

Why does it matter?



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On May 21, 2011 many people around the world “ prepared” themselves for what was sure going to be their last day on earth. According to a man by the name of Harold Camping, by 6 pm on May 21st, the world was supposed to have experienced a grand earthquake thus preceding “ The Rapture,” and it seems as though people around the world spend their “ last days on earth” doing many different things. This alone shows what values were respected and how we view them. Harold Camping had concocted some heinous math equation that led him to publicize his fourth prediction.

Although the amount of thought and research he put behind his Christian instinct was impressive; all he managed to do was create a moment of desperation for those of us who lead a “ sinful” life, and a false ray of hope for those who cling to the prophetic words of people like, Harold Camping. As one can imagine, the last few days have been driven by the predicted “ end of the world,” and through outlets such as Twitter, Live Journal, and Facebook, stories of how people spent their last days have surfaced.

Some people thought it would be a great idea to spend their life savings or their children’s college funds, some people spent the day fulfilling their goals and dream, others just spent the past few days locked in and repenting, and the rest either didn’t care or forgot. All these crazy fear-based decisions lead to a small list of much greater and loaded questions: Is it worth it? Does it matter? and Why does it matter? Of course these are questions that fall under the category of “ The Meaning of Life,” and are virtually impossible to reply to, but everyone should be entitled to possess their own educated opinion, right?

In Thomas Nagel's essay "The Absurd" he raises some interesting, but conflicting arguments toward life's "absurdity". In his very complicated essay of rationalizations, he basically presents us with the 3 main reasons why life could be considered absurd: 1) Whatever we do now will not affect the world in the future, so why does it matter? 2) We are forever considered small when compared with the universe, and our lives considered short, so why do we matter? 3) Our actions have no purposeful end, so why do they matter?

Nagel tries to justify his statements, but in the end his statements contradict his points, and this could even be summarized in one simple explanation. If you will not be around in the next 1 million years, how could you or anybody else judge people's actions to determine if whether or not they infinitely matter or not matter. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "Existentialism" is considered a philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will (Oxford).

Within this reasoning is what Nagel based his essay on, but as black and white as this may seem, many other factors should be calculated when trying to determine whether or not existentialism is rational. Without delving too far into the topic of religion, the question about the morality of certain issues still lies on the table. When trying to find a religiously ambiguous debate against existentialism one of the most important questions to consider would be: In a world in which we act on impulse without the fear of repercussion, how would our feelings as human beings factor into our decisions?

As long as there has been the existence of humans on this earth, it would probably be safe to assume that there has also been the “existence” of feelings among the people. Feelings are probably the one impulse that humans find the most difficult to quell in their everyday lives, and from personal experience, one of the most pleasantly intrusive aspects of human life. Although this might be debatable, the statement previous to the latter is not. In her 1970's book *Never in Anger: Portrait of an Eskimo Family*, Professor Jean L.

Briggs studied the Utkuhikhalingmiut (“Utku”) Eskimos of the Canadian Northwest Territories. In this tribe she found that anger and aggression was extremely rare. “Briggs suggests that even in circumstances that we would find intolerably frustrating or offensive, the Utku do not get angry. Where we would be resentful or even furious, the Utku are merely resigned. Anger is an unreasonable response” (qtd. By Solomon). Even in instances such as these, the Eskimo are in a way “brainwashed” from a young age in order to lead this “harmonious” life, and even then they lose their cool.

As reported by a fellow anthropologist, by the name of Catherine Lutz, “among the Ifaluk of Micronesia, the most serious incident of aggression last year, was when one man touched another's shoulder. He was subjected to a severe fine, a reasonable penalty for extremely unreasonable behavior” No matter what one tries to do feeling will always resurface and affect our judgment whether we mean to or not. It's simply just part of the way we were made and will always remain that way.

To argue that someone could easily “discard” their feeling and act purely on impulse would be an ignorant statement. When talking about the rationality

as opposed to the morality of a situation it then becomes a little bit more tricky because as Robert Rorty makes a wonderful job in pointing out, who can define rationality? In accordance with his characteristic nominalism, that "rationality is not a thing," to be Socratically defined or characterized in any singular way.

I would say that it is one of those "essentially contested concepts" of philosophy (like "freedom," "truth," and "justice") which plays a primarily polemical as well as a normative role in our conversations, despite the "descriptive" characterizations that are readily available in behavioral theory and the social sciences. The question is how the term is being used in any particular context and what distinctions are being made --for often the real message is political and not merely conceptual and conveyed only by implication. (qtd.

By Solomon) With arguments such as this one it brings us back to the original debate. Who is to decide what is rational? For one person might think something is a great idea when in reality it might not be, but at the same time still remain it remains a decisions in which it will not tip the scale in either moral direction. As we probably could assume from the beginning, these questions are probably best if left unanswered. The complexity of trying to find the "true meaning" of life is far too great a task for someone of our caliber to judge.

The best thing that we can do as a society is stick together and apply our best traits to create a harmonious place for us to develop and live in. The one thing that is irrefutable would have to be the undeniable fact that if we live our lives in the best way we can while making the best decisions within

society's judgment, we can't really go wrong, and if Nagel had one thing right, it was that our time on this earth is short, so we might as well take advantage of the things we've been blessed with and live life to the fullest.