A Short But Interesting Answer to The Unavoidable Question of Life

What's the meaning of it all?

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The great psychologist Carl Jung once said:

"Meaninglessness inhibits fullness of life and is therefore equivalent to illness."

I believe he's right. I've experienced it. But it's also worse than any other illness I've encountered. It's an all-encompassing force, like an illness of one's entirety. And of course, that inhibits life.

Looking back, I'm aware of some of the things that caused it for me: moving to a new place and not fitting in, quitting a long-time hobby and having nothing to replace it with, and spending too much time alone in a dimly lit apartment. These things tore me down and caused a sense of meaninglessness. And in that state, a simple question presented itself:

What's the meaning of it all?

A Natural Question

No matter how we arrive at this question, it seems unavoidable. Asking about the meaning of life is in our underline human nature. Still, while people have asked it for centuries, no one has been able to agree on one clear answer.

If we start to ponder it ourselves, we'll only become frustrated if we expect a clear and tangible answer. And from there, if we're not careful, there's a slippery slope to existential nihilism: the notion that the world is without meaning; that existence itself — all action, suffering, and feeling — is senseless and empty. This is a dangerous path to fall prey to. Because taken to the extreme, it can lead to destruction: of ourselves, of our families, and of the society as a whole.

But even if can't find a clear answer to the question, it doesn't mean that nihilism is the only option in the lack of one. More importantly, it might not even be a good question. As the philosopher Alan Watts explained:

"Problems that remain persistently unsolvable

should always be suspected as questions asked in the wrong way."

An Absurd Answer

Indeed, in the lack of an answer, it's not hard to render life meaningless. Looking at life as a whole, we realize it's gigantic and never ending. Looking at ourselves, we realize we're small and always ending. In the cosmic scale of things, we'll be gone in a blink of an eye.

For some odd reason, however, we still search for meaning despite it. And that, according to the philosophy of Albert Camus, is the absurdity of life. To paraphrase the internet encyclopedia of philosophy:

> "The Absurd is the product of a collision between our human desire for meaning and the blank, indifferent 'silence of the universe.' Here we are: poor creatures desperately seeking meaning in a seemingly meaningless world."

Chances are we will never know whether there's an objective meaning to life. There might be one, but due to limitations in our reasoning, we cannot discover what it is. But what we can know, is whether there's a subjective meaning to our life — because that's something we can experience.

Besides, why should we bother with the cosmic scale of things? Even if the universe doesn't have any meaning, doesn't mean that our lives doesn't have any too. That's what Nihilists forget. They forget who experiences meaning in the first place. The world doesn't have the ability; we do.

This is an important realization because what we fundamentally believe will <u>affect our thoughts and actions</u>. And so, whether or not we believe that life is meaningful, we're right. As <u>Viktor Frankl</u>, the psychiatrist who survived the Nazi concentration camps, observed:

> # "Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked."

So, maybe the answer to the unavoidable question is, in fact, another question. Maybe we shouldn't ask what the meaning of life is, but rather, 'how can I live a meaningful life?'

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