

What makes life meaningful philosophy essay



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You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life. These are the words of Albert Camus about the meaning of life and how it is something one should not particularly search for. The question of my research is “ What makes life meaningful?” Many historical figures around the world have addressed this question, although they commonly have not put the answers in clear terms. Aristotle talked about happiness, Camus talked about absurdism, and Viktor Frankl wrote about pain and suffering. These concepts have not directly answered the question about the meaning of life but they have played a significant role in the search for meaning. My research looks at this question from two perspectives, Existentialism, a literary movement concerned with the existence of oneself in the world, and Romanticism, a movement with great interest in nature and emphasis on an individual’s expression of emotion and imagination. People around the world should think about the meaning of life in order to find a purpose in life which in turn should reduce the pain and suffering caused by this world. Although a Romantic view of meaning has a more engaging process, an Existentialist view is more practical and relevant to our world because everyone experiences pain and has to make decisions in life.

Existentialism is a literary movement concerned with the existence and purpose of oneself in the world. Existentialists have questioned our existence in this world and purpose of finding the meaning of life. They believe that there is no predestination, and that man is free to be the master of his own fate. They also believe that man’s existence depends on suffering, because it not only can provide a person with a profound source for meaning, but it also

provides the necessary comparison by which success and happiness are measured. Existentialism is quite common in our world. People going through an existential crisis ask questions about their existence and purpose in their world. They question the meaning of their life and what the purpose of finding meaning in life if we are all going to die one day. If you are an existentialist you believe that life is inherently meaningless. You also believe, that as a human being, you have free will. In fact, you believe that you are, as Sartre says, "Condemned to be free." You have the choice to either flounder in the sorrow of your own ennui, or to forge your own meaning in life. Life is what you make of it; it is whatever you want it to be. You don't ask this question anyone else as an existentialist, you answer it yourself. Meaning is something you work for. You can't just find meaning in life by sitting around and not being productive. Slyter Marty, author of *Working with Adolescents Search for Meaning in Today's World*, says, "Adolescents can achieve meaning by setting goals." (Marty) Setting a goal in life will motivate you to do something in life. It will make you more productive which in turn may bring meaning in your life.

According to Gale Student Resources in context, "Existentialists believe that life is absurd and has no meaning." (Gale) Because modern man cannot locate an central meaning to human existence, life therefore is inherently absurd. It makes no sense. It defies reason. In the end, regardless of our heroism, love, efforts, etc. we all die. Camus believed that our universe is meaningless and that it is absurd to search for the meaning of life when there is none. He also believed that it is absurd to try to understand our surroundings, as trying to gain a rational explanation is futile. Here Camus

opposes science and philosophy by saying that all forms of logical explanations are useless: "That universal reason, practical or ethical, that determinism, those categories that explain everything are enough to make a decent man laugh." (MS, 21) All meaning is basically meaningless; great achievements by humans will be forgotten thousands of years from now. Good things happen to bad people. Bad things happen to good people, and so on, life really makes no sense at all; it is absurd. The saddest example of absurdity of our existence would be the Holocaust. The genocide of 6 million people has not metaphysical meaning; it just happened and no one can explain the meaning or purpose behind it. It must also be noted that key existential philosophers ascended directly after the Holocaust.

Victor Frankl, author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, suggests that there are three ways of giving meaning to one's life: by doing a deed or by creating a work; by encountering someone or experiencing something; and by the attitude taken toward unavoidable suffering. (Frankl) Productivity, experiences in life, and pain and suffering, which Frankl explained, are three things that may influence the meaning of life. In his chapter on meaning of life, Frankl says, "everyone's task is as unique as his specific opportunity to implement it." He is suggesting that men should not ask what the meaning of life is, but must rather recognize that it is he who is asked. On the other hand this meaninglessness makes everyone absolutely free. Man alone can determine the fate of mankind. Man alone can create meaning.

Meaning exists strictly at a human level, rather than at a cosmic or metaphysical one. Meaning must be created. Existentialists realized that all our great work and creations die with us just like a person dies: if someone's

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love for another has any meaning at all, it is because they made it so. The meaning is brought into existence by that individual.

Robert Solomon, author of *No Excuses: Existentialism and Meaning of Life*, says, "Every one of us is responsible for the way we face and deal with the world." (Solomon) With freedom comes responsibility and with great freedom comes great responsibility. A man is entirely responsible for his decisions. He must alone determine what is right and what is wrong, and we can only blame ourselves for our problems. We may (or may not - we are free to choose) return to our customs that have conventionally given mankind meaning: Art, Love, and Family, even Hope, Faith and Religion, but we do so through freedom, our natural right. We bring meaning into existence through decisions and creativity.

In addition to the Existentialist approach, one might also look at the question of "What makes life meaningful?" through the lens of Romanticism.

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, "Romantic authors have a heightened interest in nature; they emphasize the individual's expression of emotion and imagination, depart from the attitudes and forms of classicism, and rebel against established social rules and conventions." (Merriam-Webster) Romantics use imagination to think about life, they are really connected to nature and their imaginations are influenced by it. Nature is an experience and this experience connects individuals to their feelings.

Romantics find nature beautiful, influential, and flawless. Freedom is also something they take into consideration, just like nature is free; they believe that human beings are free too. They should not be controlled by rules placed by the authority. Previously literature was inspired by law and

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religion; now, it was all under the author's creativity and powerful emotions. This sense of imagination gives them a unique perspective which brings meaning to their life.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the author of *The Little Prince*, uses imagination in the book by using metaphors, it gives him a unique perspective, and he tries to understand himself in this unique and imagined world. Similar experiences lets people really understand themselves which gives them a meaning in life. David Banach, a philosophy professor at Anselm University, says, "The universe is a single unified whole." (Banach) Everything around us is connected to everything else. In a similar fashion the things we go through in life are also connected to other events in life, so everything in life has meaning and it is something we must extract. On the other hand these experiences can help people create moral values and better decisions in life. These moral values and lessons learned from former experiences may be applied to day to day decisions. It could set a standard for a person to follow which could be meaningful to them.

Existentialism and Romanticism overlap in terms of meaning because they both emphasize the individual and his activities in life. Both approaches establish the fact that an individual himself is responsible for his life and no one else. Individuals are unique and they should not be limited by any rules, both perspectives declare that people must rebel against established rules to be freer in order to expand the purpose of their life. What sets these approaches apart from each other are their differences in respect to how they view the world. Existentialists believe that the world doesn't make sense and it's absurd, we must try and find meaning in this absurd world as <https://assignbuster.com/what-makes-life-meaningful-philosophy-essay/>

there is no way. Romantics on the other hand use imagination and emotions rather than reason and formal rules to experience life. Existentialists would say that this imagination makes everything more complex as it adds more to the absurdity of the world.

In terms of practicality for our lives, the most compelling approach to the question is Existentialism, because it is easier for people to make decisions in life and to be responsible for them than trying to imagine a world and understanding yourself. Existentialism provides a deeper understanding of life and how one should try and find meaning in this absurd world.

Existentialism also provides a clear stand point of how productivity, pain and suffering, and experiences in life can ultimately bring meaning to someone's life. The answer most suited to our times in Existentialism as pain and suffering has become quite common in our world. This pain and the decisions brought by these experiences allow people to get to know themselves in a better way which makes their life meaningful.

It is important to continue asking and trying to answer this question because meaning gives our life a purpose. Eventually we are all going to die but finding the meaning of our life reduces our pain and suffering in this world. Those who have spent time pondering this question have contributed to many educational fields, and improved our understanding of this world. For example, Aristotle who talked about happiness and how it could bring meaning to life has provided a great deal of information to the field of science and many have called him the Father of Biology. Many others who have addressed this question have made it easier for us to understand this world and find a purpose in life.

Many people may question the importance of the meaning of life and how it would help someone through the journey of life. Meaning in life gives a person a purpose in life, it motivates people to do something they love. Meaning can be extracted from anything, it can derive from a person's job, hobby or family and we are free to choose. Meaning can also reduce the suffering we experience in this world. Everything we do in life is for the future result of happiness. Similarly, finding the meaning of life potentially makes people happy. There are questions that arise when talking about this subject such as, can you have a meaningful life without being religious? Or is there life after death? The answer to these questions may differ from person to a person. A religious person might answer the first questions by saying that the purpose or meaning of their life is to serve God and an atheist might say that the purpose of their life is to improve. Likewise for the second question answers will vary. These questions have been asked for thousands of years but no one has been able to give a definite answer because of the wide variety of perspectives. This research has raised many questions for me. I usually think about the cultural differences between the U. S. and Pakistan. It's strange to see how big the differences are even though we live in the same world. For example, many people in Mountain View are concerned with getting the best phones, cars or clothing, whereas, people in Pakistan are more concerned with staying safe because of the current security issues. I think it is absurd that we have such big differences in these two different communities. These differences have no meaning or purpose behind them, they are absurd. I suppose it is something that we have to accept and live with. The search for meaning or the things that make life meaningful may very well change in the near future with the rapid advances

in technology. Life might become a lot easier to live and we may not have to go through a great deal of pain and suffering which usually brings meaning to life. Or with the great increase in population in the future survival could become a common goal for people to achieve and staying alive may possibly be the most meaningful thing in their lives.