

Kafka



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This simple yet ingenious quote by Kafka does make one stop and think, is life really that meaningless? How can one concur if life is meaningless or not? Before these questions can be answered, one must ask, what is meaning? Amazingly enough, meaning is something we create ourselves. We attach meaning to everything around us whether it be language, a person, an item, or even a pencil.

Meaning comes from within us, making us the sole contributor to our own existence. Therefore, nothing has meaning unless one was to attach meaning to it, and to attach meaning to anything proves one has created an identity, and that identity allows one to exist. Mortal life by definition comes to an end whether one likes it or not, and because of this, we are always facing the pressure of extinction. The way we cope with this pressure is by giving meaning to the things we do, the things we love, and all the other things which matters in ones life.

To give ourselves an identity in which we exist in this world and to leave behind a trace of our existence. Although it is truly evident that meaning comes from within the individual, others might think differently. One of the main arguments against meaning coming from the individual is that we were already given meaning since birth, given a set of beliefs and morals to follow, so how does one create meaning if it was already given to us from generation through generation?

What they do not know is that meaning is something we gain through experience, and experience is not something we have from birth. Another valid argument would be that this universe does not need meaning and

therefore it is not important to have meaning or create meaning. However, meaning is all around us and whether one likes it or not, we were built to create meaning in order for us to exist, and for us to be able to create an identity. Before we dive deeper into the topic of how we gain meaning, we first have to question what is meaning?

Clare Carlisle quotes Kierkegaard and explains, " Even though all sorts of things exist, for Kierkegaard the word " existence" has a special meaning when applied to human life. This meaning arises from the fact that we always have a relationship to ourselves. " (Carlisle, What does it mean to exist?) To go into more thorough detail, meaning is the stem of everything human. Meaning comes from us because like stated above in the quote by Kierkegaard, we are the only ones who can have a relationship to ourselves.

Humans only truly exist through identity, identity is gained through experience, and experience is what we use to create meaning. Many other individuals would like to believe that meaning does not come within us, but rather given to us, passed down to us from our past generations. For an example, Annie Druyan, wife of astronomer/philosopher Carl Sagan (1934 - 1996) remembered a conversation her husband had with a young man and it goes, " At the end of it, a young man came up to him and he said: What do you give us in return? Now that you've taken everything from us?

What meaning is left, if everything that I've been taught since I was a child turns out to be untrue? Carl looked at him and said, 'Do something meaningful. ' " (Sagan.) Without meaning this world would be complete chaos. A person needs to grow up with meaning as a supporting factor, or

else their world would become chaotic and by definition, meaningless. The young man in the flashback is a person who struggles with the belief that he grew up with meaning given to him and therefore once he comprehend the truth and reality of it all, there would be no significance left.

Carl Sagan tries to make this young man understand that in truth, meaning is something we can create anytime, anywhere, and anyplace. Sagan's simple and brief quote 'Do something meaningful' gives us hope because it illustrates that meaning does not stem from the beginning of our lives, but something we have to experience and something we have to do in order to gain meaning. Although there are many others out there like the young man depicted in Annie Druyan's flashback, they would have to know that meaning is not something in which they are given, but is gained through their Journey and understanding of life.

This is significant because it is imperative for ones knowledge to understand that no matter how lost or confused one might be, they could always create their own meaning instead of relying or is biased on the thought that meaning was created for us. If one was to be biased on that thought, their total reliance on the meaning at which was given to them would collapse when they learn the undeniable truth that meaning has always been within their reach. Although meaning is a controversial and conflicting topic to discuss, some might argue that meaning is something we shouldn't try to understand at all.

Alex Percival as a strong opinion towards meaning and how he believes the universe does not need meaning at all. He states in his own words, " With

modern discoveries, we have found that the meaning of life itself is pointless, but we are extremely lucky to be here because the probability that any one of us being in existence is next to 0%. " (Percival.) In truth, meaning does matter in this world that we live in. Without meaning we would be lost with no identity, and would have no proof of our own existence.

It is important for humans to make meaning for themselves because we want to exist and therefore we should exist. Meaning is not pointless at all, in fact meaning is apart of ones soul, apart of us. Meaning is a tool we strive and depend on to survive, because without it we would feel worthless and needless to say, useless. Despite the many oppositions against the interpretation of meaning, language is one of the many factors in which humans attach meaning to. One blogger give their thoughts on how meaning relates to language and states, " Language communicates meaning, and the origin of meaning is relationship.

In fact; if we use the idea that " relationship is the origin of meaning" as our lens, it opens up a whole new world eyond the narrow definitions that confine meaning to traditional ideas of language. " (The Wisdom of Life.) Language in fact does relate to human relationships. To be able to communicate and articulate our thoughts gives us meaning. Without language, humans would not be able to express their thoughts and empty their minds and this is an important process to meaning because how can one attach or create meaning if they cannot express themselves.

It is crucial to understand that language does not get it's meaning from others but it is something we attach to it. For n example, as Professor Jacoby

has mentioned in class, " A chair does not have meaning unless we give it meaning. The word chair to another person could mean something much more significant or it could mean nothing depending who this person is and what significant attachment they have given to the chair. " (English 205 Lecture.) Anyone can give meaning to anything as long as there is a special significance to it.

This is how we gain existence and gain identity. It comes through our experience and how we see things in our own eyes and not through what has already been defined for us. When one speaks about language, often we question what is the significance of many languages in this world. As Noam Chomsky says in *We Still Live Here*, " A language is not just words. It's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It's all embodied in a language. " (Chomsky. Language is no longer just words or different types of languages that people speak around the world, it is what sets us apart from others. It is what defines us as a people, it gives us meaning. With many languages around the world, one could feel lost or troubled because they are afraid they could lose their identity. Although that is definitely not the case, language could preserve one's true identity because with language comes a culture, a tradition, a community, and a whole history. With all these factors combined, one can find their identity and create meaning to their lives in their own ways and form.

To find one's own identity is truly important in terms of existence, and the only way to find one's identity is through finding meaning within themselves. Meaning also attaches itself to forms of exceptionalism, how we interpret

and truly follow this ideal belief is entirely up to the person. In one article by The Globalist, they proclaim, " And Americans can only be exceptional if we are well informed and willing to make hard choices and take risks. Apathy, ignorance and risk aversion are the death sentence of the American experiment. (The Globalist, The Idea of American Exceptionalism.) This is not only true to Americans, but also other cultures around the world as well. To make one self " exceptional" the person needs to be able to make well informed decisions on their own accord and take risks by the ips of the their own fingers. This connects to meaning because the only way we can make our own decisions and take our own risks is by attaching our own meaning to what all of these things mean. To be exceptional does not necessarily translate to ignorance, it could also mean it is their only form of survival.

To any culture around the world, their identity is found through their culture, history, tradition. They rely on these factors because it is what makes them special, unique, and superior from others. Just like how each of them have their own language, tradition, and beliefs, hey want to preserve this by giving it a name, American Exceptionalism, British Exceptionalism, and Greek Exceptionalism. This way, they have given meaning to these terms which in return protect their identities. As individuals we all have a specific responsibility to be fulfilled once we take our first breaths in this world.

One specific sentence which caught my attention in the article by The Globalist was, " As citizens, we have a sacred duty to conserve government by the active " not passive " consent of the governed. " (The Globalist, The Idea of American Exceptionalism. Even if we are a citizen of American or not, <https://assignbuster.com/kafka/>

it does not matter, because every human in this Earth has a specific duty, which is to do something meaningful so that can be remembered for what they've done. The government is depicted as powerful, and because we see them as powerful, we believe that meaning comes from the government.

The government's rules and laws seem to constrain us, but in reality it's constrictions is what tests our understanding of what meaning is. For an example, in *The Trial*, a relatable quote from the conversation between K. and the doorkeeper goes as this, " Everyone strives to reach the Law," says the man, " so how does it happen that for all these many years no one but myself has ever begged for admittance? " The doorkeeper recognizes that the man has reached his end, and to let his failing senses catch the words roars in his ear: " No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you.

I am now going to shut it. " (Kafka 256.) In *The Trial*, it is Kafka's intention to make the court look so powerful, because in this way, K. is forced to look for meaning and search for his own identity instead of trying to search for significant meaning in others. In fact, the court is so powerful that they have already planned everything out for K. K. 's future was in their hands and yet he barely even realized this because he was transfixed on trying to get everyone else to help him when the answer was within him.

This message is of vital importance to comprehend, because one must know that no matter how powerful the barrier maybe between the person and their journey to gain meaning is, their duty as a human allows them to conquer those obstacles and face their own challenges. In *The Trial* it is evident from

the very beginning K. 's thoughts were always ethered to what others thought about him and his need to find meaning through them instead of himself. Whenever K. spoke, he would always pay close attention to others, as though their opinions and thoughts were crucial to him, " 'Intrusive, thoughtless people! ' said K. s he turned back into the room. The supervisor may have agreed with him, at least K. thought that was what he saw from the corner of his eye. But it was just as possible that he had not even been listening as he had his hand pressed firmly down on the table and seemed to be comparing the length of his fingers. " (Kafka 17. Throughout the Trial, K. is repeatedly focusing on what others think of him, how others does not give him attention, and how others gave him meaning. His mind was constantly affected by the whispers around him and it affected him to the point whereby he was utterly dependent on other people.

Kafka's mission was to make us understand that K. was trapped in the wrong place the whole time, in someone else's mind. When a person is trapped in someone else's thoughts, it would be hard for them to understand how important meaning is if they are constantly looking for meaning in the wrong place. One of the great meanings behind Kafka's works was to question one specific word, " Meaning. " In the text, K. 's conversation with the Priest demonstrates how Kafka views the word meaning, miou look for too much help from people you don't know," said the priest disapprovingly, " and especially from women.

Can you really not see that's not the help you need? " (Kafka 252.) Kafka used K. as a guide to help him search for or make meaning. K. is constantly seeking and depending on others to be able to survive and to exist in this

world that the meaning to his life soon became exactly that; his reliance on others became his meaning of survival, to exist. Kafka wants us to know that meaning was not already given to us, but we make meaning. We give meaning to people, things, and everything around us so we can feel special, unique, and most importantly to feel like we exist.

Kafka also wants us to know that K was looking for meaning in all the wrong places and to learn from K.'s mistakes. K. looked for meaning through his reliance on others, when he was supposed to create meaning within himself. To exist, we first have to rely on our own thoughts and our own ideas. This is significant because our thoughts and our own ideas is how meaning is created. If we do not create meaning through our own minds, we do not exist according to Kafka, and that is why K. dies (Kafka 271) at the end because he was not able to realize his whole life depended on someone else, and his sense of meaning came from the people around him as well which is what makes one exist. Although, this leads to the quote which was stated in the beginning of the essay, "The meaning of life is that it ends." -Franz Kafka. No matter how a person tries to define meaning or try to apprehend it, life does end. So why is meaning so important? Meaning not only gives us a sense of security and comfort from the chaotic world we live in, but it also serves as a backbone to our identity and our existence.

By us giving meaning to anything and everything, it gives us a sense of comfort knowing that it is significant or in some ways meaningful to us therefore making us feel as though we exist because we gave meaning to something which never had meaning before it came into our lives. To exist, to give meaning, and to gain an identity is all part of what it means to be

human. Meaning nowadays is interpreted in many different ways, but one theory seems to stand out more than the rest, and it's that meaning comes from within each individual and not from an external source.

We use meaning to create ourselves, find our identities, and sustain our existence through our lifetime. In these modern times, the word meaning has been modified to each person's own interpretations of what meaning is. The problem is, would meaning ever be completely defined? Or is it a word that us humans can attach our own meaning to? It is definitely something to think about as we progress further into the world of constant change and start to lose the roots of our identity and even our existence.