

WHY EVEN MIND? ON THE A PRIORI VALUE OF “LIFE”

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ABSTRACT: This article presents an analysis of the matter of the “meaning” of life in terms of whether it should even be lived in the first place. It begins with an attempt at defining the question as an inquiry on the *a priori* value of attention in general, and develops into an axiological reflection distantly inspired from Martin Heidegger’s notion of “care.” The main objective of the article is (1) to “answer” the question (or to proceed as if the question could be answered) objectively by “playing along” with its naïve logic—that is, by finding a basis for comparing the good that can be found *a priori* in life (mainly, pleasure) with the good that can be found *a priori* in death (mainly, the absence of pain)—and, then, (2) to suggest why we have no good reason to feel dissatisfied with where this leaves us (i.e., possibly facing a certain specter of ethical foundationalism: the question of the “value of value”). Its basic conclusion is, assuming we are committed to assigning value to life *in general*, that we should be able to say that life is good *irrespective of* any explanation for its existence.

KEYWORDS: Meaning of life; Axiology; Existentialism

To be, or not to be,—that is the question:—
Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?—To die, to sleep,—
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to,—‘tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish’d. To die, to sleep.¹

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest—whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories—comes afterward. These are games; one must first answer.²

1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Act III, Scene 1.

2. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus And Other Essays*, New York, Vintage Books, 1991, p. 3.

INTRODUCTION: WHAT WE MEAN (VERY BASICALLY) AND WHY WE ASK

What we seek when we search for “the meaning of life” in the most basic or general sense (or for an answer to the timeless, general question, “why are we here?”) can be one or both of two things: either it is an explanation for the fact that “life” as we know it exists, or it is a justification for our most basic (or “default”) desire to live.

On the one hand, looking for an explanation “why” life exists may have to involve an onerous empirical investigation, theory-making, speculation, or even myth-making. It is an inquiry concerning natural history at best (cosmology, etc...). On the other hand, articulating a justification “why” we desire to live needs only involve the clarification of a supposed rationality (or revelation of lack thereof) supporting one of the most significant “choices” we have already made (i.e., to survive). Our goal here is to do the latter—a more “humble” pursuit.

But why do it? What explains or justifies this desire to articulate a justification why we desire to live? Do we not agree that, “there are certain things one does not ask about: primary imperative of instinct?”³ Might our inquiry, then, not be only the expression of a sick, perhaps “depressed,” psyche, or a symptom of the degeneration of one of our most basic instincts? Might this also help explain why the legendary resonance of “the” question from the mouth of Hamlet, insane as he seemed, has elicited only aesthetic fascination for the most part, instead of a greater moral demand to either seriously answer or dismiss it? Maybe. Indeed, why else would we have “sensed” (as we have at times) a vague danger or insanity about that “humble” question? However, the question has remained, somehow. After all, it seems that the authority of these notions of health relates back to the authority of the principle that life ought to be preserved in the first place, which is precisely what we dare to question. Such circular appeal does little to dispel the troubling appearance of sense and meaningfulness in the question. Perhaps, what we need is to better understand how “wrong-headed” that question really is, if at all, and then also why, nonetheless, a thinker like Camus not only addressed it seriously, but also made it *the* question, elevating it to a level reminiscent of First Philosophy.

The explanation may well lie in the fact that some of us (including Hamlet, Camus and others) suffer through a special kind of stupidity. “Value judgments about life, for or against, can in the final analysis never be true; they have value only as symptoms, they can be considered only as symptoms—in themselves, such judgments are *stupidities*.”⁴ What makes this characterization more compelling is, precisely, that it questions the adequacy of our understanding.

Stupidity is to the psyche as filth is to the body: a Sisyphean problem, in one sense. And philosophy is that hygienic practice that we use, continually, against the never-ending problem that natural stupidity presents—just as others use regular prayer or other rituals to purge their psyches, again and again, of similar curses, or as we all take

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Richard Polt, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, p. 77.

4. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 13 (emphasis added).

regular showers to purge our bodies of the natural growth of filth. Thinkers of different inclinations have acknowledged aspects of this chronic susceptibility, and its relation to philosophy, in various ways. According to Wittgenstein, for instance, “human beings are deeply imbedded in philosophical – i.e. grammatical – confusions,”⁵ and “philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.”⁶ (Questions of understanding—meaning or the illusion of meaning—always involve questions about our relationship with language.) As for Deleuze, “[philosophy] is useful for harming stupidity, for turning stupidity into something shameful. Its only use is the exposure of all forms of baseness of thought.”⁷

It is noteworthy, however, that not all stupidities are born equal: some reflect (and can be justified as) efforts to overcome the stupor of a new birth. In our modern case, it may have been the birth (or at least the early stages of conception) of what could now be called post-theism. (“God is dead.”) This may have been the destabilizing event. And if it was, then our inquiry can be explained as an aspect of our re-adjustment, and perhaps even justified as an attempt at re-education.

I. WHAT WE MEAN (IN MORE DETAIL)

Regardless of whether or not we find that it is *the* “fundamental question” of philosophy,⁸ we can see that judging whether life is or is not worth living is, in one sense at least, when understood with a general character, a fundamentally philosophical question. The question calls on the living individual to make a value judgment (which seems of the most serious extent) about the condition it most basically, most generally, and in a sense most intimately, “finds itself” in—and in this sense, the question must be seen as a “personal” one.⁹ But the judgment called for only becomes especially interesting for philosophical exercise once we attempt to make it “objective,” so to speak.

On the one hand, from a “subjective” point of view, the question whether life is or is not worth living reduces simply to the question whether or not—or *how*—we the living already in fact, in our variable situations, desire or not to live. Its answer is a function of descriptions of motivational dispositions as they may vary from individual to individual and circumstance to circumstance. (For instance, some may find certain cases of euthanasia justified, or find certain forms of suicide honorable.) In other words, from a subjective point of view, the answer would simply be that life is worth living to the extent that, while we could have a different attitude, we just *happen to* want it (to be disposed towards it), perhaps in light of circumstantial considerations. And, thus, the question could be

5. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript, German English Scholars' Edition: TS 213*, trans. C.G. Luckhardt and M.A.E. Aue (eds.), Malden, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 417.

6. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd ed., Prentice Hall, 1973, p. 47.

7. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, London, Althone Press, 1983, p. 106.

8. For instance, it may be that, “what can be said?” is a more fundamental question—assuming there truly exists such hierarchy between questions of philosophy.

9. One might say, but in a somewhat informal sense: it is an “existential” question.

quickly addressed in some cases, without much need for philosophical inquiry—except perhaps on collateral issues. Similarly, typical answers referring simply to how “fun” or “beautiful” life is, or (perhaps the contemporary scientist’s favorite) how “fascinating” or “mysterious”—these answers are, as stated, inadequate for our purposes, to the extent that they are primitive (uncritical) generalizations expressing our preexisting desire for (or infatuation with) life.

On the other hand, from a point of view that purports to be “objective,” we must have a more complex approach. We must “problematize” the value of life in general. The question is not simply whether (or how, or even why in the broad sense of an explanation) we happen to desire or not to live, but rather whether (or why in the narrow sense of a justification) we should or should not ever desire to live in the first place.

a. The objective approach

In seeking a justification, we must look, beyond the mere “freedom” (or given-ness) of any primitive desire, for something like a final “authority” that we could show through some fact or logical inference¹⁰ to make us “right” (i.e., as a matter of reasoning) to have such a desire. In other words, we must try to present life as being instrumental or not to some uncontested value (or purpose)—and, thus, as either “useful” or “futile.” In this sense, the word “meaningful” (pertaining to life) would be basically synonymous with the word “useful”—a relation between objects and moments, on the one hand, and how what we value can be served, on the other hand.

In addition, we do not look for conditions that would sustain or increase the value of a proposed venture; we look for a demonstration that the venture can have *any* value. Accordingly, in order to find the objective position, we must avoid in our picture of life or death any variable circumstance that could be taken to make either one of them arbitrarily *more* or *less* attractive or pursuable. Furthermore, any description of how we desire to live may well entail conditions under which we would not prefer to live. But even if such conditions exist, it does not necessarily follow that life is without value when those conditions prevail. Indeed, by analogy, that we would prefer ten dollars to five dollars if we could choose does not mean at all that the five dollars would then have no value. Other example: that we would happily accept an ice cream cone if it were free but refuse it if we had to pay for it does not mean at all that ice cream has no value to us. The distinction can be expressed as follows: the value of ice cream in light of its cost, we call its *a posteriori* value; the value of ice cream irrespective of its cost, we call its *a priori* value.

What we seek in this inquiry is the *a priori* value of life-as-such—the value that subsists in, or is essential to, or is the initial value in, any life, irrespective of its circumstanc-

10. By “logical inference,” we mean simply this: for instance, if you find that it is too cold outside, then, the logical inference is that *a priori* (i.e., assuming there are no other considerations), you should dress warmly if you go out. (An example of an *a posteriori* condition could be this: you have just made a bet with a friend that you could go out naked in the cold for one hour.) The terms *a priori* and *a posteriori* are defined more specifically below.

es, including, to any extent possible, any explanation for its existence.¹¹ (The objective question calls for an *a priori* answer.) In contrast, we are not interested in questions such as whether seppuku is honorable or how end-of-life decisions should be made. (The subjective question, the question of circumstances and the *a posteriori* answer coincide.)

Although we do not intend to structure our arguments very rigidly below, it should be clear that the groundwork for this inquiry is primarily “analytical”—not necessarily in the doctrinal or academic sense, but rather in the sense that our primary purpose is elucidatory. Nietzsche said, “One would have to occupy a position outside of life, and on the other hand to know it as well as one, as many, as all who have lived it, in order to be allowed even to touch upon the problem of the *value* of life.”¹² We do not use the word “objective” to claim an independent point of view in an empirical inquiry, however—indeed, we disregard empirical circumstances. Our intent here could be limited to analyzing the concepts of “life” and “value” in order to show or suggest any logical relation between them. “Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.”¹³ The appropriate response to the “problem” of the *a priori* value of life (including an understanding that it is beyond question and that the “problem” must disappear) could become evident as either a direct or an incidental effect of our attempts to demonstrate or articulate that value. In fact, ideally, our “conclusions” should be seen as “platitudes,” undeserving in hindsight of any meticulous development that would have preceded them—platitudes that for whatever psychological cause (say, stupidity) failed to be immediately obvious. It is in this “senselessness” alone that we will attempt to show “truth,” in or through our judgments of value, for or against life. But, before we can begin, a last touch of philosophical housekeeping is in order. We must narrow down what we mean by “life.”

b. “Life” as psychological experience in general

Is it “organic existence” as such? Not necessarily. Our interest here is not primarily in articulating the value we find in distinguishing organisms (including bacteria) from non-organic objects—say, as presenting a “remarkable” cosmological phenomenon. Nor is our interest primarily in deciding in the abstract whether the body of a brain-dead person is worth sustaining, or in deciding whether our economic gain is ever worth sacrificing the participation of another human in the world. As aforesaid, we approach the question whether life is or is not worth living as a personal question, a question about our own, perhaps ubiquitous, pursuit of first-person living—personal life. In other words, our interest here is narrowly in deciding whether we, as deliberate attendees in this phenomenal world have any reason¹⁴ to be or remain in attendance—regardless of any possible implication on those other matters. We seek a demonstration, as it were,

11. When we speak of the *a priori* value of life, we cannot be speaking of the *a priori* “value” of a variable—as when we try to speak of the *a priori* time on a clock. (There can be no such thing.)

12. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 28.

13. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 50.

14. Just as, again, one has a reason to dress warmly when it is cold.

that life is generally worth the least amount or threshold of the attention (or effort) that it involves—inasmuch as attention or effort represents what we can “give” when alive for whatever value we find. In short, we seek a basic reason to pay attention to the world.

Hence, ultimately, by “the value of life,” we really mean the value of attention in general, or conscious “participation,” or conscious presence, or conscious existence in general, or perhaps what Heidegger called *dasein* (being-there). In short, “life” is consciousness itself (awareness, psychological experience).¹⁵ Therefore, our main question (on the *a priori* value of first-person living) can be rephrased as follows: whether or not there is a *a priori* logical reason to have or sustain even the minimum of attention in the world. Hence our title: why even mind? (A perhaps more illustrative way to think about this is to ask, as Hamlet did in a way: if we could be in, or go to, dreamless sleep forever, why should we care at all to be or stay awake?)

II. “PLEASURE” AS THE MOST GENERAL SIGN OR PHENOMENON OF GOODNESS IN LIFE

When we determine something objectively present by merely looking at it, this has the character of care just as much as a “political action,” or resting and having a good time.¹⁶

One needs not decipher Heidegger to recognize a logical relation between caring about things, on the one hand, and paying attention to the world (such as by looking at things in visual space), on the other. In fact, we can begin to answer our main question, whether or not there is a *a priori* logical reason to pay even the minimum of attention to the world, with a platitude that expresses such a relation: we have a *a priori* logical reason to pay attention to the world in any world where (1) we value (care about) anything at all, and (2) paying attention favors or could favor what we value.

What could be a sufficient representation of something we value, for our purposes? Let us take the example of security. It might be noted, for instance, that paying attention to, including thinking about, the world can further our security interests in general simply by ameliorating our capacity for orientation away from undesirable circumstances—be they possible in proximate space or more remotely. But appealing to such interests as a justification for staying alive (awake, attentive), at this point in our inquiry, would beg the question of elucidating *their* instrumental value. After all, it is precisely a security interest (that in our lives or persons—our personal survival) that is being questioned in this inquiry. In other words, an appeal to the “orientational” (indirect, external) value of attention at this stage would only show us to our starting point.

In contrast, questions as to the instrumental value of pleasure, even in its most vulgar concept, do not seem likely to cause a problem—even though pleasure can be

15. When we use the word “attention,” it is often to emphasize this attribute of “deliberateness” in conscious living, which is really what is on trial here. But we should ignore any doubt as to whether consciousness is distinct from, and can subsist in the absence of, any meaningful (sensed) attention.

16. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York, SUNY, 1996, p. 180.

theorized to have an (external) instrumental value, such as a biological function for instance. (In the vulgar concept, pleasure is a necessarily discrete, temporary experience, which can even be seen as a distraction from “higher” pursuits.) That is because there is “immediacy,” so to speak, in the value of pleasure: it has a dimension more akin to that of what we might call a “final” good, a thing good in or for itself. Indeed, one needs not contemplate anything *behind* pleasure to value it: it has intrinsic (direct, internal) value. In contrast, the same cannot be said about the value of worry or fear—which expresses security interests. The reason for that might be this: pleasure is itself a form of satisfaction of desire; worry or fear is not. Worry or fear is not worth having (better yet, worth not having) unless it is conducive to something else. If the value of pleasure in its vulgar concept is ever questioned at all, it is typically by comparison with value that is supposed to exist outside of it, the pursuit of which might happen to come into conflict with the pursuit of pleasure. But, that *some* value can be found in pleasure (i.e., that it is “found good”—that all people who have it must like it to some extent) is beyond reasonable dispute. Therefore, we can use the concept of pleasure as a sufficient representation of something we value.

Furthermore, that manner of finding things good that is in pleasure can certainly not exist in any world without consciousness (i.e., without “life,” as we now understand the word)—slight analogies put aside. In fact, we can begin to develop a more sophisticated definition of the concept of “pleasure,” in the broadest possible sense of the word, as follows: it is the common psychological element in all psychological experience of goodness (be it in joy, admiration, or whatever else). In this sense, pleasure can always be pictured to “mediate” all awareness or perception or judgment of goodness: there is pleasure in all consciousness of things good; pleasure is the common element of all conscious satisfaction. In short, it is simply the very experience of liking things, or the liking of experience, in general. In this sense, pleasure is, not only uniquely characteristic of life but also, *the core expression* of goodness in life—the most general sign or phenomenon for favorable conscious valuation, in other words. This does not mean that “good” is absolutely synonymous with “pleasant”—what we value may well go beyond pleasure. (The fact that we value things needs not be reduced to the experience of liking things.) However, what we value beyond pleasure remains a matter of speculation or theory. Moreover, we note that a variety of things that may seem otherwise unrelated are correlated with pleasure—some more strongly than others. In other words, there are many things the experience of which we like. For example: the admiration of others; sex; or rock-paper-scissors. But, again, what they are is irrelevant in an inquiry on *a priori* value—what *gives* us pleasure is a matter for empirical investigation.

Thus, we can see now that, in general, something primitively valuable is attainable in living—that is, pleasure itself. And it seems equally clear that we have *a priori* logical reason to pay attention to the world in any world where pleasure exists. Moreover, we can now also articulate a foundation for a security interest in our life: since the good of pleasure can be found in living (to the extent pleasure remains attainable),¹⁷ and *only* in

17. Whether pleasure always remains attainable in life can be considered under Parts III and IV below.

living, therefore, *a priori*, life ought to be continuously (and indefinitely) pursued at least for the sake of *preserving* the possibility of finding that good.

However, this platitude about the value that can be found in life turns out to be, at this point, insufficient for our purposes. It seems to amount to very little more than recognizing that our subjective desire for life in and of itself shows that life has some objective value. For what difference is there between saying, “living is unique in benefiting something I value (namely, my pleasure); therefore, I should desire to go on living;” and saying, “I have a unique desire to go on living; therefore I should have a desire to go on living;” whereas the latter proposition immediately seems senseless? In other words, “life gives me pleasure,” says little more than, “I like life.” Thus, we seem to have arrived at the conclusion that the fact that we already have some (subjective) desire for life shows life to have *some* (objective) value. But, if that is the most we can say, then it seems our enterprise of justification was quite superficial, and the subjective/objective distinction was useless—for all we have really done is highlight the correspondence between value and desire. Perhaps, our inquiry should be a bit more complex.

We may have to think beyond the fact that bare life has *some* value *a priori*—the fact that there is *some* value in *any* life—(which basically gets us back to the fact that we already have some desire for it or that we can have pleasure in it), and consider the possibility that there might be some value in *not* living also, and that it might be greater than or cancel out the value we find to be primitively characteristic of life. (This would not be an *a posteriori* or circumstantial comparison, nonetheless, because life and death are basically logical extensions of one another—like “p” and “not-p.”)

This last question invites two approaches—perhaps only nominally distinct. One is to ask whether, where life (with the desire for life) already exists, there is also something primitively, and then relatively, desirable about dying: something that would be *a priori* preferable to that which we already desire in staying alive. Simply put: *in general*, would dying be better than living? (This concerns the value of our survival.)

Just as we have assumed pleasure to be something primitively desirable attainable in living, we can assume the absence of pain (of displeasure) to be something primitively desirable attainable in death. (On the model of pleasure, we adopt a broad definition of pain: it is dissatisfaction with consciousness, or the experience of disliking things.)

Ideally, we would be able to answer any call to judge the value of life (*a priori* or *a posteriori*) by simply balancing the good and bad it involves as follows: (1) the “amount” of present bad plus the odds of future bad, against (2) the “amount” of present good plus the odds of future good. This comparison would require two assumptions: (1) equal amounts of good and bad neutralize each other, and (2) any moment in life (outside of “heaven” or “hell” at least) always preserves the possibility of *both* future good and future bad. Accordingly, in terms of pleasure and pain, our question on the value of life over death could be reframed as follows: whether the absence of pain (present and future) guaranteed by death is worth losing all access to pleasure (present and future) included in life *a priori* when such access also involves access to pain.¹⁸

18. As the French-speaker ordinarily puts it: *la vie vaut-elle la peine d'être vécue* (i.e., is life worth the pain of

The other approach is to consider whether it can ever make sense to say that it would have been better, or even “just as well,” if we had never come to life in the first place—if experience had never appeared. (This concerns the value of our birth.) According to Cioran, “not to be born is undoubtedly the best plan of all. Unfortunately it is within no one’s reach.”¹⁹ But can his point be disputed in a reasoned manner? The issue can be framed as follows: whether the mere fact that experience exists can be said to be a good or a bad thing.

Before we can tackle these questions properly, however, we must return to the sense of Heidegger’s remark (in the epigraph above). What Heidegger was emphasizing is that consciousness does not merely incidentally support value, as if it were an external (incidental) agent—like a rock may serve the one who throws it. Since it does not necessarily follow that there is no consciousness without pleasure from the fact there is no pleasure without consciousness, we might be tempted to infer that value in general might be only an occasional “entertainment” of consciousness. Instead, Heidegger points out that consciousness, in and of itself, presupposes and always is an expression—not a detached medium—of value, or “care” (i.e., an expression of “interest in things,” one might say). Let us elucidate what “care” signifies (for our purposes, at least) and how consciousness expresses it.

III. AXIOLOGY

It is not only the case that all desire invokes a question of value, but also that only desire creates value: there is no value beyond the desirable; all value is a function of some desire. For instance, the value of health comes from the fact that we desire survival, and pleasure, and offspring, etc... Consider: although what is desirable may sometimes require elucidation, what we cannot recognize in any way to be (or to further) something desirable, we simply cannot recognize as being valuable.²⁰

a. The importance of difference

To value anything is to care about something, to have desires (wants) for things, to have preferences over things; and to have a preference entails caring about a *difference* in the way things can be—favoring one *contingent* way for things to be over another. (This reflects the essential axiological dichotomy between good and bad.)

Where there is no difference in the way things can be (no contingency), there also can be no preference one way or another—there can only be indifference. Note that this seems to entail that a “heaven” where nothing bad *can* occur is impossible—and the same for a “hell” where nothing good can occur. (Certainly, the notion of a heaven or

being lived)?

19. Emile Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, Arcade Publishing, 1998, p. 223.

20. Compare Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus And Other Essays*, p. 51 (“what can a meaning outside my condition mean to me?”).

hell leaving its inhabitants in indifference is oxymoronic.)

b. Awareness

Loosely speaking, care manifests itself either in what one “undergoes” or in what one “does”—it has both passive and active expressions. More explicitly, the capacity for caring consists in being disposed to feel or sense or otherwise behave with preference—again, regardless of whether or not we “know” our own preference (that is, whether or not as bearers of particular preferences we have a clear and distinct, definite and accurate concept or understanding of them).²¹

Feeling and sensing are ways of behaving with preference. (Thus, speaking of one’s having “feelings of preference” for something would be redundant, at least strictly speaking.) All feeling is a sign of caring; it is or carries an expression of preference. All awareness presupposes caring about the way things are or can be.²² In Heidegger’s words: “care lies ‘before’ every factual ‘attitude’ and ‘position’ of *dasein*, that is, it is always already in them as an existential *a priori*.”²³ In other words, we could say that interest in things “precedes” (to use a Sartrean term) awareness of things—and the attendant formation of propositional attitudes. Better yet, it *engenders* those other kinds of phenomena. All belief, for instance, as a species of propositional attitude, is produced ultimately for the business of some desire. In sum, the existence of desire generally *explains* the existence of consciousness and attitudes—desire goes beyond experience. Hence, it would be impossible to have consciousness without a sense of good and bad: a perfectly axiologically indifferent state of consciousness is perfectly impossible.

Hence, awareness can be thought of as part of a simply inestimably larger condition of interest in things. (Again: the fact that we value things needs not be reduced to the experience of liking things.) From the restrictive point of view of a reductionist materialist (if she is also a functionalist perhaps), this condition could be distinguished as merely a way that organic entities distinguish themselves from the rest of Nature. (One could say that awareness is for those entities a device favored through evolution for bettering their chances of biological “success”—notably, by ameliorating their capacity for spatial orientation, as suggested earlier.) Alternatively, the condition could be that of a larger, more comprehensive entity for which organic life represents nothing but one avatar—e.g., Schopenhauer’s “Will,” or a pantheist’s “God.” These explanatory speculations, however, are still beyond our inquiry.

Overall, it now appears that consciousness is inherently, always, “value-entertain-

21. We may often lack the language to express, or the capacity to appreciate, the complexity of the considerations required to best serve our preferences—which we may be described to sense ordinarily with some degree of vagueness.

22. The “fabric” of awareness could be imagined as a roundabout of signs pointing to one another, but “pre-informed,” so to speak, of their ultimate function to signal to the bearer of a desire the existence, proximity or distance in space or time of relatively desirable or undesirable circumstances. (It could even be said that the capacity to *distinguish* percepts or concepts reflects the need to respect the axiological dichotomy—between what would lead to desirable or undesirable circumstances.)

23. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 180.

ing,” so to speak: there is no state of consciousness that is not value-laden. In other words, consciousness is, in every moment, either a satisfaction of a desire or another event within the quest for the satisfaction of a desire; experience is always “motivated.”

At the same time, we repeat, it is also clear that what we desire is not always something we conceive of distinctly in consciousness. In fact, what we think we desire is a function of capacities and circumstances—robust thinking or analysis, information, reaction under stress, and so on—that could make us think we want what we do not want. (Consider, e.g., Oedipus’ case.)

c. *The logic of desire*

It is impossible *a priori* to both actually want something to be the case and at the same time want it not to be the case: it is impossible to simply desire that any desire that we presently have not be satisfied (in which case it would not be desired). This is not withstanding the possibility of having, *a posteriori*, different, independent, circumstantial desires simultaneously, therefore potentially conflicting. (Such conflicts of desires may occur on account of problems and dilemmas imposed by *external* circumstances, including defective judgment or insufficient information.) It is therefore also impossible to desire that our present generally consistent desires be extinguished before they are satisfied—regardless of whether or not our dispositions for them can crumble (from death, illness...).

Two approaches remain—again, perhaps only nominally distinct: (1) whether it is also impossible *ever* to desire (*a priori*) no longer to desire anything in the future (which may depend on the kind of satisfaction involved, as discussed below), and (2) whether desire-as-such implicates a satisfaction with its own existence (which is another way of asking whether the mere fact that value exists can be said to be itself valuable). The first approach aims at determining the value of the survival of value or desire, and will be addressed below; the second approach aims at the value of the birth or mere existence of value, and needs not be addressed separately in the present inquiry.

d. *Metaphysics of desire*

There are two fundamental general forms of desire: we can call them finite desire and infinite desire. A finite desire can only be satisfied with a limit: it is to be definitively satisfied by a specific numerical value or a finite event in space-time—for example: going to the beach, or reaching sexual orgasm, or passing the bar exam, or ending a particular pain, etc... A finite desire is essentially circumstantial: the meeting of circumstances produces its terms and it reflects the limits that this meeting creates. An infinite desire, on the other hand, has no definitive satisfaction in number, space or time. For example, the desire for general pleasure (the desire to like how we feel) has clearly no temporal limit: it is constant; it aims at no final end.²⁴ (Strictly speaking, nobody would like not

24. Could the same be said of the “will to power;” although the notion of power (including the capacity for orientation, for instance) could not be conceived without reference to a weight of *circumstances* to be

to like how he or she feels at any time—including masochists.) Accordingly, there can be no such thing as a particular pleasure that could satisfy all desire for pleasure “once for all.” In other words, the infinite desire for pleasure finds its highest satisfaction in continuity (or perpetuity). The greatness of Baudelaire’s poetry, when in *The Bad Glazier* (1862) he says, “what does an eternity of damnation matter to someone who has found in one second the infinity of pleasure?” is to be found precisely in the paroxysm that seems to make logic irrelevant.²⁵ But it is, strictly speaking, impossible to find in finite time an infinity of pleasure, because finite time always entails finite space.

Within any particular moment of consciousness, both aspects of desire are present—“perpendicular” to one another, as it were (like, say, particle and wave, or space and time). There is no one moment when we are awake when we do not entertain a finite desire, and there is no moment when we are awake when we do not have the infinite desire for pleasure.

e. The essential form of desire

According to Schopenhauer, “all endeavor springs from deprivation—from discontent with one’s condition—and is thus suffering as long as it is not satisfied.”²⁶

One might imagine that “need” (in a sense implying imperfection, lack, deficiency, dependency, oppression, unsettlement) is the fundamental form of desire. And, accordingly, just as the absence of such “need” is easily thought of as a state of “freedom” or “peace,” one could imagine that the disposition to care about things is essentially the expression of some kind of original, genetic “disturbance” from an ideal state of axiological indifference (which could be the fundamental state of Nature, notwithstanding Schopenhauer’s theory of the Will as “thing-in-itself”), and that the foundation of all moral concern is really a constant attempt to escape, or do away with, the oppression of *having to care* in the first place—and to near or return or otherwise reach that state of indifference (i.e., to die, if we assume that death is the end of experience). In other words, all desire would be traced back to a fundamental desire to stop desiring. Our not letting ourselves die easily (or killing ourselves), however, might then be explained by the difficulty of overcoming so sophisticated a form of oppression as to have befuddled us so dramatically or to have buried our behavioral capabilities under ranges and ranges of obstacles (in the form of our body’s reflexes, social norms, theologies, etc...). Hence, in this context, our survival instinct would, at best, appear essentially a psychological restraint reflecting the intricacy of our conditioning and, in effect, the depth of our captivity under the “bio-regime.”

There is a critical problem with this reductive picture, however: it is based on a subtle misunderstanding of the form of desire (by Schopenhauer and others).

We could approach this problem by noticing that the notion of desire as being, fun-

overcome?

25. See Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, New York, New Directions, 1970, p. 12.

26. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, David Berman (ed.), trans. Jill Berman, London, Everyman, 1995, p. 195.

damentally, a disturbance—a problem—implies that *all* desires must be consistent with a preference that they could end “once for all” or had never existed. Pain, or suffering, is a problem precisely because we want it to disappear. (The “essential problem” in all problems, we could say, is that they exist.) Under this logic, for all desires, one single great definitive satisfaction (end) would have to be superior to several satisfactions. Just as, by analogy, vaccines are superior to cures or therapies.

Accordingly, pleasure might have to be seen as a sort of consolation we reach for *faute de mieux*, while hoping for the coming of that ideal eschatological liberation that is death—even if we cannot normally think of it so straightforwardly. Pleasure would be basically indistinct from pain-relief.

We have seen, however, that (1) it is impossible to desire that our present generally consistent desires be extinguished before they are satisfied, and (2) the general desire for pleasure naturally aspires *a priori* to continuous (or continual) satisfaction across time.²⁷ There can be no such thing as an ultimate pleasure that could satisfy all desire for pleasure “once for all,” regardless of its nature or “intensity:” again, the desire for pleasure finds its highest satisfaction in continuity (or perpetuity). Accordingly, the desire for pleasure cannot be squarely reduced to a desire for the resolution of a problem—it is not merely the desire for the end of pain. The first is an infinite desire, and the second a finite desire (i.e., the desire for the end of pain would ideally be satisfied by a single event, such as the end of experience, but the desire for the continuation of pleasure could not). Therefore, it could not be the case that, for *all* desires, one single great definitive satisfaction would be superior to several satisfactions. This should already suggest that the form of problems is not *the* essential form of all desire.

Yet we can go further. The general form of desire is not that of a problem, but that of a stake (in french: *enjeu*). On the one hand, the general form of problems could be expressed as follows: “something *is* wrong.” Since it aims at an end, it does not entail *definitive* dissatisfaction; it entails hardship (which, sometimes at least, means the worsening of the conditions for satisfaction of a desire). In other words, a problem presents an obstacle that is not inherent to desire. It implicates, not only the elements of all quests (mainly, a consideration of time) but also, an additional element—a *circumstance* beyond the mere delay that time imposes. This entails that “lack of satisfaction” needs not be synonymous with “hardship,” or “dissatisfaction” for that matter. For example, suppose that I want to eat some ice cream tonight, and there is only one ice cream shop in town. If I drive to the shop and it is closed, then I am dissatisfied. If on my way to the shop I encounter a traffic jam just minutes before it is set to close, then I am experiencing hardship. Merely driving to the shop (initially), however, neither dissatisfies me nor makes my dissatisfaction more likely, in the relevant sense.

On the other hand, the general form of stakes could be expressed as follows: “some-

27. Perhaps just as the infinite desire for pleasure naturally aspires to continual satisfaction across time, a “one-time” finite desire (such as, say, the specific desire to receive a lifetime achievement award) would aspire to its own replication, if not simply to that of its kind, if it were otherwise possible (say, across worlds).

thing *can* go wrong.” (As suggested earlier, contingency is essential to desire.) The essential form of desire is not that of problems or obstacles, but that of the *possibility* of problems or obstacles. Schopenhauer’s understanding of the notion stems from a confusion between the two—a confusion of modalities. “We feel as if we had to penetrate phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the ‘possibilities’ of phenomena.”²⁸

It seems that a misleading analogy makes this confusion more likely. (“Philosophy points out the misleading analogies in the use of our language.”²⁹) The analogy is based on facts such as that, as suggested earlier, vaccines are superior to cures or therapies—in other words, it is better to be inoculated from a disease than it is to be cured of, or treated for, the disease. What escapes notice in this case is that what makes vaccines superior is not that they may end the general possibility of disease (which they may not); it is that they may end (or reduce) some specific possibility (or likelihood) of disease. This distinction can be highlighted, for instance, in the fact that an *actual* measurement of risk could conceivably be assigned to the latter, whereas no such measurement could be assigned to the former. What makes us susceptible to the confusion is the same thing (whether shallow error in thinking or deep irrational paroxysm of desire) as what makes us believe that a “heaven” where nothing bad can occur is possible.

IV. IS LIFE “BETTER THAN” DEATH *A PRIORI*?

a. The value of survival

We are now in a position to state an answer to our main question. As we have shown, we are animated (at the very least) by an infinite desire for pleasure and it is impossible to desire that our present generally consistent desires be extinguished before they are satisfied. Therefore, it is impossible to desire the end of what makes pleasure possible (namely, experience, “life”) *unless* perhaps pain is a constant of that condition—that is, unless life presents a constant problem. Indeed, according to Schopenhauer, “essentially all life is suffering.”³⁰

We have seen that pain has the form of a problem—it signals non-definitive (thus *temporary*!) dissatisfaction with consciousness, or hardship. In other terms: [simple pain] = [(consciousness*desire) + obstacle]. On the other hand: [consciousness*desire] = [desire for satisfaction including pleasure]. Therefore: [Simple pain] = [desire for satisfaction including pleasure + obstacle]. Since, as shown above, consciousness is always an expression of desire, then [consciousness*desire] can be simplified to [consciousness].

In this way, pain can be seen to address an additional circumstance (the obstacle it signals) seemingly outside of the essence of consciousness. Nonetheless, perhaps we

28. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 42.

29. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript*, p. 399.

30. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, p. 197.

could imagine that such circumstance *always* subsists *with* consciousness, or even “precedes” it in some way (in which case, we might be more inclined to relax our restriction to *a priori* matters). What if, for instance, we were to theorize that the birth of consciousness is explained by the circumstantial *advantage* it confers—say, toward organic survival, as aforesaid? (For instance, it provides a sense of orientation.) Perhaps this could be expressed by saying that, at its foundation, consciousness (“life” in the relevant sense) is an expression of a will to such power as would allow organisms to survive. It would return us to the view that consciousness is, at its essence, valuable as a security device or capacity instrumental to something else whose value could also be questioned. The issue would be whether that circumstantial advantage addresses an “obstacle” explaining the need for the advantage. If so, then the nature of the desire for pleasure could more accurately be described, not as “infinite,” but rather as “indefinite”—pleasure would have value *only so long as* the advantage is needed.

However, such an image would also be the result of what we characterized earlier as a confusion of modalities. The fact is that the advantage, the power, which consciousness is supposed to confer, fails as a whole to correspond to any problem or obstacle. Were the fundamental value of consciousness considered to be that it furthers our security interests in general simply by ameliorating our capacity for orientation away from undesirable circumstances (relative to some desire other than that for pleasure), then the general “circumstance” that the advantage of having consciousness addresses could simply be described as follows: it is the fact that undesirable circumstances can exist. In other words, consciousness could be seen as an advantage vis-à-vis the simple fact that *things can go wrong*—which, as we have seen, is a condition of the existence of value itself. Thus the advantage would not be aimed at a problem or obstacle. Rather, it would be aimed at the *possibility* of problems and obstacles, perfectly reflecting the form of desire itself. Accordingly, desiring the end of the condition for which the advantage is needed *a priori* would be the same as desiring the end of the possibility of problems, which, in turn, would be the same as desiring the end of desire—the disappearance of value.³¹

In sum: no problem for consciousness precedes or is inherent to consciousness, which indeed involves an *infinite* desire for pleasure. Therefore, it is false to say as Schopenhauer said that “essentially all life is suffering.” Whereas the end of pain can only be desired, it is impossible to desire the end of the essence of life, because it would have to involve a satisfaction with the end of an unproblematic infinite desire. In other words, we cannot help but desire the continuation of life-as-such: our survival is good *a priori*. Life at its essence is *not* suffering—pain is an *a posteriori* (i.e., circumstantial) phenomenon of consciousness.

Furthermore, since, as we have seen, life is an expression of desire (and no state of desire can be one of indifference), then life “at its essence” cannot be indifference. The value of our situated (i.e., *a posteriori*) experiences can be assumed to be entirely vari-

31. Note also that were organic survival to be our fundamental desire, it would still not present us with a real problem, because an ending, a *solution*, could never satisfy it. (One cannot define a problem without a possible solution.) The advantage provided by consciousness could never cease to be an advantage.

able. For instance, anyone of us could imaginably be born with a health condition that causes chronic headaches, or instead with a tendency for joyful reverie, or something else. However, the *initial* value of experience (to the extent we can distinguish experience from its objects—to the extent we commit to assign a value to all life *in general*) is the same for all.

It follows that life at its essence is pleasure. Life inherently, *initially*, “produces” pleasure. It “begins” as pleasure, so to speak, only to be countered, *frustrated*, *a posteriori*, by pain. (We can think of pain as thwarted pleasure—but not of pleasure as thwarted pain.)³² And the desire for pleasure appears more precisely as a quest, not really to find or discover pleasure,³³ but rather to sustain (continue), and then augment (intensify) or expand (diversify) pleasure.

In conclusion, since the infinite desire for pleasure finds its greatest satisfaction *a priori* in its own perpetuation, then life finds its greatest satisfaction *a priori* in its own perpetuation. The fact that the circumstances of life (limited life expectancy, torture, etc...) do not allow, or frustrate, such perpetuation, however, forces us to reevaluate our death. But this issue belongs to another type of inquiry—on the subjective or circumstantial or *a posteriori* value of life.

b. The value of birth

The above “demonstration” that our survival-as-such is good may also suggest that the mere fact that experience exists can be said to be a good thing. If experience (which we have shown to be an expression of desire) inherently produces pleasure (which is satisfaction with experience), then there is a point at which, or a degree to which, we can treat desire and satisfaction interchangeably. Indeed, pleasure is produced not simply *after* it is desired, but *while* it is desired. Thus, it is perhaps possible, on this account, to suggest of the birth of the desire for pleasure that it is good. In any event, we cannot rationally prefer *a priori* not to have been born in the first place.

CONCLUSIONS: THE VALUE OF LIFE, ETHICAL FOUNDATIONALISM AND POST-THEISM

The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.³⁴

32. One could also imagine pain as the effect of, or a sign for, the “gravitational pull” of death, so to speak.

33. Notice also that pleasure (as the experience of liking, or the liking of experience) is not something that we can target or pursue at the exclusion of anything else.

34. Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life (Science Masters Series)*, New York, BasicBooks, 1995, p. 133.

a. Nihilistic theism:

In conclusion, we have shown that the desire for the good of life is *a priori* superior to the desire for the good of death—and that the good of life finds its highest form in its own perpetuation.

We have also noted that circumstantial entanglements could conceivably make us think we want what we do not want. In other words, irrational behavior becomes possible: it becomes possible to find discrete pleasure in things that *should not* give us pleasure—say, because they compromise access to greater pleasure. This explains why it becomes possible to even deny the value of life-as-such.

We can also reason that it is the circumstance that the perpetuation of life and pleasure seems practically (i.e., *a posteriori*) impossible—because we believe we are mortal and *expect* to die—that forces us to, not only reevaluate our death but also, focus more on the other dimensions of pleasure (intensity and diversity). And, what is even more interesting: it is the denial of the truth of this apparent circumstance, this imperfection of pleasure, which forms the central concern of theological worldviews (which devalue pleasure in its finite form—at least, to the extent that it does not seem conditioned by them). This concern finds expression in two assertions: that experience belongs to an immortal soul; and that perfect pleasure is guaranteed in “heaven.”

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“Heaven” is defined as a place where nothing bad can occur—a place where problems and dissatisfaction are not possible. (A place of absolute, necessary security.) As we have seen, however, any desire for such a place would seem to entail a desire for a place where value is no longer possible—because value always entails a preference over alternatives (one of which is bad). In other words, desiring to go to heaven would be the same as desiring the end of desire, the disappearance of value.

We need not investigate in detail the circumstances that make it possible to say that such a place ought to exist. (Perhaps it relates to a fear of Murphy’s Law—“what can go wrong will go wrong.”)³⁵ But we can “see” how tempting it is to say so, and thus unwittingly sacrifice the possibility of the good to the desire for its necessity. Those who commit to such a place, we call “greedy nihilists.” Hamlet, for instance, even though he does not actually mention a place we would call “heaven,” shows that he is a greedy nihilist when he laments “outrageous fortune” to the point of finding value in the idea of the end of experience—he wishes that things in general were incapable of going wrong. (This is precisely the contrary of *amor fati*.) It is as if one needed to be able to believe in the possibility of a perfect, everlasting, totalitarian state of goodness in order to be able to find anything good at all.

Heaven can be defined as “God’s realm.” That “God” may be defined as an inescapable (perhaps even all-inclusive, somehow), eternally consistent, committed and supreme preference and power. Through these attributes, It makes heaven possible. Therefore, it is Its authority that conditions the possibility of the good itself (which for

³⁵ This law needs not be true, it seems. Nor needs it matter that much if it is.

greedy nihilists, as we have shown, is conditioned on the idea of its necessity). Thus, that “God” becomes the source or foundation of ethics and value.

Accordingly, when the idea that such a “God” does not exist becomes contemplated, the idea that the good itself does not exist also becomes contemplated. With the idea of the disappearance of the duty imposed by that “God” also comes the idea of the disappearance of the good itself. Thus, it is as if the greedy nihilistic theist needed to feel compelled to love anything at all by such “God,” without which she would be terminally overcome with a sense of all-encompassing futility. In other words, she would become a passive nihilist—in the Nietzschean sense.

In sum, there would be two sides to this paradoxical coin we can now call the Nietzschean God. On one side, it is something that guarantees the preservation of one’s “willingness to care,” so to speak, more or less like an anti-depressant. Because of immortality and heaven, it becomes impossible to “lose” the world. On the other side, it is something that forces one to care. Because of immortality and hell, it becomes impossible to “escape” the world—and costly to try to do so.

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The Nietzschean God could perhaps be distinguished from the run of the mill “God,” perhaps more primitive, which is sought, not to provide a source or ground for the very possibility of value, but simply to provide *marginal* gain or good fortune—or perhaps a special kind of inspiration in the face of dismal odds. We could define this “God” broadly as, “that which can help us in our darkest hours,” and, for contrast, baptize it “the Pascalian God”—solely as an evocation of the opportunism suggested by Blaise Pascal’s wager, and not necessarily as a claim regarding the wisdom of that wager as stated or of Pascal’s beliefs. To the opportunist, it is good if the Pascalian God exists, but it is not necessary that the Pascalian God exist for things to be good.

It is perhaps the temptation to further define the Pascalian God, in order to make it more predictable, that eventually leads us to conceive of the totalitarian Nietzschean God—inflating, in the process, the problem of fortune (chance), from a discrete, marginal, “quantized” phenomenon, so to speak, to a massive one.

b. Post-theism and axiological realism

Post-theism needs not involve any negation of the existence of a particular “God.”³⁶ It needs only involve a realization that we must find *answers* without reference to any such “God.”

The “cause” for the existence of value, like the “cause” for the existence of consciousness, is a matter open to speculation or theorizing. For instance, it may be that organic beings have a tendency to value things (to have preferences) simply by virtue of their contingent material constitution. In other words, Dawkins (in the epigraph above)

36. In fact, one might do very well to hope for something like the Pascalian God, at least on occasion.

could be right. *Or*, it may be that our world (if modal realism makes sense) contains in its modal particularity a definitive “bias” which, somehow, immortal souls within it reflect in their innate sense of value. Whatever! For our purposes, the only difference would be that in one case the “force” of value would seem to come from the contingent forces that hold us together, whereas in the other it would appear to come from the fact that the finding of value is *incidentally* inescapable (i.e., because we just happen to live in that world with the relevant modal particularity).

What must be understood is that neither “theory” should change anything to the “value of value.”

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An ethical foundation is “something for the sake of which everything else can be valued.”³⁷ Greedy nihilists believe that an absence of external obligation (external force) at the foundation (or as the source) of value (desire) would eliminate value. However, we have seen that their worldview was founded on a desire for something that would make value impossible. Perhaps, then, something like “gratuity” (freedom) would best serve as “foundation.”

But such a “foundation” would seem to correspond to no foundation at all, except for the simple fact that we value things. It would not be conditioned upon any additional claims about other entities. And yet this would seem to make sense, since any such *conditioning* (of the possibility of asserting value) would itself have to express (albeit indirectly) an assertion of value already preexisting that conditioning. What, then, when it presupposes that value exists, could such conditioning add to the possibility of that existence? (Or, perhaps more importantly, what might it subtract?)

In other words, while we see that the constitution of all morality is twofold—including (1) value (i.e., the fact that we value anything), and (2) the fact that the service of what we value may be conditioned³⁸—we now also see that, however, we cannot meaningfully, by ourselves, place conditions for our valuing things in general, for valuing things in the first place.

In yet other words, we have seen that, in terms of general phenomena, care (value) “precedes” belief. Therefore, how could any belief—except the senseless (uninformative) belief that value exists—rationally condition value? More specifically, how could belief in a particular explanation for the existence of value condition value? (These are rhetorical questions.)

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Value cannot be self-defeating—desire cannot desire its own dissatisfaction. Moreover,

37. Ronald de Sousa, *Relativistic Foundationalism? Or Let's All Go Back to Being Modern*, at www.chass.utoronto.ca/~sousa/foundism.html (last accessed on April 21, 2008).

38. In other words, generally, it is the fact that the satisfaction of our desires may be conditioned that creates issues of morality.

every moment in life expresses or pursues value. Accordingly, conscious behavior must always be limited to value-supporting actions—at least so long as external forces do not interfere. Therefore, even if it is imaginable that there exists outside of life a state of affairs wherein there is no concern with things, and that such a state should in principle be accessible (if death is the end of experience), we nonetheless find ourselves incapable of truly desiring it as an end in itself. Hamlet's lament (if sincere) was nothing more than the product of a special kind of confusion (or stupidity).

In this sense, we are “trapped” in value—our “escape” could only come (directly at least, if at all) from the exterior. Perhaps then it follows that it is in those who depend on external references, or transcendental “truths,” to provide their axiological source or foundation that we truly begin to find the collapse of what makes value (and therefore morality) possible.

c. *Temptation of “meaning”*

To ask for the meaning of life can be thought ultimately to ask what should be done with one's time thought of as a whole (a single project). We have said more specifically that what we seek when we search for “the meaning of life” in the most basic or general sense can be one or both of two things: either it is an explanation for the fact that “life” as we know it exists, or it is a justification for our most basic (or “default”) desire to survive. We have also defined the word “meaningful” (as pertaining to life), for purposes of our inquiry, as being basically synonymous with the word “useful”—a relation between objects and moments, on the one hand, and how what we value can be served, on the other hand.

On the one hand, one who seeks an explanation for the fact that life exists may well seek no more than an inspiration to, as it were, *shape* her life. On the other hand, one who seeks a justification for our most basic desire to survive seems to seek an inspiration to *want* a life. What we have attempted to show can be stated as follows: that wanting to live is an *a priori* aspect of life—in other words, life has value *a priori*, irrespective of any explanation regarding its existence.

As we have shown that life-as-such (the general condition of experience) has, at the very least, the unproblematic value of pleasure (the liking of experience, or the experience of liking things), then the service of pleasure could be seen as that object or moment in life that is sufficiently “meaningful” in serving what we value. Furthermore, since value-as-such could not be conditioned by any explanation, then the very existence of unproblematic value in life could not rationally be conditioned on one explanation or another for the existence of life. It is not simply that we have some subjective desire for life, but that living things cannot help but desire life *a priori*.

Accordingly, we *should* be able to see life as an end in itself. Although one explanation, as opposed to another, for the existence of life could depict a better overall situation for life (e.g., one that would involve immortality), we must fight the temptation to believe that any explanation could condition our finding life *good*.

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