

## What's the purpose of life and existence?

The purpose of life/existence can be one of:

1. Pre-determined by the 'Creator(s)'
2. Determined by an individual or individuals during the existence of everything.
3. Engrained within the nature of all things, not by design but simply because it is.
4. Many things/life-forms set purpose for many others.
5. It is up to every individual life form to set their own purpose and find their own meaning.
6. There is no purpose and could be no purpose.

I have argued that the creator did not exist in previous articles. The second and fourth could be true. However this only means that someone/thing else has decided a purpose for you. It does not mean you have to follow that purpose. People often say that you have to do what God tells you. Why? If God's sense of morality is different to ours then you may in fact find his decisions immoral. Perhaps because you think God has the big picture? Well this is more of a valid argument. But how do you know what God's purpose is anyway, even if you believe in God's existence? You cannot say because of the religious texts because there are many different ones for different religions. You cannot say that one is more valid when the proof does not say so. You cannot say because God spoke to you, for it is easy to prove that your mind can play tricks on you. The only thing you really know is real is "I think therefore I am" or as I like to add "I feel therefore I am". Hence if you have not been told your purpose this must be intentional right? If this is so we cannot look to God for an answer.

Perhaps number 3 is true that purpose and meaning is engrained in everything and everyone? Well if this is true then science, psychology, sociology etc can help us determine the answer. But in essence it would mean that number 5 is true. We set our own purpose in life, even if nature has determined who we are and therefore what decisions we're likely to make.

Number 6 is simply ridiculous. We all set purposes for ourselves, and many of us try to set purposes for others. The dictionary describes purpose as the reason for which anything is done. If you mean to go to work today then it is your purpose to do so. Is this different, perhaps too small to be discussed in answer

to this question? No. It simply highlights how many different purposes and meanings can be explored in life. You can have one big purpose. In fact your life will likely be more productive if you aim in one direction. But you will have many purposes along the way, and find much meaning too. It is up to you to determine what you want to take on board when others designate purposes for you or point out certain meanings.

Next, many people have said something along the lines of "I don't know if I can live in a world where there's no greater meaning or purpose." What if this one Godly purpose did exist? Would it make life better or worse? My argument is most likely worse. There is meaning and purpose to be found within everything, and this can affect the meaning and purpose of all others who are connected (and everything is connected in some manner or another). What would happen when this big purpose was over? Perhaps there would be a new one? Well why do we assume God would need us for that new purpose when we clearly think we're so ideal for the current one? Perhaps the purpose is eternal, like balancing the existence of all things. If that is true then I suppose it could add purpose to our lives. But it would only add. It would not replace. Every life has meaning and purpose whether or not there is one that some other being/thing we don't fully understand decided decided on our behalf. To put it another way, your parents could decide that you're going to be the best footballer in the known world. But if you grow up to be pretty awful it doesn't take anything away from life. It just leads you in a new direction, allowing you to choose a new purpose for yourself (one which by the way is usually more fulfilling when you discover and pursue it based on your own decisions).

The implications of life's meaning/purpose are subjective. Firstly, they mean you should actually pursue purpose and meaning. Unfortunately the number of people who think developing a meaningful philosophy of life has declined over the last 40 years. Interestingly, this decline has an almost precise reversal relationship to the number of people who think being well off financially is important, but that's another story.

So what purpose should we set? In order to decide that I listed a few of the things that human beings have aimed to achieve within the last hundred thousand years:

- . Food
- . Water

- . Warmth
- . Shelter
- . Clothing
- . Power (whether this comes through land, military, power over others on a smaller scale etc)
- . Money
- . Survival
- . Achievement and success as can be measured by peers

But the thing is that all these aims have one thing in common. When asked why do you want this they all have an answer:

1. Why do you want food, water, warmth, clothing and shelter (Maslow's 5 basic needs)? In order to survive.
2. Why do you want to survive? Because I like to live. Why do you like to live? I like to be happy.
3. Why do you want power? Either to survive, in which case to be happy, or directly because it gives happiness.
4. Why do you want money? Again indirectly or directly because it allows happiness.
5. Why do you want achievement and/or success as can be measured by peers? Because it gives happiness.

So can we ask this of happiness? Why do you want to be happy? A cynical person could say that they would be unlikely to survive and be successful if they weren't happy at least some of the time. But seen as we only want success and survival in order to be happy (proven by the fact that suicide exists) it seems the ultimate purpose of life must be happiness.

Next, what are the implications of this? Do we want complete happiness and nothing but happiness? No, we need a balance. In an ideal world we would of course want 100% happiness 100% of the time. But in reality such a state could only be drug-induced. And we would not be effective at doing anything either. Why would you go to get food if you were completely happy without it? Why would you risk your life defending someone/some nation attacked by someone who craves violence? In essence, 100% happiness equals a natural counter-weight applied on our children. Hence we must pursue not short-term but long-term happiness. Optimism and pessimism are the same by the way. Some

pessimism is healthy (see earlier debate on the subject, from December or November)

Do we only want happiness for ourselves? Now this is a more difficult question. The answer is obviously no. But it is an answer formed purely on logic and we do not know enough about human psychology to say for certain whether we truly are all completely selfish (the argument goes that people help others because it makes them happy, but that they would not help if it would cause more negative than positive emotions). Hence my argument here is that this should be the sort of moral principle that needs to be taught in schools. In recent years morality has been withdrawing from education as it is seen as indoctrinal; instead the extreme liberal view that we should only teach facts and let individuals make up their own minds has come to the fore. But can you honestly say that if you were standing behind a 'veil of ignorance' (John Rawls's concept from A Theory of Justice, which calls on people to make decisions as if they didn't know who they were in society) you would pick you to be happy at the expense of all others? Perhaps I should have mentioned justice and fairness earlier as throughout the history of much of academia right back to Ancient Greece it has been these concepts and not happiness, that shaped our pursuits. So we should be ready to use that learning now to promote the happiness of all, not just 'us'. And this can have real effect too. Self held ideas, rules and principles do shape our actions, even so far as to make us go against the grain of logic or emotion at times.

Now although most modern professors profess such beliefs of fairness I would take this one step further. I think we need factor in not only all humans but all life forms that can experience emotions. Many people have argued with me on this point but no one has justified their opinion. The last such debate I had involved these comments:

"So you think that because we are more intelligent than other life forms we should be treated as if we're better than them?"

"Yes"

"So then you think that humanity should be casted in order of intelligence with the least intelligent humans being treated equally with the most intelligent animals?"

"...."

Intelligence may be acceptable as a factor for how we treat life forms because

more intelligence often allows a greater contribution in helping others. However the data shows it doesn't always work like that. And we would probably be better off ranking life in terms of emotional capacity if we were to take this approach.