy, feeling excluded from that hierarchy, or losing one's idealization of it, predictably results in anti-meaningful feelings such as dejection, alienation, despair, or pointlessness. Moreover, because the converse of idealization is demonization, the hierarchy account posits that being subjected to a hierarchy that debases, degrades, or otherwise diminishes someone is a paradigm instance of anti-meaning. Being subjected to racial or gendered oppression thereby serves as an important example of anti-meaningful experience on the hierarchy account. Lastly, the hierarchy account is flexible: while it is characterized in terms of a subject's perception of a hierarchy as ideal, it is compatible with an objectivist construal that only certain hierarchies are worthy of being idealized. More generally, the hierarchy account unifies disparate examples of meaningfulness and meaninglessness, while satisfying several good-making meta-theoretical criteria. It should therefore be considered alongside other leading theories of meaning in life.

Patrick O'Donnell: Pessimism on Meaning, Transcendence, and Reconciliation

One of philosophical pessimism's especially contentious claims is that no human life is meaningful. This paper advances a moderate interpretation of this claim: humans can access "immanent" goods which confer some meaning on their lives, but cannot access a class of "transcendent" goods. This is just cause for regret, but this situation might also underwrite a liberatory political ethic. The distinction between immanent and transcendent goods is Kantian in spirit. Immanent goods are possible objects of experience for temporally and spatially bound creatures like us. Candidate immanent goods include friendship, family life, wisdom, awe, understanding, achievement, legacy, recognition, solidarity, and collaboration. Transcendent goods transcend the conditions of our earthly experience-- invincibility, immortality, pure understanding and contemplation, direct acquaintance with God, the grace offered to our restless spirits, the cosmic redemption of our sufferings. My claim is that pessimism accepts a rich ontology of immanent goods while rejecting the possibility of transcendent goods. Unfortunately, all of us aspire to some transcendent good or other. Human life is thus not meaningless full stop, but no human life is meaningful in a way that would reconcile our transcendent aspirations with our immanent constraints. This interpretation has two interesting implications that are somewhat underappreciated in the literature on pessimism and the meaning of life. First, pessimists often struggle to convince non-pessimists that they should care that our lives are not as meaningful as they could be. Why should the gap between our immanent nature and our transcendent longings be tragic in a way that calls for regret? Yet if we are agents who constitutively strive for transcendence, we are already implicitly committed to an ideal of meaning which must remain tragically unsatisfied. Caring about transcendent goods, I suggest, is constitutive of much of our practical agency. Second, this means that pessimism offers us a project of becoming reconciled to our immanence. This might involve diversifying those goods that are sources of immanent meaning, and to resist the conditions which block our access to sources of immanent meaning. Arguably, this requires forms of social and political struggle which resist the pacifying tendencies of neoliberal capitalism, which replaces our restless attempts to find and make meaning with desires for a hedonistic and uncomplicated contentment. It may be our ethical responsibility to expand the space of

immanent goods which make meaning, not only for ourselves, but for all those immanent creatures who strive for a meaningful life.

Iddo Landau: Suffering and Meaning in Life

The paper explores, from a nontheistic point of view, the relation between suffering and meaning in life. It starts out by presenting various ways in which suffering enhances life's meaning. Then it presents various ways in which suffering diminishes life's meaning. We seem to have arrived at an impasse: suffering both enhances and diminishes meaning in life, sometimes even when considered in relation to the same category, such as morality, value, alienation, love, depth, maturity, or authenticity. I distinguish between the suffering that enhances and the suffering that diminishes meaning by identifying typical characteristics of each. These have to do with, among other things, the severity of the suffering, its duration, our control over it, whether its source is natural or human, the effects of the suffering, the degree to which we can understand it, and the degree to which it is considered justified. Our interpretation of suffering, then, is very important: much of the effect of suffering on life's meaning depends on our interpretation of it according to the characteristics mentioned above and others. Some aspects of various religions and cultures can be understood as efforts to interpret suffering in ways that will make it harm people's meaning in life less. After examining suffering's impact on meaning in life while distinguishing between different types of suffering, I examine suffering's impact on meaning in life while distinguishing between different types of meaning. I suggest that there are types of meaning in life, such as those having to do with achievement, self-sacrifice, and courage, for which suffering is more necessary than it is for other types of meaning in life, such as those having to do with love, aesthetic experiences, and serenity. I suggest that contrary to what seems to be a common view, the types of meaning for which no or little suffering is necessary make life no less meaningful than the types of meaning for which much suffering is necessary. Moreover, I argue that there are cases in which even a significant increase in meaning is not worth an associated increase in suffering, because suffering has a strong negative intrinsic value. Hence, sometimes it is better not to increase meaning in life, or even to reduce it, in order not to suffer. Examples from the lives of Kierkegaard and van Gogh are presented.

Jonathan Strand: On Making a Difference

This presentation will present and argue for an analysis of the concept, "making a difference". It will then explain how this analysis may help adjudicate some current debates regarding meaning in life. People frequently express a desire to "make a difference" and admiration of people who do. They often judge that a person's life has been meaningful when they believe it has "made a difference". More generally, they often judge a thing to be "meaningful" when they perceive it to be "significant", they perceive it to be "significant" when they think that "it matters", and they think that it matters when they think it has "made a difference". That people conceive of things in this way is an empirical matter. Whether these concepts are actually related in this way is a philosophical question. This presentation will focus on an analysis of the concept of "making a difference", assuming what is commonly assumed. The beginning of this analysis is that a thing makes a difference when some state of affairs obtains that would

not have obtained had that thing not existed/occurred/obtained. The details of the analysis reveal other properties difference-making has: when is it exemplified, what sorts of things can have it, in what ways, under what circumstances, and to what extents. Since people often ascribe meaningfulness to things that have “made a difference”, this presentation will close with an explanation of how the analysis of this concept may be relevant to items of debate regarding meaning in life. For example, the analysis seems to lend support to the common but disputed claim that the existence of God, and truth of other common religious doctrines, would render human life more meaningful. The analysis also seems to help explain an intuition many have had that we, and our lives, would be more significant if we had “libertarian” free will. This, in turn, would lend support to the Free Will Defense against the Atheological Argument from Evil: Assuming such free will is possible, God would have reason to create creatures with it; free creatures would be more significant than unfree creatures. People with faith in such things, therefore, have enhanced grounds for a sense of meaning in their lives.

Fumitake Yoshizawa: Two Kinds of Meaninglessness in Life

In this paper, I propose a distinction between two kinds of activity-related meaninglessness. When we state that we are not engaging in a meaningful activity, there are two distinctive cases. The first is that (i) we are engaging in an activity, but it is not meaningful. The second is that (ii) we are not engaging in an activity that can be meaningful. I carve out the distinction from cases depicted in the literature, such as Leo Tolstoy’s *Confession* and J. S. Mill’s *Autobiography*. In these instances, individuals who have achieved their meaningful purpose paradoxically experience a sense of meaninglessness (cf. Landau 2017, *Finding Meaning in an Imperfect World*, chap. 3). These cases are typically seen as challenging for purpose-centered theories of meaningfulness, in the sense that something is missing if an activity does not lead to other new activities (cf. Bradford 2022, “Achievement and Meaning in Life”). In contrast, I focus on another aspect of these cases, which, as I see it, is often overlooked. In these instances, when people complete their meaningful activities, a gap of activity to be engaged in emerges. This represents the second type of negation of the meaningfulness of activities. The second type of negation, which can be characterized as the absence of activities, has not yet been explored. Thus, the primary goal of this paper is to clarify its core feature. Once clarified, the absence of activities can be observed in various situations where people struggle to engage in any activity. We can identify some situations better understood not as the meaninglessness of activities, but as the absence of activities, for instance, during the transition to school and in making career choices. Furthermore, I will clarify the more specific features of the second type of negation by answering several questions, including: How can we evaluate it, as negative or neutral?; What is the appropriate attitude toward the absence of meaningful activity?; How does this absence of activity contribute to evaluating a particular duration of life, or life as a whole?

Chelsea Shay: The Fundamental Threat of Superintelligence: A Loss of Meaning in Modernity

We are obsessed with the idea that superintelligence poses an existential threat in the sense of biological domination. The two biggest proposed risks of superintelligence is that of alignment and control. Respectively, this is where the AI's values do not align with our own (i.e., there is a misalignment of values and goals), thus leading to potential human genocide or slavery; and the AI's determination to fulfill its assigned goals—when coupled with its heightened intelligence—will make it uncontrollable, thus again leading to potential human genocide or slavery. But the fundamental risk of superintelligence lies not in the existential threat to our own domination (of the earth), but in the existential threat to the meaning within our lives. This is because technology—as exemplified in superintelligence—is a way of revealing meaning which turns everything into intrinsically meaningless resources to be optimized. Since technology shapes our understanding of entities (i.e., their what-ness) as mere resources awaiting our optimization—and nothing else besides—their meaning (aside from their use) is obscured. The meaning that we lose due to technology *is* existentially valuable, yet it is inaccessible in a world dominated by the kind of technological revealing that leads to superintelligence. Thus as technology pervades and becomes our permanent ontology—dismissing alternative ways of revealing as ridiculous or irrational—the possibility for other ontologies disappears. And once a technological ontology dominates our understanding of entities completely, then we will no longer be able to disclose the meaning inherent in things outside of their use. Then, with our capacity for meaning-disclosure inaccessible, humanity will cease to meaningfully exist far before any superintelligence-human power struggle. Following Heidegger's analysis of technology as a dominating manner of truth revealing, I will show why the more pressing threat of superintelligence lies in a loss of meaning rather than the loss of human control over the earth.

Kiki Berk: Beauvoir on Meaning in Life at Old Age

In her massive work *La Vieillesse* (in English: *Old Age*) (1970), Simone de Beauvoir argues that old age is bad. One of her arguments is based on the idea that it is difficult for the elderly to give their lives meaning. In this paper, I investigate this controversial claim, focusing on Beauvoir's reasons for thinking it is true. She gives two. First, according to Beauvoir, the active and forward-looking nature of human projects is in tension with the backward-looking mentality that is so tempting for people nearing the end of their lives. As a result, the elderly tend to focus more on “being” than on “doing.” It follows, Beauvoir thinks, that the elderly engage in fewer projects and so have less meaning in their lives. Of course, the elderly still do things and think about the future, but for Beauvoir these are not “projects” in the true sense and so cannot generate meaning in their lives. Second, Beauvoir argues that unprivileged people have no worthwhile projects to fall back upon in their old age, since they were unable to develop such projects in the first place. Accordingly, such people cannot give their lives meaning when they are old. It is important to note that this particular problem of old age is contingent. Even the earlier issue—that the elderly tend to look backwards (rather than forwards) and are concerned with being (rather than doing)—can be avoided if one is intentional. Beauvoir doesn't think that old people's lives are inherently less meaningful than anyone else's—let alone inherently meaningless. Rather, she thinks that being old makes it difficult to give one's life meaning. After discussing how these two arguments have been

received in the secondary literature, I go on to evaluate each in its own right. I argue that each of these arguments successfully identifies a serious challenge faced by the elderly in making their lives meaningful. This naturally raises the question of to what extent can these challenges be overcome in contemporary society. This is largely an empirical question, and I end the paper with some reflections on how society should change in order to mitigate these challenges to finding meaning in old age.

Nobuo Kurata: The Intelligibility Approach of Meaning of Life

In this talk, I will examine the validity of an approach that considers the meaning of life in terms of intelligibility. There seems to be agreement among writers in this field that the "meaning of life" contains the connotation "something understandable about life" or "something to be understood about life. However, some critics attribute the meaning of life to the values of something, and consider the meaning of life to be based on something valuable (e.g., Metz). In their view, the importance of understanding has to do with the value of knowledge. However, when we talk about the meaning of life, "something referred to" is assumed, and the expression "understanding or knowing the meaning of life" is more natural than "feeling" the meaning of life. We think there is an answer to the question, "What is the meaning of life?" and we assume a "reason" for the question, "Why should I live?" because the term 'the meaning of life' assumes something comprehensible. In particular, when someone says, "I don't understand the meaning of life," the speaker feels some distress or is troubled, in which case the speaker's system of beliefs, concepts, and reasons (subjective world) is confused. The expression "making sense of life" is tied to the human intellectual capacity for "sense-making. Because the meaning of life is based on intelligibility, recent discussions on this topic have been related to linguistic analysis of propositions and narratives of life. To "understand the meaning of life" is to recognize the appropriate purpose in the systematic perception of the whole of life, if the meaning of life is to be considered in relation to "purpose. If we consider the meaning of life to be the meaning of our own lives, we must properly recognize how we influence society and the people around us. Furthermore, when someone seems to have "found the meaning of life," their beliefs and reasons are in stable order. When our beliefs are integrated into a stable system, we can have a positive attitude toward our lives and the world. As a result, we can have a fitting attitude toward our world and feel value in our lives. And this value is not the value of some scientific knowledge.

Noah Jones: Utilitarianism and Meaningfulness: Enemies or Friends?

Outside the world of academic philosophy, the word "utilitarian" is often used to describe artifacts or environments that emphasize cold rationality or pragmatism at the cost of comfort, emotional resonance, and perhaps meaningfulness. Since its origin in the enlightenment, the ethical theory called utilitarianism has been conceived and applied in ways that at least plausibly do reduce happiness to something less than human and alienate the moral project from what seems to make our lives meaningful. I suggest a version of utilitarianism corrected by Aristotelian moral and psychological insights. I argue that the classical utilitarians, while correctly identifying the core logic of practical rationality, had faulty conceptions of both human well-being and human motivation. I hope for my argument to mediate between the

Aristotelian and utilitarian moral traditions, and in doing so I draw several practical conclusions about the relationship between philosophical theories of morality and everyday decision-making and moral language.

Arto Tammenoksa: The Ascetic Path to Meaning - A phenomenological approach to resignation in a world of empty transcendences

Consider, for a moment, a state of immortality – being unable to perish from natural causes, or at all. What would bring meaning to a life freed from finitude? Intuitively, one would find meaning in amassing things, material or immaterial. The less materialistically inclined of us might chase novel experiences, as an expanse of boundless new possibilities opened before us and, for once, everything a human could attain was attainable for an individual. However, transcending one's current situation by acquiring new things would soon prove empty – once acquiring every possible thing and experience became only a matter of time, non-finitude would bring only ennui. After every acquisition there would still be more to acquire, but meaning would remain elusive. This is the condition of the acquisitive subject: to always chase after more, while never finding fulfilment and meaning in acquisition. In *A Secular Age* (2007), Charles Taylor argues that immanent and secular answers – which Taylor calls "modern materialism" as abandoning the search of meaning altogether, and "higher selfishness" as forms of hedonism and self-development under the rubric of capitalism and commodity fetishism – to the question of meaning are fragile and that an answer leaning on the transcendent or sacred would be more resilient against crises of meaning. For Taylor, meaningfulness stems from a theistic belief, religion. Taylor is mistaken in thinking a permanent solution to meaningfulness is even desirable, much less attainable. Meanwhile, in *You Must Change Your Life* (2013) Peter Sloterdijk claims there are no religions, only more or less successful immanent spiritual practices – anthropotechnics that encompass everything from monasteries and physical training regimes to Scientology and Eastern asceticisms. I draw from the latter phenomenological eclectic to claim the solution is to be repetitive instead of permanent, and sketch a path to immanent meaning characterised as an ascetic life. The ascetic path towards meaning emphasises resignation, relinquishing, and missing out instead of acquisition, competition, and accumulation. The path of resignation seeks to overcome the empty transcendence of acquisition and competition by enriching the experience of living. Thus the act of relinquishing is a positive contribution instead of an act of privation. Anthropotechnics place us in an immanent space, where a phenomenology of vertical ethics needs no reference to an outside transcendence, as the finite horizon of anthropotechnics is always already infused with meaning.

Luke Elson: Moral Error Theory and Meaning

As a Mackie-style moral error theorist, I think that murder is not wrong and that there are no categorical reasons for action or objective values. The Olson-style global normative nihilist in me goes further and denies that there are normative reasons for any actions or attitudes. It is often assumed but rarely argued that these views rule out meaning in life. I present some arguments for that claim, then reject it. First, morality does (or would) provide meaning. If

there were moral truths, they would be a source of meaning: categorical reasons would make certain actions fitting or appropriate. Without getting overly teleological about it, in doing those actions we'd be functioning properly. That is a kind of meaning or purpose, one ruled out by error theory. But second, even if morality would be one source of meaning, it doesn't follow that without morality there can be no other sources. But on certain views of meaning (such as Susan Wolf's) objective value is required for an activity to be meaningful. Error theory and certainly global nihilism would rule out any meaning whatsoever, because they say no activities are valuable. This argument is threatening. Third, mere belief in error theory could forestall the possibility of meaning. If meaning requires subjective engagement with activities (eg, thinking them worthwhile), and if as a conceptual or psychological matter such engagement implies an evaluative judgement (eg, if to think something worthwhile involves judging it valuable), then a consistent acceptance of error theory prevents the right kind of engagement, preventing meaning. This could happen even if the error theory is false. Now my positive view. I grant the first argument: morality would have provided meaning. But I reject the second argument. Meaning in life doesn't require objective value, and the arguments that it does (due to, for example, Wolf) are not particularly persuasive. The third argument is potentially threatening, but not in practice. Acceptance of the error theory or even nihilism doesn't seem to drain us of emotion or engagement. There are important questions in metaethics and the emotions about why this is so, but it does seem to be so. Error theorists are not particularly glum. To conclude, and perhaps unexpectedly, meaning in life is not prevented by the error theory. But error theory does have implications for what can provide meaning: most obviously, not morality.

Nathan Emmerich: Psychedelics, Psychotherapy and Meaning in Life.

Over the past two decades or so there has been a renaissance in research into psychedelics which has produced significant evidence to suggest that such drugs, or the experiences they induce, might be suitable interventions for a range of illnesses, including PTSD, depression, addiction and so forth. Protocols for the use of psychedelic drugs generally place them within a psychotherapeutic context. The standard approach, labelled Psychedelic Assisted Psychotherapy (PAP), involves a small number of preparatory sessions which are undertaken prior to a supervised drug induced experience in a controlled environment. This is followed by further sessions which aim at the psychological integration of the patient's experience. Whilst various perspectives have been advanced there is a great deal of uncertainty about the mechanism(s) of action that produce the therapeutic effects psychedelic drugs seem to have. Although some have suggested that it may be possible to eliminate the first-person or, perhaps, hallucinogenic effects that one might consider to be the hallmarks of psychedelic drugs it nevertheless seems likely that this emerging therapeutic modality relies on both their neurophysiological and their subjective effects. Similarly, whilst there has been some recent debate about the necessity of situating psychedelic interventions within a psychotherapeutic context, there seems good reason to suppose it makes a positive contribution, or so I will suggest. This argument set forth in this paper suggests that a great deal of significance is often attached to psychedelic experiences by those that have them. They tend to be highly affective, not least because they are commonly perceived as being intensely meaningful experiences, both during and after they occur. That this is the case is arguably central to their value, both as

a therapeutic modality and perhaps more generally. This view raises a number of questions, including whether it is philosophically appropriate to embrace or further realize meaning rooted in psychedelic experiences or to draw any kind of metaphysical conclusions on their basis. The latter is something that might include spiritual or mystical type beliefs but may also include the way in which we (affectively) perceive or understand death, or our own mortality. Noting that psychotherapy can be a valuable undertaking in the absence of any pathology and that existential approaches take meaning to be a central concern, I suggest that if the psychedelic experience can be appropriately culturally situated then there is no reason why it should not be something we turn to in our efforts to realise meaning in modern life, not only as a part of the psychotherapeutic endeavour but also more broadly.

Joshua Lewis Thomas: In Defence of Sense: Why the Intelligibility View is Still the Most Attractive Analysis of Life's Meaning

For some time, philosophical analyses of life's meaning have almost universally treated it as constituted by value of a certain sort. However, this has recently been challenged by philosophers who instead see life's meaning as constituted by something like sense or intelligibility. Pushing back against the challenge posed by this 'Intelligibility View', it has been argued that it fails to capture everything we mean when we talk of meaningful lives (Metz 2019), and that the established 'Value View' is ultimately the correct approach (Landau 2021). Focusing on the specific theory presented by Thomas (2019), this paper attempts to defend the Intelligibility View from some of the objections and counter-examples given against it, while also providing counter-examples to the Value View in return. In addition, it evaluates and rejects the option of retaining both views, with each being correct in different contexts. It concludes that the Intelligibility View is the neatest, most intuitive, and most theoretically plausible approach to life's meaning currently in the literature.

Ayush Nautiyal: The Coherency of the Moderate Supernaturalist View in Light of the Mawson-Metz Argument

Mawson tacitly suggests and Metz expressly makes a certain objection to the moderate supernaturalist view by saying that if an "afterlife with God" confers tremendous meaning upon us and that this meaning is temporally infinite, then this moderate supernaturalism slips into extreme supernaturalism because any meaning that is available within a finite lifetime, be it spanning over millennia, will, by comparison, be totally insignificant when compared to the temporally infinite source of meaning, i.e., God. I object to this understanding which seems too hasty because it fails to recognise important points like: A. that meaning requires a subject to whom that meaning must matter B. THIS and THAT may be mutually independent sources of meaning or qualitatively different such that they are subjectively comparable sources of meaning This paper takes a relook, from first principles, at the Mawson-Metz argument by trying to understand how it works. At the heart of the discussion is a thought experiment based on the axiological significance of an afterlife involving a passionate atheist painter and a sincere devotee. A mathematical rule is presented, which seems to operate in the Mawson-Metz argument. A probe into this rule reveals its inadequacies. The issues involved are also dealt

with without an application of the Mawson-Metz argument. An argument from "meaning and being", as per which maximal meaning requires an eternally meaningful existence, is made in support of moderate supernaturalism. Simultaneously, an axiological inquiry is conducted in the thought-experimental world in search of an afterlife that would be no worse axiologically for the atheist painter, in light of the argument from "meaning and being", were it possible for us to give it to them. The place of the atheist painter, who would still choose a finite THIS over an eternal THAT if these were the only available options, in a moderate supernaturalist view, grounded on the eternal meaning available through communion with God in the afterlife, is presented as a challenge for moderate supernaturalism and toning down of the view is suggested. Note: 1. THIS refers to the purely physical world and the human condition and the like, and THAT refers to some perfect metaphysical reality like God. 2. Moderate Supernaturalism is the view that some meaning is possible in a purely physical world but an ultimate meaning is available only through spiritual conditions like God and Soul. Extreme Supernaturalism is the view that no meaning is possible in a purely physical world and only spiritual conditions like God and Soul can confer meaning upon us.

Travis Rebell: The Value of a Meaningful Life

Many people have worried at one time or another that the life they are leading is a meaningless one. The desire to lead a life with meaning is often deeply felt, and so the thought that one's life might be lacking in meaning is often deeply distressing. To have a frustrated desire for meaning in one's life is clearly to be in a bad state, but is it bad because such meaning is something we should want for its own sake—something that merits, or calls for, our wanting it—or is it bad merely when, and merely because, meaning is something that we actually do want? The answer is complicated by the fact that questions about a life's meaning are notoriously unclear. The unclarity is due to the fact there are multiple senses of the term "meaning" in which we might ask whether a life has meaning or lacks it. We might ask, for instance, whether our lives are meaningful in the sense of being fulfilling or satisfying, or being lived to some purpose, or being of great significance or importance, or making sense when considered as a narrative or as part of a larger narrative. When we examine these different kinds of meaning more closely, what we find, I argue, is that they don't all possess the same kind of value—that these different kinds of meaning don't all matter in the same way and to the same degree. In fact, some kinds of meaning matter only contingently, though without being any less relevant to what motivates us to ask about the meaningfulness of their lives. Often, what is regrettable about having a frustrated desire for meaning is not the absence of meaning itself but the frustration of one's desire for it.

Katherine Martha: Narrative, Meaning, and Well-Being: Fact or Fiction?

Do the narratives we tell ourselves about ourselves make our lives go better or worse? That is, can storytelling impact an agent's prudential good? In this paper, I argue that the practice of constructing and endorsing a coherent, intelligible narrative about an agent's life enhances her well-being as long as: 1) the narrative maintains fidelity to the reality of her life's events, 2) the agent endorses the narrative as true, and 3) the narrative makes visible the meaningfulness

of one's life. The first criterion is meant to design narratives that keep one grounded in what is real, and prevent one from drifting off into fantasies and illusions of grandeur. The second secures a narrative's conative force; that is, a narrative that meets the second criterion is capable of motivating and moving an agent into a reformed relationship to herself and her life. The third, and perhaps most crucial, criterion entails that one's narrative does not just make contact with reality, but also illuminates and centers the presence (or absence) of an ineluctable, objective prudential good: meaning, where meaning is understood as "active engagement in projects of worth." My position is constructed by way of a synthesis of Connie Rosati's work on storytelling and Susan Wolf's writing on meaning and well-being. Along with Rosati, I contend that while storytelling is capable of enhancing a person's well-being, it can also be detrimental to it. Just as with any tool, it is important that we use it in the proper way for its intended purposes. It is for this reason that careful attention ought to be paid to the ways in which one constructs a life's narrative. In this paper, I offer a new way of identifying the snares of storytelling. Unsuccessful narratives, which are actively harmful to an agent, are those that violate both the first and third criteria. That is, they are stories of mere fantasy, which either obfuscate meaning when it is present or falsify meaning where it is not. The impact of these forgeries is that they leave us isolated and cordoned off from our prudential good. Because storytelling can be unsuccessful and even dangerous, learning how to tell stories well and responsibly can help us to evade pitfalls that plague even the greatest writers of fiction.

Charlie Potter: Life as Lived Experience

There has been a great deal of discussion about the meaning of 'meaning' within contemporary literature on the meaning of life (Thomas 2019; Nozick 1981), but not so much on the meaning of 'life'. In this talk I will argue that outside of recent analytic philosophy, it is much more helpful to think of life as it occurs in 'the meaning of life' as something we experience rather than as something we do. As Charles Repp has pointed out we often talk of people being in our lives, and use phrases like 'experiencing everything life has to offer', or 'I hate my life' (Repp 2018), that are much more comfortably understood if we think of life as something we experience. My aim will be to add how it is something like this sense of 'life' that was (a) used in the origins of the term, that (b) was translated into English and spread into popular culture, and (c) is largely still used outside of philosophy today. 'Life' as it appears in early uses of the meaning of life, is often used synonymously with 'the world' or 'nature', which makes little sense if we think that life is something that we do, but not if we think of it as something we experience. Linguist Steven Cassedy has also shown how it is predominantly this sense of life that is used as the term enters the English language through Carlyle, Tolstoy and Tillich (Cassedy 2022; See also, Leach and Tartaglia 2018). I will also add to this the importance of existentialist accounts of meaning in shaping the 20th century philosophical literature on meaning. The most popular answer to what gives people meaning in qualitative psychology studies is admittedly personal relationships (O'Connor and Chamberlain 1996; Schnell 2004; Wong 1998), but even here personal relationships are an important part of our life as we experience it, as well as being something that could go into a narrative with our agency at the centre. It is also not uncommon that people will give nature as an answer, and I will also argue that for most religious people, meaning isn't so much a concern with how proud of our life we

can be, but more a concern with our engagement with the world and God. I finish with some thoughts on why recent philosophy has tended to concentrate on us as agents.

W. Jared Parmer: Automation, Value Learning AI, and the Aftermath of Meaningful Work

I argue that much meaningful work we do cannot be fully automated away. Were such work to be ‘fully automated’, the result would be mere parody of the work we presently do. This poses a risk not only to workers who might be displaced by automation, who are standardly the focus in ethics of work, but to anyone who enjoys the goods such work produces or sustains. Meaningful activities are subjectively engaging and positively impactful, where the engagement and the impact share a common basis. Among these activities are practices, which are open-ended in two respects: We can continue to do them indefinitely, without their ceasing to be meaningful; and they are specified widely over time: We work out the relevant normative standards for what to do, and how to do it, along the way. There are many examples of meaningful practices in work, such as philosophy, therapy, art-making, teaching, caregiving, and any number of crafts, such as interior design, dress-making, and carpentry. The wide specification involved in practices renders them not amenable to full automation. Because wide specification relies on receptivity to value, it cannot be proceduralized on the order of an algorithm. Handling newly encountered values by following already-accepted standards is, when that is one’s general approach, not receptivity to value at all. And, because wide specification cannot be proceduralized, it cannot be fully automated. Practices, therefore, cannot be fully automated. It might be thought that we should be skeptical of this argument, because value learning research in AI appears to be precisely about leveraging machine learning to design AI that can be receptive to value. In value learning AI, the values to be learned are treated as capturable in a utility function, which the AI needs to estimate to solve its optimization problem of what to do. But, even if serious implementation challenges could be overcome, value learning AI still would not exhibit receptivity to value of the right sort. This is because, in a practice, there is no enduring utility function for the value learning AI to estimate, nor any enduring method of estimation. In a practice, both are subject to ongoing critical appraisal, which is partly constitutive of receptivity to value. A value learning AI cannot do this critical appraisal by itself, and so practices cannot be performed by value learning AI on its own.

Thomas Rule: Meaning as Horizon

Many contemporary analytic philosophical discussions of the meaning of human existence seem to take ‘purpose’ or ‘value’ to be the fundamental or most relevant senses of ‘meaning’. However, this assumption threatens to obscure more profound questions. Inspired by thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, I suggest instead that the meaning of something may be more essentially understood as the background or surrounding context which serves as the immediate condition for the possibility of its intelligibility. Here the ‘meaning’ is that primary distinction on the basis of which further significant distinctions can be made to organize a broader understanding - in this case of one’s own existence taken as a whole. It does not follow that our inability to step outside of human existence to see it from a ‘God’s-eye-view’ precludes access

to such a context in terms of which we might make that existence intelligible. Instead, meaning might be understood on analogy to a horizon. Much like how a literal horizon represents a limitation to our field of view which is itself a distinction on the basis of which we make further spatial distinctions: up from down, left from right, near from far - so a 'meaning' of human existence is one on the basis of which we could orient ourselves as to how we might possibly distinguish, from a first-person perspective, 'human' from 'non-human' on all sides and in turn 'find our way about'. We tend to operate in more narrowly limited meaning-contexts - for example, the sense of directionality which any talk of 'purpose' or 'value' implies already presupposes some such 'space' of possible significance. What philosophers should ask is: "In light of which 'horizon' can one come to the most comprehensive and internally coherent understanding of their nature and their place in reality as possible?" This might well be the whole proper task of philosophy itself. This approach is plausibly more relevant to addressing the concerns of those who suffer 'crises' of meaning than most recent accounts. As Tartaglia (2016) observes, many contemporary accounts merely discuss what sorts of activities are considered socially acceptable for someone to value or undertake. But someone who experiences the loss of a sense of meaning is not disoriented as to the values of the society around them. Rather, I suggest they may be profoundly disoriented as to their 'place in existence' as an interpretive, intelligibility-making being, seeking an orienting 'horizon'.

Christopher Earley: Witnessing History and Searching for Meaning

When wars begin, public tragedies occur, pandemics break out, or great scientific, artistic, or sporting achievements take place we often suddenly feel that we are 'living through history.' The change of experience that this phrase marks has received little attention within philosophy. One temptation is to argue that all we are doing is proposing that the events we are encountering will probably be of interest to future professional historians. However, I would like to propose an alternative explanation: we feel like we are witnessing history when we are pushed to question what makes our past, present, and future lives meaningful. I will begin by first presenting some examples that capture the phenomenon of witnessing history. I will then present some arguments against the view that the persons undergoing this change in experience are simply imagining that future professional historians would regard it as significant. Historians often see many more things as being historically significant than the kinds of things our attention is drawn to when we witness history. They also usually set themselves at a distance from the periods they study, whilst those who witness history witness it in the present. As such, they witness history in a quite different way to those caught up in events. In response, I will present my own contrasting account of what it means to witness history. I argue that we feel we are living through history when our usual sense of what is personally and publicly meaningful is ruptured. Here I will follow the trifold account life's meaning put forward by Joshua Seachris, where finding our life 'meaningful' involves finding it to be intelligible, purposeful, and significant. Adding to this account, I argue that all three dimensions are affected by the ways our conceptions of the past and our conceptions of the future connect, and how this affects our interpretation of the meaning of our lives in the present. I propose that events are experienced as ruptures when they affect the temporal continuity of our interpretations of our lives, and, in doing so, force us to become reflectively aware of what we

think makes our past and future life meaningful. When this forced reflection is particularly dramatic and particularly widely shared amongst our community, I claim that we feel we are living through history.

Brylea Hollinshead: Dispositional Love and Meaning in Life

According to Susan Wolf's influential hybrid account, a life is meaningful "when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness". In this paper, I aim to develop the hybrid view in a way which resolves some potential problems with Wolf's initial formulation and presents an independently attractive account of meaning in life. Firstly, I focus on the subjective attraction that Wolf describes as a particular type of good feeling or state of positive affect. I argue that the subjective constituent of meaning in life is best understood not as an occurrent "good feeling", but rather as a particular form of dispositional love. Such love leads to a wide range of "downstream" episodic emotions, some of which are positive, yet many of which are negative. This explains how a hybrid account can make sense of a life which is characterised by "bad feelings" yet is still deeply meaningful. Secondly, I argue that the object of the relevant form of love is subject-relative value rather than subject-neutral value, and show how this claim adequately captures the way that love represents or "sees" the world and differentiates the appropriate form of love from other closely related emotions like respect or admiration. Finally, I suggest that our "downstream" emotions play an important role in the epistemology of meaning in life. Through our emotions, we can come to discover what we love and what makes our lives meaningful.

Damiano Ranzenigo: Existential Necessity

I aim to offer an account of the psychological phenomenon of existential self-identification (ESI), according to which some people cannot fathom living a meaningful life without some X they strongly and intrinsically value. ESI is best exemplified by people who overcome phases of existential distress by committing themselves to a specific evaluative self-conception, like Martin Luther expressing his moral and theological commitments with the famous words 'here I stand, I can do no other', and many other people consciously holding that life makes no sense without caring for some X, be it about politics, religion, profession, familial and romantic relationships, etc. I first consider two influential notions of practical necessity as candidates to specifically account for ESI, namely Harry Frankfurt's notion of volitional necessity and Christine Korsgaard's notion of universal commitment and conclude that both fail to do justice to the nature of ESI. Frankfurt's volitional necessity conflates two rather distinct phenomena: on the one hand, the passive discovery of an incapacity of character and, on the other hand, the active acquisition of a reflective stance on something one cannot imagine living a meaningful life without. Korsgaard's alternative universal commitment is inadequate to capture ESI in two senses: it requires that the necessity be generalizable and lawlike when ESI can instead be very particular; and it places too much emphasis on the need to maintain integrity, when instead it is the role played by some such identities for meaning in life that explains their practical necessity. My alternative account of ESI treats it as a sui generis phenomenon, which I thus characterize: Existential Self-identification: a reflective belief that X, which or whom one

strongly and intrinsically values, is constitutive of the full meaningfulness of one's life, when one values full meaningfulness in life. Full meaningfulness in life is understood as the subjective awareness of one's life having diachronic purpose and being worth living as a whole, which one tends to increasingly value going through phases of existential distress. Contrary to the alternatives, my account captures the active and reflective dimension of ESI, while not drawing from overdemanding self-legislation or the need to maintain integrity for its own sake, but is exposed to other challenges, such as the possibility of beliefs about oneself being wrong, the controversial postulation of 'reasons of meaning', and the seemingly idiosyncratic nature of the phenomenon. Addressing these challenges highlights further interesting aspects of ESI.

Irene Liu: Meaning and Tradition

Many people – 'traditionalists' – find meaning through their participation in a tradition. The goal of this paper is to elucidate tradition as a distinctive source of meaning in life, one that is surprisingly similar to religious sources of meaning. One option to explain meaning in tradition is that the pursuits through which people participate in tradition are themselves objectively valuable. Studying Civil War history, say, or playing blues guitar is itself an objectively valuable activity. To use Wolf's formula, they fittingly combine "subjective attraction" and "objective attractiveness." But this explanation does not adequately capture what the traditionalist sees in her pursuits. She is not just or even principally moved by the objective value of the activities; if they belonged to another tradition, she would feel differently. For the traditionalist, the principal attraction is that the pursuits are parts of her tradition. A second option is to think that meaning in tradition is relationship-dependent. That is to say, meaning is principally a function of a person's relationship to tradition rather than any objective features of the tradition itself. Accordingly, the fulfillment that the traditionalist gets from her participation in tradition might be compared to that which a person gets through her relationships to friends and family. While this idea gets us closer to how the traditionalist sees things, it is incomplete. Our relationships to friends and family seem more voluntary than that towards tradition, and we are "ontologically vulnerable" to tradition in a way that we are not to personal relations. This is well illustrated by Lear's discussion of the Crow. From these critiques emerges a third option: meaning in tradition is explained by the fact that tradition is the necessary framework for people to have meaningful pursuits and relationships – and meaningful lives – at all. Meaningful lives grew increasingly impossible for the Crow as their tradition atrophied. If this is true, our relationship to tradition is more akin to our relationship to a creator than to friends or family. This makes the meaning one derives from tradition more akin to religious meaning, which explains why some traditionalists describe their experience as answering a "religious impulse...to stand in awe of something greater than oneself." It also makes sense of the feelings of existential gratitude that people report about tradition. Thinkers such as Taylor, Dreyfus, and Kelly worry about the loss of meaning in a secular world. If I am right, tradition might fill that void.

George Backen: The Phenomenology of Meaning

Nagel is correct, the arguments for the Absurd are inadequate. Yet, contemporary accounts of meaning are inadequate responses. The Absurd is neither a conclusion to assent nor deny, but a phenomenology of alienation. A homelessness lacking orientation and motivation, where acting in the world is a long-lost possibility. The phenomenology of meaning is being at home in the world; maximally oriented and motivated so actions are effortless and rewarding. Hope is considered in detail. The Absurd is phenomenologically like depression. Matthew Ratcliffe analyses depression into possibilities. The Absurd is the loss of possibilities of acting in the world. The stage set collapses leaving a person on the other side of the bell jar. In the extreme is nihilism; Charles Taylor calls, “the negative slope of orientation.” In nihilism, the person is so far removed from the world as possibilities, they no longer move. Meaning is at home in the world where actions are effortless and rewarding. Familiar experiences include dance, play, and, goal-oriented, flow. Recognized as our most meaningful, the phenomenology is coupling with the world. Embedded and embodied, the loci of decision-making shifts. One is accountable, but not entirely in control. Meaning is rewarding as we are relieved of the burden of egoistic thinking. Beyond familiar experiences of dance and dialogue, there is the coupling which gives narrative to our lives. Visions, like Wittgenstein’s religious pictures, get us out of bed in the morning. These terminal visions are hope, they orient us in the world and pull us towards the future. Hope is a virtue lost in the phenomenology of the Absurd. In conclusion, the Absurd is not a logical conclusion, but a phenomenology of alienation. To understand the phenomenology of meaning, we analyzed the Absurd into a lack of possibilities where the person is neither oriented nor motivated to act in the world. In contrast, meaning is maximally at home in the world where actions are effortless and rewarding as the loci of decision making has shifted away from the ego. Hope is the coupling with a vision of the future.

Christine Susienka: Hope and Meaning in Life

A growing body of philosophical literature argues that hope can be impermissible or inappropriate if the evidence in support of the hoped-for end is insufficient or if the probability of the hoped-for end coming to fruition is too small (e.g., Moellendorf 2020/2022; McCormick 2017). While I do not challenge the claim that hope is in part reason-responsive, I argue that this approach fails to take into account the centrality of hope to the commitments that serve as sources of meaning in life. To value a project or to love a person might require us to maintain hope despite evidence that the hoped-for end is both unlikely and unsupported by previous evidence. For example, consider a parent who continues to hope that their child overcomes an addiction despite a history of failing to do so. Even if the parent can recognize that it is unlikely that their child will overcome the addiction, it is both understandable and perhaps even admirable for them to still maintain the hope. Or consider the citizen who hopes for a just society, despite living a country that has committed serious atrocities historically and that resists change in the present. Hope that justice is possible can well be recognized as a virtue even in these circumstances. In cases like these, recalcitrant and motivating hope (as opposed to mere optimism) is often reflective of our deepest commitments, and, as a result, to let go of such hope requires giving up on or letting go of a part of ourselves. Likewise, these hopes are for futures that are not entirely within our control, and if the end is sufficiently important to us, then working toward it can still be meaningful even if its outcome is uncertain and we

understand that the timespan for assessing progress might be more than a single life. Some of what we find most meaningful are multigenerational projects, the success of which cannot be measured by only looking at outcomes in one life. Though there may be times when giving up a hope is what we ought to do, I maintain that the permissibility or appropriateness of hope cannot be assessed from an agent-neutral third-personal stance, which assessing it based on past evidence or the probability of the hoped-for end does, but that we must instead consider it from the agential perspective and consider the meaning-related costs for the agent to doing so.

Alon Shalev: Final Ends and the Two Concepts of Meaningfulness

At the 5th ICPML, I presented an argument highlighting the existence of two distinct concepts of life's meaningfulness, originating from two separate "needs for meaning" that drive the pursuit of meaning. Utilizing a primarily phenomenological perspective, I proposed that one concept of meaningfulness is a response to angst, involving tying oneself to certain things, such as achievements, higher beings, values or ends, seen as possessing certain qualities deemed truly significant, thereby achieving a sense of permanence despite mortality. In this conception, meaning inheres in qualities which certain activities contribute to attaining. Simultaneously, another concept of meaningfulness responds to ennui and involves engaging in activities considered inherently worthy, irrespective of any ends they may promote. In this second conception, meaning is found in activities performed for their own sake. I emphasized the necessity of distinguishing between these two concepts, as they are frequently conflated. In the upcoming conference, I aim to present the second stage of my argument. Initially, I will assert that angst and ennui indeed share a fundamental commonality: both emerge from the will to exist. Subsequently, I will clarify why these two concepts of meaningfulness are often conflated. More importantly, I will reiterate the two concepts of meaningfulness analytically, critically evaluate them, and argue for the supremacy of the latter over the former. My intention is to demonstrate that meaning derived from activities performed for their own sake is both feasible and valuable, while meaning derived from attachment to significant qualities is ultimately unsatisfying, falls short of its goals, and may even be considered incoherent. I plan to achieve this by analyzing these two concepts in light of the idea of final ends.

Ying Xue: The Risk of Seeking the Meaning of Life and a Hegelian Solution

Adolf Eichmann is one of the major organisers of the Holocaust. Two Eichmann are presented: For Hannah Arendt, Eichmann (Eichmann1) is a thoughtless careerist full of cliché (1963). However, Bettina Stangneth (2014) suggests that Eichmann's commitment to Nazism is a result of serious and deep deliberation (Eichmann2). This paper will not discuss which one is the real Eichmann, or if evil can be banal. Rather, it focuses on the two ways in which Eichmann1&2 seeks meaning of life and, finally, devotes himself to an evil project. First, I will argue that, despite the significant differences between the two portrayals, the risky factors leading to evil-doing in both cases share the same structure highlighted by G. W. F. Hegel in *Philosophy of Right* §§136-139. According to Hegel, when a subject sees herself as a will having the right to evaluate objects independently and guide her life by her own concepts of welfare, happiness and good, she sees the world projected by herself as universal

and objective. However, she does not achieve any substantial understanding of what good is, but only a self-certainty. Furthermore, this self-certainty has the potential to authorise evildoings in the name of the good. Evil becomes a call from “conscience” – Eichmann1&2 would be paradigms. Second, I will explain that our daily understanding of seeking meaning of life encourages this evil-enabling structure – our capacity of “independent thinking” is prioritised, and whether a specific thing is meaningful for “me” is awaiting assessment. However, heroic characters with strong self-certainty can slide into evildoers either like Eichmann1 who identifies himself with a popular ideology or Eichmann2 who devotes himself to a cause he judges as “great”. This does not mean that any meaning-seeking thinking and actions necessarily lead to evil. Rather, the point is that seeking the meaning of life based on this picture of independent individuals is deficient – the potential for evil is immanent in it while happy ends are always contingent. Third, I will consider a Hegelian solution to this problem: to weave ethical life into the fabric of any meaning-seeking activities at the individual level. I will defend Hegel regarding the most controversial part of this proposal – the state. Apparently, this would produce more Eichmann1, if it merely means that we can only find meanings in following political authorities. However, I will argue that this Hegelian solution could prevent Eichmann1&2.

Tayron Alberto Achury Torres: Perseverance in its Being and the Meaning of Life: A Perspective from the Philosophy of Spinoza

Baruch Spinoza, a 17th-century philosopher, developed a philosophy that delved into various aspects of existence, questioning the nature of God, reality, and the purpose of life. His most renowned work, "Ethics," explores both ethical and metaphysical themes, identifying the fundamental reality as the "substance," interchangeably labeled as God or Nature, seen as infinite and necessary. Unlike traditional approaches, Spinoza does not directly address the "meaning of life." Instead, he suggests that the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of reality is crucial for leading an ethical and fulfilling life. Freedom and happiness, according to Spinoza, come from comprehending and accepting the necessary nature of things, freeing us from limiting emotions. He introduces the concept of "conatus," the innate drive in all living beings to persevere in their existence and work towards self-preservation. This drive, connected to the "perseverance in being," represents the essence of every entity in the universe, from elementary particles to humans. Spinoza's ethics involve living in accordance with reason and understanding our intrinsic connection with nature. Good and evil are defined in terms of increasing or decreasing an individual's power of action, rather than external moral conventions. Spinoza's philosophy reflects on the search for truth and the relativity of it. While acknowledging the relative limitations of truth, he emphasizes the importance of knowledge aligning with reality for decision-making that enhances our capacity for action, giving profound meaning to our existence. Despite determinism in Spinoza's philosophy, the quest for the meaning of life is not devoid of significance. Instead, it provides a framework where we become aware of our interconnectedness with the universe. Each entity, as a vital node, contributes to a cosmic fabric where understanding our nature and choosing actions that strengthen it create a meaningful narrative in a perpetually moving universe. In this context, the meaning of life is the very manifestation of the essence persevering in its existence.

Vincent del Prado: Our Corporeal Spell: Embodiment, Subjectivity, and the Analytic Philosophy of Meaning in Life

Relative to the meaning of life, many philosophers have been interested in the more modest idea of meaning in life; the most notable example is Susan Wolf (2010). Often enough, this is a starting point wholly apart from the meaning of life, but it seems to me that one cannot properly address what meaning in life is without considering what the meaning of life is. This is because the practical reality of living meaningfully is constrained by the nature of living things. Thus, it is my hope that my view is one that takes seriously the conceptual challenge of meaningfulness discourse by reckoning with the connection between meaning in life and the arguably more grandiose topic, the meaning of life. In doing so, I consider the practical, forward-looking question about meaning in life to be one grounded in embodiment. Embodiment delimits the nature of one's life and life generally in a rather straight-forward way. The living agent is constrained by the nature of life in various senses, including the biological sense. I am going to limit the scope of what I mean by life to something like biological life. Why? This is because whatever there is to life and its possible meaning besides embodiment, the extent and duration of embodiment constitutes the experience of one's life. Therefore, embodiment provides the foundation for meaning in life, and, I will argue, guides its normative dimensions to a significant extent. Thus, I will side with Seachris (2009), (2019), and Thomas (2019) in reasoning that the meaning of life is indeed connected to meaning in life. Specifically, the meaning of life determines what meaning in life can be. Subjectivism is a promising starting point for an embodied point of view. I defend the idea that Agent-dependent reasons are ancillary to meaning in life (Calhoun 2018) against objectivist and hybrid theories. In addition to agent-dependency, there are important externalist conditions that result from the embodied and situated nature of agency. Following Roholt (2022), I will defend the idea that this helps to substantiate the intuitive appeal of non-subjective conditions for meaning in life while still leaving in place the importance of a subjective component. I consider the plausibility of "meaning autonomy" as an objective dimension of meaning, in which "people can decide what is meaningful for themselves" (Kügler 2023). I contrast the non-subjective dimensions of meaningfulness as they arise from embodiment.

Lucy Tomlinson: This Beautiful, Meaningful Life

Classically, beauty has formed part of a triad (the good, the true and the beautiful) that confer meaning to life. However, the power of beauty to confer meaning was seen as self-evident, and while its causes and nature were much discussed, its meaning-conferring powers were not placed under the same scrutiny. Then, in the 20th century an opposing view gained favour, that beauty did not confer meaning because it was a passive experience and meaning came about through one's actions. Beauty became a kind of pleasant add-on to experience, a luxury that was nice to have but not necessary in the serious work of building meaning into one's life. This paper contends that beauty is indeed a meaning-conferring phenomenon and can be both a passive episode and active experience constituted by the experiencer. The paper then turns to the means by which beauty can confer meaning to life, considering a) its power to allow one to transcend one's ego b) emotional resonance c) sensory richness d) closer connection with others and e) closer contact with reality as the potential substrates of beauty's ability to confer meaning on one's life. The paper considers some responses to questionnaires administered to the public to understand how these factors contribute to experiences of beauty. The paper then

considers that idea that beauty is representation of value(s), where those values can be heterogeneous in nature. Turning to pain as an analogue, it shows that a property such as beauty can both represent value and be of value itself, in just the way that pain can represent disvalue (such as bodily damage) whilst being problematic and of negative value in its own right. The paper then concludes the experiences of beauty should be taken seriously as meaning-conferring and that a life devoid of beauty might well be called a life devoid of meaning.

Asheel Singh: Openness to ‘Cosmic Realism’ about the Meaning of Life

Openness to ‘cosmic realism’ about the meaning of life Dr Asheel Singh Senior Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, University of Johannesburg asheels@uj.ac.za Much of the field of meaning in life proceeds from two fundamental dogmas. The first is that the scientific method is probably our best way of discovering truths about the natural world (a position often encapsulated in the meaning literature under the banner of ‘naturalism’). The second, ostensibly derived from the first, is that there is no fundamental meaning to existence. A consequence of these two dogmas is that much of the field proceeds from a first philosophy that spurns examinations into the question of the meaning of life—although most in the field accept that the question of meaning in life can be intelligibly interrogated. In this talk, I challenge the assumption that the former (naturalism) implies the latter (‘base nihilism’, let us call it, following Singh 2023), or that the meaning of life requires a supernatural realm. I argue instead that these assumptions are not at all implied by naturalism (far from it), and that the field should be open to the possibility of what I shall call ‘cosmic realism’ about the meaning of life. Cosmic realism about meaning, as I present it, holds that the phenomenon of meaning is no less real than, say, the four fundamental forces of physics. It is a view that shares the spirit of scientific realism, in that it is optimistic about the possibility of ‘knowing the mind of God’—to invoke Stephen Hawking’s famous phrase—through the scientific method, albeit in the matter of life’s meaning. To put it far too aphoristically, base nihilism is the assumed consequence of the triumph of the scientific project in Western culture: life’s (base) meaning is a baby that has been thrown out with the bathwater. But this concept (‘meaning’), too, can be appropriately naturalized; it, too, can be apprehended as a natural phenomenon arising from intelligible cosmic-bound processes, and not assumed to be a special case distinct from other natural phenomena. Going further than, say, the realism about meaning in Metz (2013), cosmic realism is open to the possibility of discovering the meaning of life—i.e., a ‘cosmic’ or ‘holist’ theory of meaning, as opposed to (merely) an ‘individualist’ one. Cosmic realism, as I present it, is a contemporary restatement of a view with significant historical precedent, having been the default position of scholars of meaning, cross-culturally, for most of recorded history. Though these presentations of the view have tended to be closely associated with religious doctrines, the view need not entail ‘supernatural’ beliefs. I demonstrate this naturalist compatibilism, as it were, by appealing to recent naturalistic attempts to explain consciousness as an all-pervading cosmic phenomenon (Shani and Keppler 2018 and 2020), and recent attempts to revivify ancient (Eastern) cosmic accounts of meaning (Singh 2023) and consciousness (Albahari 2019). My aim, ultimately, is to argue for the very old idea of a cosmic meaning-conferring order in which the conditions for the possibility of meaning obtain and are sustained by very the existence of the cosmos itself.

Shawn Graves: Love and Meaning in Life

In this paper, I explain and defend the view that one's life is meaningful insofar as it relates to the world in loving ways. One's life relates to the world in loving ways insofar as one's life is made up of loving acts and loving attitudes, especially when one's life is made up of loving acts motivated by loving attitudes. Meaningfulness is not an all or nothing appraisal. So, the meaningfulness of one's life is proportional to how loving one's life is. To explain this view, I offer a brief account of love. Here I engage the relevant literature, including the work of Harry Frankfurt, J. David Velleman, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Martha Nussbaum, John Rawls, Eleonore Stump, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Alan Soble. In short, love entails (1) seeking to promote the flourishing of the beloved, and (2) desiring union—social integration and cooperation—with the beloved. Consequently, a loving act is one that promotes the flourishing of the beloved and social integration and cooperation with the beloved, and one's attitude is loving when one intends to perform loving acts. I offer additional explanation by briefly considering some aspects of what it means to flourish or, alternatively, have a good life. Here I engage with Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach. In defense of this view, I consider where alternative views fail and suggest that this love-centered view avoids these pitfalls. For example, I criticize views that emphasize purpose, life-coherence, fulfillment, virtue, belonging, significance, admirability, and/or memorability. I then argue that a love-centered view is not subject to these criticisms. Of course, this is merely suggestive, not conclusive. In addition, I consider some potential objections to this love-centered view, including some proposed counterexamples. I argue that a love-centered view can handle adequately these potential objections. Finally, I note that a love-centered view of meaningfulness offers some guidance on whether non-human animals can have meaningful lives. Briefly, non-human animals may be a source of meaning insofar as they can be recipients and subjects of love. On this view, we can have meaningful interactions with non-human animals. Whether non-human animals themselves can have meaningful lives turns on whether they can relate to the world in loving ways. Put succinctly, if a non-human animal is capable of performing loving acts and/or having loving attitudes, then it is capable of living a meaningful life.

William Pamerleau: The Impact of Film on Meaning in Life

One of the ways in which philosophers have described the way in which we generate meaning in life is through narratives. Social philosophers like MacIntyre and Taylor have argued that our identities are largely constituted by narratives that sort out which life events matter and which do not. Philosophers who write more directly on meaning in life, like Seachris and Thomas, also acknowledge the meaning-making role of narrative, even if it is acknowledge there are other aspects of a meaningful life. Narratives also have an important social aspect. We learn much of the stories we tell about our own lives from others – from social scripts, as Appiah refers to them, that we both draw from and contribute to. Most films, too, are narratives, and as such they constitute a source of social scripts. If we think of film broadly, including content found on television and streaming services, and consider the frequency with which we engage it, one wonders how much impact film narratives have on our life narratives. This discussion seeks to explore that impact, considering the effects of film narrative on life

narratives with respect to meaning in life. I argue that the effects are both negative and positive. Film can, for instance, serve as a means of oppression by enforcing and sustaining forms of identity that may be demeaning. This happens, for example, when films normalize racist attitudes or glamorize characters who, while attractive in other respects, convey a toxic masculinity. But films can also have a positive impact by challenging those sorts of narratives, revealing their contingency and breaking their hold (as *Philadelphia Story* attempted to do for the gay community, and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* for persons of color). They can also lead us to reflect on the adequacy of our own narratives, thereby enabling growth, or serve as examples of how to narrate the events of our own lives in different and more meaningful ways. As an aside, while this discussion is interesting in its own right, it also serves as an example of how meaning emerges from within human activity and our negotiation with social resources. For philosophers that doubt our ability to find meaning in life without reference to the more cosmic aspects that emphasize meaning of life, this discussion demonstrates another way we can indeed generate substantive meaning from within the scope of human activity.

Matthew Hammerton: A Conditional Analysis of Meaning in Life

In normative ethics it is standard to distinguish an analysis of a concept from a substantive theory of what that concept consists in. For example, consequentialists think that moral rightness consists in maximizing the good whereas deontologists think that it consists in respecting individual dignity. Yet, we do not suppose that they simply mean different things by “moral rightness” and, hence, are talking past each other. Instead, we suppose that there is a basic concept of “moral rightness” that all moral theories are concerned with and take different theories to be giving rival accounts of what properties in fact satisfy that basic concept. The same applies to theories of meaning in life. Objectivists think that a meaningful life must satisfy certain objective values whereas subjectivists deny this. But we don't think that they mean different things by “meaning in life” and, hence, are talking past one another. Instead, we suppose that there is a basic concept of “meaning in life” that all these theories are concerned with and take different theories to be giving rival accounts of what properties in fact satisfy the basic concept. In this talk, I first argue that attempts to specify a basic concept of “meaning in life” that is neutral between different substantive theories of what makes lives meaningful have not been successful. I then propose a conditional analysis of meaning in life that takes an unorthodox approach to accommodating subjectivist and objectivist theories. According to this analysis, if there are objective values in the world then a life is meaningful if, and only if, it is lived in a way that is appropriately connected to those values. However, if there are no objective values in the world then an agent's life is meaningful if, and only if, it is lived in a way that is appropriately connected to certain kinds of mental states the agent possesses. This account has the benefit of accommodating both objectivist and subjectivist theories of meaning in life. However, it includes two controversial assumptions, which I defend. The first is that, if objective values turn out to be a metaphysical reality in our world, then subjectivism must be abandoned as meaning in life must, in some way, be connected to those values. Many subjectivists appear to accept this, But I rebut the hypothesized arguments of those who might reject it. The second is that, if there are no objective values in our world then subjectivism about meaning in life rather than nihilism about meaning in life is what follows. Some

objectivists seem to reject this and insist that the absence of objective values leads to nihilism. I argue that they are wrong to do so.