

The Meaning of Life

A guide to finding your life's purpose

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Introduction

How to think about life...not how to live it

"Life, under any circumstances, never ceases to have a meaning."

— Viktor E. Frankl¹

"My life is my message."

— Mahatma Gandhi²

PRINCIPLES OF THE MEANING OF LIFE

- **Growth** – *The meaning of life is to grow*
- **Experience** – *You grow through experience*
- **Desire** – *Desires motivate you to have experiences*
- **Belief** – *Beliefs shape your perception and sustain your desires*
- **Emotions** – *Emotions indicate your life direction and progress*
- **Ethics** – *Ethics are principles for your growth within a society*
- **Support** – *Support enables you to realize your life's meaning*
- **Choice** – *Your choices create your destiny*

CONTEXT FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE

“What is the meaning of life?” is a complex question. People who ask it usually want to know four things:

- “How did life come to be?”
- “How does life work?”
- “How should I live my life?”
- “What should my goal in life be?”

The more important question, though, is why they are asking it. Ultimately, people want to know what to do with their lives and how to do it successfully. A rational person, then, is trying to use knowledge about where life came from and how it works to inform their goals and behaviors.

Unfortunately, life is so complex that no one set of instructions or rules could cover the infinite number of possible situations. Still, there are plenty of people looking for guidance and plenty of people willing to provide this guidance. As with any advice, the recipient has to decide whether any particular recommendation applies to his or her situation.

The problem with most life advice is that it combines the answers to these four questions and makes them interdependent. For example, one recommendation might be that life was created by God and follows the rules of God, so people should have an ultimate goal to worship Him and behave following His rules to live a pious life. These universal recommendations answer all four questions collectively, requiring anyone who only asks one of them to subscribe to the whole worldview.

By combining them, they often conflate them. Many religious and philosophical texts start with how life began, what the point is, and then recommend how to live based on that. There are two problems with this approach: subsequent scientific findings regarding how life works are filtered through the lens of that particular worldview, and life recommendations are based on who or what created the universe.

People should not be trying to use how and why life and the universe came into existence to determine what their goal should be and how to behave. An athlete does not need to learn who invented the sport and why to understand it, appreciate it, and excel at it. Instead, people should use their knowledge of how life works to define their own goals and behaviors.

Because how life works should be the basis of how to lead a meaningful, successful life, three of the four questions can be set aside for now. How life originated may have a scientific answer (i.e., a chemical reaction) or a religious one (i.e., God), but the former has no bearing on life's meaning while the latter can never be proven scientifically. Goals are subjective, so no one can say with universal applicability which goals everyone should have for their lives. Finally, you cannot understand how to approach life optimally until you understand how life works and what the goal is.

The reality is that no answer to the question of how to live life will satisfy everyone, and there is no single way to live life that is objectively best. There are plenty of successful approaches to follow when you have a specific goal, but people asking about the meaning of life are likely searching for what that goal should be.

Providing universal advice on how to identify the right goal and approach it in the best way possible is not easy. Philosophers have debated for thousands of years whether there are such things as objective, universal rules for living a successful life. Those conversations are often abstract, so most actionable guidance defines a set of common goals, such as health, wealth, status, and love, and explains to the listener what to think and do to succeed.

Unfortunately, telling people what to think instead of helping them think for themselves deprives them of the fundamental knowledge they need to find their own purpose. In addition, most life advice is heavily influenced by what the advisor believes is the right way to live. As a result, people receive guidance that may not apply to them with no way to determine whether it does.

To figure out the meaning of life, then, the only solution is to start by understanding how life works—how to think about life, not how to live it. How life works can be objectively answered, and those answers can be effectively used to inform what goals to have and how to behave in life.

Science, for example, is used to learn about and then explain how the universe works. There are “exact” physical sciences, such as physics and biology, and the “inexact” social sciences, such as psychology and sociology. Scientists have learned how life works from these sciences, yet most people separate science (the “how”) and philosophy (the “why”).

As a result, the most widely accepted life philosophies are based on pre-science theologies that start from how and why life came into existence and end with general rules for living. Science-based life philosophies, such as secular philosophy or atheism, have made significant progress but are frequently framed from the perspective of theology to help people live morally, happily, and purposefully without belief in a deity. In contrast, the most insightful, actionable philosophy would explain how life works and how you can systematically derive meaning from your existence.

Fortunately, philosophy and science have progressed to the point where there is now a logical explanation of how life works that can help you figure out the purpose of your existence for yourself. This book explains the eight most important life concepts that you need to understand to derive your own meaning:

The Eight Fundamental Concepts of the Meaning of Life

- **Growth** – Life’s definition, purpose, and significance
- **Experience** – Life’s medium for growth
- **Desire** – Life’s driving force
- **Belief** – Life’s sustaining force
- **Emotions** – Life’s feedback mechanism
- **Ethics** – Life’s rules for optimal growth
- **Support** – Life’s protection and nurturing system

- **Choice** – Life’s freedom to determine its own destiny

Understanding and mastering these eight concepts will help you live a life of purpose. Each chapter in this book explains one of the concepts in detail and contains supporting evidence from the fields of biology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, economics, and theology. The chapters are structured in the following way to explain the concept and apply it to your life:

Contents of Each Chapter

- The definition of the concept as it pertains to life’s purpose
- The existence or evolution of the concept in living things
- The nature of the concept as it exists in humans
- The application of the concept in your search for meaning
- The difficulty in finding meaning without the concept
- Recommendations for how to proceed when you are unsure
- Questions for reflecting on how the concept applies to you
- Exercises to help you apply the concept to your life

You may wish to skip to the exercises to find your meaning as quickly as possible, but the most important part of searching for your meaning is knowing *why* these eight concepts are core to living a meaningful life. This book uses scientific, logical explanations of how each concept works to avoid the ambiguity of parables and the incredibility of spiritual explanations. Once you grasp the concepts, you can then use the practical guides at the end of each chapter to translate the insight into action.

In short, this book explains how life works conceptually and then provides an analytical process that you can use to find purpose in your existence. This approach can help you understand how to think about life so you can figure out your own direction without relying on an outside force to set it for you. There is no rigid belief system, no list of rules to follow without question, and no expectation to take anything on faith. Instead, this book contains the very core principles of life that serve as the basis for

religions, philosophies, and personal success stories around the world.

If you are curious, lost, confused, depressed, searching for answers, or looking for more fulfillment, this book is made specifically for you. You want to find your purpose. You want someone to help you figure it out, not to tell you what it is or what it should be. After reading this book, you will understand how people find meaning in their lives and use that approach to live a life full of purpose. Your self-determined destiny begins here.