



# The meaning of life: between contradiction and absurd.

## (Antinomy of the meaning of life in modern naturalism)

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**Resumen:** El artículo intenta sistematizar los enfoques existentes sobre el problema del sentido de la vida humana. En el marco de la conocida división en nihilismo, sobrenaturalismo y naturalismo, se lleva a cabo un análisis del sentido, que se ilustra con el experimento mental Salvar a Sísifo. Los enfoques naturalistas existentes se sistematizan sobre varios puntos de vista, como resultado de lo cual se demuestra la antinomia del sentido de la vida. Los autores sugieren una manera de superar esta antinomia: si el naturalismo quiere continuar la discusión sobre el sentido de la vida, requerirá cambiar el paradigma de la búsqueda del sentido de la vida por el de la búsqueda del fin de la vida.  
**Palabras claves:** sentido de la vida- naturalismo- sobrenaturalismo- fin de la vida- Sísifo.

**Abstract:** The article attempts to systematize existing approaches to the problem of the meaning of human life. Within the framework of the well-known division into nihilism, supernaturalism and naturalism, analysis of meaning is carried out, which is illustrated by the thought experiment Save Sisyphus. Existing naturalistic approaches are systematized on several grounds, as a result of which the antinomy of the meaning of life is demonstrated. The authors suggest a way of overcoming this antinomy: if naturalism wants to continue the discussion about the meaning of life, it will require changing the paradigm of the search for the meaning of life to the search for the aim of life.

**Keywords:** meaning of life naturalism- supernaturalism- aim of life- Sisyphus



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## Introduction

Strange as it may seem, in analytical philosophy, brought up on the traditions of pragmatism, the question of the meaning of life already at the end of the 20th century ceases to be a “black sheep” (Hosseini, 2015, p.1) and today causes deep and stormy discussions.

This discussion proceeds mainly within the framework of the triad: nihilism-naturalism-supernaturalism (Hosseini, 2015, p.3). Nihilism implies the absence of an answer to the question of the meaning of life, and to a greater extent, the meaninglessness of the question itself. Naturalism is an attempt to answer this question based on the materialistic approach and its values. Supernaturalism defends the impossibility of answering the question of the meaning of life in non-religious way. Paragraph 2 is devoted to the consideration of this dilemma, and for the best illustration of the emerging antinomy, a thought experiment “Save Sisyphus” is proposed in paragraph 3.

Despite the attempts of supernaturalism to monopolize the search for the meaning of life (Bennett-Hunter, 2016), naturalism actively invades this field of research and offers many answers to this question. Here we must first of all analyze the possibility and relevance of the very formulation of the question of the meaning of life in naturalism (discussed in paragraph 4). Further, coming to an affirmative conclusion, we turn to the systematization of heterogeneous naturalistic approaches, built along several lines. Firstly, it is the distinction of approaches to the meaning of life according to the source of the answer (paragraph 4.1): transcendent, existing outside of human life, and immanent, found in our very life. This distinction is also often presented as the meaning of life – the meaning in life. The second division is determined by the relation to the subject, whether there is a meaning independently of the questioner (4.2): objective (meaning exists independently of the subject) and subjective (meaning exists only for the subject and for the subject); a hybrid view is also highlighted here. Further, according to the predestination of the answer (4.3): freely created by the subject or imposed on the subject by external influence.

Carrying out such a classification makes it possible to realize the antinomy that arises in the naturalistic understanding of the meaning of life (formulated in paragraph 5): the meaning of life must be both immanent, objective (at least to a certain extent) and freely accepted by the subject. Such clarification makes it possible to outline a way to resolve the contradiction, which lies through the correction of linguistic expressions (paragraph 6): replacing the *meaning* of life with the *aim* of life when questioning from the position of naturalism.

## The naturalism-supernaturalism dilemma.

Nihilism and supernaturalism develop, in many respects, coherently with the classical tradition and do not enrich it so much with qualitatively new arguments. The naturalistic approach applied to this issue is a very interesting phenomenon, since on the one hand, the data of such sciences as

psychology and neurophysiology do not allow us to deny the significance of the meaning of life for a person, and on the other hand, the materialistic worldview constrains the search for meaning to the world of reality.

Naturalism actively opposes attempts to sacralize or transcend the solution of the problem of the meaning of life, which can be clearly seen in the discussion of Metz (2016) - Bennett-Hunter (2016). Guy Bennett-Hunter defends the thesis that human life finds meaning based on what is beyond human existence and is "ineffable" by means of language. The "ineffable" is revealed to a person through emotional and aesthetic experiences, which are the basis for finding the meaning of life. Metz characterizes the argumentation Bennett-Hunter as a return to religious existentialism, and develops a critique of this approach based on the analytical tradition. He puts forward three arguments against the "ineffable" as a source of meaning in life.

*First argument:* even if we assume that a person has a relationship with the "ineffable", most of a person's life takes place outside of the relationship of a person-the "ineffable", nevertheless, these no less significant aspects of life need the presence of meaning (Metz, 2016).

This argument is clearly illustrated by the 'e2-e4' thought experiment. The game, as Huizinga (1955) brilliantly demonstrates, breaks out of the ordinary determination of life, creating an autonomous field of meanings. The question of the meaning of the game is by definition meaningless. But this does not seem to negate the fact that the move e2-e4 makes sense (it is not a blunder). Even though chess is meaningless, individual moves make perfect sense. Therefore, individual values in our life can also have meaning, despite the fact that life as a whole does not have a transcendent meaning. "Seeking meaning 'all the way down' might not be discovering what it is that confers meaning on all the other meaningful conditions, but instead merely a comprehensive reckoning of all the meaning conditions that are present or possible" (Metz, 2016, p.1256). That is, the meaning of life is created by life itself, as the essence of a person is created by himself (Sartre, 1943).

If we approach this question in a purely descriptive, sociological way and ask: are there things that are not related to God, which for some people are the meaning of life (even if they are an illusion: Sisyphus - a stone can be rolled up a mountain), then the answer is obvious: yes. But only until this person thought about what gives his life meaning, did not realize its illusory nature.

Going back to the thought experiment with chess, even if all the moves of the game (at least one player) are meaningful, it does not make the whole game meaningful. All moves can be wonderfully thought out and justified, but this does not mean that chess makes sense; it makes sense to play chess.

Although in reality, chess (like almost any game) has certain benefits for an enthusiastic player: it develops logical thinking, attentiveness, the ability to anticipate the actions of another person, etc., but these are all transcendental meanings that have meaning *outside* of chess. Chess has a certain transcendent meaning, but this meaning has nothing to do with the meaningfulness of a single move. From this we conclude that transcendent and immanent meanings exist in parallel.

*Second argument:* Meaning, meaningfulness - this is what brings understanding to the situation. And it doesn't have to be something or someone "ineffable", it doesn't have to be necessarily God. "... what makes life meaningful is, at least in large part, something that renders it intelligible" (Metz, 2016 p. 1253)

*Argument three:* How can something be meaningful that is unspeakable, that is a mystery, that is, that we do not understand? (interesting to note, that by making this argument, Metz himself recalls Kant's thing-in-itself, but this does not bother him at all). It turns out that the religious (Christian) answer to the question of meaning sounds too Buddhist: it makes sense, but no one knows what it is.

The approach proposed by Metz fits perfectly into the analytical tradition: by clarifying the language expressions, we will gain an understanding of the essence. But if we continue his method, we have the right to ask ourselves: does the e2-e4 move make sense?

As a result, we return to the well-known Munchausen trilemma, only in application not to the cause, but to the meaning: a cycle, bad infinity, an arbitrary break. For greater clarity, let us do a thought experiment "Save Sisyphus".

## **"Save Sisyphus" Thought Experiment**

Given: there is a man Sisyphus, who is doomed to engage in a difficult and unpleasant occupation - to drag a stone up a mountain. Moreover, this activity is meaningless, because the stone constantly rolls down before reaching the top. However, if he can roll this stone, he will be released. But it is impossible to roll a stone.

Question: under what conditions can Sisyphus' life be filled with meaning?

Nihilism's answer: under no conditions. He can choose between committing suicide or deliberately continuing an absurd life.

Supernaturalism's answer: he must believe in god. Having seen Sisyphus' suffering and efforts, the gods will have mercy and release him. It is pointless to ask why he had to carry this stone, since the divine meaning is "ineffable" and incomprehensible to man.

Naturalism's answer: change your attitude to the process. This can be achieved in a chemical-physiological way (introduce a special substance that will make Sisyphus think that rolling stones is the best activity in the world or erase the memory after each failure). In addition, Sisyphus can convince himself that you do not need to ask about the ultimate meaning of his work; you need to focus on each act of ascent and see that each of them has its own purpose, which means that in general, his life is not meaningless (Metz, 2016). He can also see that his work has some beneficial effect on other people or even animals, and helps the environment.

There are really a lot of options. These options are seriously proposed by serious researchers as an answer to the question of the meaning of human life. But all of them are crossed out by the fact that Sisyphus will NOT be able to drag the stone.

It is also interesting to assume that if the conditions of the problem were not significantly modified: Sisyphus still could not drag the stone, but in each attempt, there was some progress. More precisely, not in each, but only in some, and in random order (this is important for maximum production of dopamine (Sapolsky, 2017)). But looking back at his entire path, at all his efforts, he would have seen what a huge way he had come, what heights and perfection he had reached in his activity! And then

Sisyphus would not be a symbol of meaningless suffering, but a model of the happiest and most purposeful person.

The meaning of life is found, its formula turned out to be simple and ingenious as  $E=mc^2$  and sounds like this: the meaning of life = asymptote + dementia!..

## Analysis of meaning.

In order to better understand the possibilities of considering the meaning of life, we will try to systematize the possible types of answers to the question of meaning.

*First of all, we must answer the question: does it have meaning to ask about meaning? In the context of the pragmatic and consumer cultural paradigm, such reasoning is called meaningless philosophizing. Let's assume that there is really no point in asking about the meaning. But*

a. if a person asks this question, it is no longer meaningless. That is, such a question is relevant for at least one person. He may be wrong, but if this question is significant for him, then in general it is not completely meaningless.

b. a situation where the question of meaning really and completely does not make sense - lack of choice, animal existence in search of pleasure and avoidance of suffering. But then it becomes impossible to understand the deliberate suicide (not emotional or euthanasia) that so many people commit. The self-willed suicide sees emptiness instead of meaning when it should be. The very existence of such suicides proves the significance and meaningfulness of the question of meaning.

c. in this case, the “ontological proof” really works, since it does not relate to the transcendent world, but to the phenomenal, to human existence. So, if a person understands and attaches importance to the question of the meaning of life (deliberate suicides understand and attach importance), then this question is not meaningless. We must answer it.

*Hence, the question of meaning makes sense, but does it have an answer?*

This answer can be given either in an ontological way (we create meaning) or in an epistemological way (we cognize meaning). Depending on how we ask this question, there is a certain type of answer to it. The epistemological question gives us a predetermined and objective meaning. Problems in understanding the meaning of life arise when ontological and epistemological questions are mixed. The possibility of overcoming confusion is found only in the fact of knowledge, the fact of activity.

The answers to the question about the meaning of life can be divided on several grounds:

*Classification of approaches to the meaning of life in relation to the human life: immanent or transcendent.*

Immanent meaning - the meaning of life arises within life itself – meaning in life. Transcendent meaning - the meaning of life as a rationalized value, which exists outside of a person's life and comes into life from the outside.

The naturalistic position lays in the consistent rejection of the transcendence of meaning. In a secularized culture, there is no place for absolute values as such. In this context, the arguments about the meaning of life lose their meaning. After all, life is a form of existence of protein bodies; its task is to reproduce itself in an innumerable variety of forms. Is there anything we can add here? It is possible only to talk about the meaning *in* life, while it is always desirable to clarify a certain context. Living life in certain circumstances gives it meaning. Meaning, as a kind of cultural product, as a reflection of life, which can acquire a certain value, significance, become an element of culture. This is how L. Wittgenstein presented this problem (Kishik, 2008).

Evolutionary anthropology is the most consistent concept of the naturalistic sense. As a synthesis of biological and humanitarian knowledge about human nature, it characteristically talks about the meaning of life. Edward Wilson in the books "On Human Nature" (2004), "The Meaning of Human Existence" (2014) writes that if humanity developed through Darwinian natural selection, then our species arose due to genetic combinations and due to ecological necessity, and not by the will of God. It follows from this hypothesis that human, as a biological species, has no purpose external to his own biological nature. Traditional religious beliefs, moral principles, including the need for meaning, are nothing but vital survival mechanisms. Understood in such an interpretation, they are deprived of any transcendental meaning, respectively depriving a person of transcendental goals. But the absence of transcendent goals has a detrimental effect on the human community. It is the goals that are external to man, set as super-tasks, that is, as a task to overcome natural limitations, to go beyond natural limitations, that most effectively organize human communities, make it possible to focus energy, open up new opportunities and new resources.

In order to find a new super-goal, a new super-task and, accordingly, a new meaning of human existence, or, as Edward Wilson writes, "to find a new morality based on a truer definition of man," it is necessary to "look inside, uncover the mechanics of the mind and restore its evolutionary history" (Wilson, 2004, p.33). However, here we come across another dilemma related to the choice of ethical prerequisites revealed in human nature. "Innate sensors and motivators existing in the brain deeply and unconsciously influence our ethical attitudes" (Wilson, 2004, p.33). Morality is based on social instincts. This hypothesis was expressed by Ch. Darwin. Evolutionary ethics originates from the works of Peter Kropotkin (1991), and now it is confirmed by modern sciences such as primatology and neurobiology (de Waal, 2013; Sapolsky, 2017; Arkhireev et al, 2020)

According to the evolutionary anthropology of Edward Wilson, "the true purpose of man is man" (Wilson, 2004, p. 45). To achieve this goal, a person needs to preserve biodiversity as a condition for the existence of the environment in which our biological species was formed.

It is also necessary to highlight the concept of "logotherapy" by Viktor Frankl (1988). It can include the entire direction of modern existential psychology, with its numerous variants. Among the modern authors of this direction, Irvin and Marvin Yalom (2021) stand out especially vividly. V. Frankl and his numerous colleagues unequivocally believe that the question of meaning in life should be considered exclusively within the framework of a secularized culture. In order to avoid transcendental associations, and to consider the question of the meaning in life outside the humanistic – theological apposition, V. Frankl and his colleagues prefer not to use the term spirituality. Thus, the level of meaning belongs to the noological dimension of human nature. The basic attitude of V. Frankl is the absolute value of human life. And if a person's life is a value for us, then meaning is what gives life

significance. Frankl believes that we need to accept the meaning in life as an absolute value. The external circumstances in which this absolute meaning is realized are not decisive. The only thing that matters is a person's attitude to circumstances. Further, this meaning-affirming concept is filled with numerous examples from psychotherapeutic practice. Statistical data and data from conducted social experiments are used as arguments. But the very fact of the absolutization of meaning in V. Frankl's concept becomes the object of criticism from specialists.

A very important approach within the immanent meaning is developed by Giovanna Caruso (2019), who writes that self-exploration becomes the starting point for raising the question of man in modern anthropological approaches. Accordingly, human life is no longer considered as a theoretical object of philosophical research, but as a concrete performative fulfillment of an individual's life. Both in Heidegger's "Dasein analytics" (Heidegger, 1927) and in Angehrn's "hermeneutics of self" (Angehrn, 1999), the meaning in life can be identified with the process of self-realization much more than with any possible significant achievements, occupations or qualities. The human self forms itself, and thus defines its meaning as a process that characterizes a human being. The "I" or "self" is constantly in the process of becoming and exists only as this process, and remains incomprehensible to a person in its entirety. Therefore, self-understanding becomes the starting point for raising the question of man in the philosophical anthropology of the XX century (Plessner, 2019; Gehlen 2007).

Caruso emphasizes the normative-reflexive nature of such self-knowledge, "self is constantly in the process of becoming self-existent and exists only as this process and remains unfathomable to man in his completeness" (Caruso, 2019, p. 493-494). This means the immanence and uniqueness of the meaning in each particular life, each individual. A person, in order to be himself, must constantly perform the task of self-understanding and, consequently, self-realization. This process is not social, it is not related to the fulfillment of social obligations, observance of commandments, rules of social behavior. The process of self-realization is primarily normative.

*Classification of approaches to the meaning of life in relation to the subject: objective or subjective. Is there a meaning in life that is independent of a particular subject?*

This is one of the debatable aspects of the meaning of life problem: "should we be subjectivists or objectivists about the meaning of life" (Landau, 2013, p.605). Thus, philosophical theories about the meaningfulness of life can be divided into two main groups: subjectivism and objectivism. According to subjectivism, achieving meaning of life depends solely on personal goals, desires, feelings and inclinations. The main problem of this view is that it is too permissive, because people can find satisfaction and pleasure in activities that are not considered particularly significant. According to pure objectivism, the meaningfulness of life does not depend on subjective beliefs and desires: life has an objective meaning, independent of reason and context. The implication of this view is that someone's life can be objectively meaningful regardless of how that person perceives their own life. The main problem faced by objectivism is that establishing what is "objectively relevant" has proved extremely difficult (Politi, 2019).

As an example of subjectivism, it is possible to indicate the position of Frankfurt. He relies on an existential argument: in the case of love, dedicating yourself to what you love is enough to make your life meaningful, regardless of the inherent or objective nature of the objects you love (Frankfurt, 2002, p. 250). We can find similar thoughts in Trisel's work: since there is no predetermined goal of life, or



at least there is no evidence of such a goal, the only goals that we could not achieve are those that we have conceived. (Trisel, 2002, p. 73) He defends the idea that could be designated as "radical subjectivism", Trisel, like Dostoevsky, poses the question as follows: if the Universe is indifferent to us (that is, there is no objective meaning), does this lead to the meaninglessness of the life of each of us (that is, does it mean the absence of subjective meaning)? And it gives the most radical answer to this question: even if the Universe did care about us, it would not in fact affect the search for subjective meaning, would not improve the quality of our lives.

It is worth emphasizing that the subjectivist vision of meaning - meaning in the movement towards what *seems* significant, is quite clearly refuted by M. Scheler: "the depreciation of values... to the level of one's own actual desire ... therefore, the restriction of values to one's own naturally given level of attraction... - the main source of blindness, delusions and illusions of value consciousness" (Scheler, 1999 p. 35).

A prominent representative of *objectivism* is Taylor. He asserts that the concept of meaningfulness implies objective value, so we do not define what questions are meaningful, otherwise not a single question would be meaningful (Taylor, 1992, p. 39).

The objectivist approach in the most radical version of solving the problem of the meaning of life is based on the hypothesis that the formation of meaning is associated with the work of certain areas of the cerebral cortex. This fundamental ability is developed in the course of evolution and is directly related to the survival of the species. The development of neuroscience is important for the development and actual confirmation of this hypothesis. "Perhaps also neurology will reach one day the state in which we will be able to stimulate areas in the brain and thus give people who feel that life is meaningless a feeling that it is meaningful, just as we can do today, to an extent, for depression... Should some people who do not want to receive this treatment undergo it against their will (by sheer force, or perhaps through manipulation)?" (Landau, 2013, p. 616)

Critics of the extreme objectivism position emphasize that the existence of a pre-set, specific goal for each person, in which it and only it makes his life meaningful, is the path to fatalism. The freedom of a person is only to go to this goal or not to go, that is, only the illusion of freedom. The lack of freedom makes the question of the meaning of life meaningless, so the position of extreme objectivism as an answer to the question of the meaning of life is internally contradictory.

The position of extreme subjectivism is also absurd as such and does not hide this from the very beginning: this is position of Camus' Sisyphus, who rejects all "objective" values as imposed from the outside and finds a way out in the production of the absurd. The subjective approach always compares meaning with the game, where there is meaning inside, and asking about the global meaning does not make sense, the game is always absurd.

In the research literature, attempts are made to get out of the opposition of subjectivism and objectivism in solving the problem of the meaning of life. So, for example Thagard (2013) argues that the appropriate response to nihilism is not to make a deductive argument against all challenges to the meaninglessness of human life, but rather to identify elements, that reliably contribute to people's positive assessment of their existence. He shows that the discussion revolves around the angle of view on this problem. Just like the approach of Wittgenstein's language games, which are completely accessible to an outside observer and do not imply an "inner knowledge" of the meaning



of words, naturalism is unable to get out of the paradigm of the "hard problem" of consciousness. It is doomed to describe a human only in the third person perspective: it is able only to record descriptively what statistically gives meaning to other people's lives. But it is impossible to talk about the meaning of life as such.

Susan Wolf attempts to develop an intermediate position, the so-called "*hybrid view*", which removes the tension between subjectivist and objectivist approaches (Politi, 2019). Wolf believes that in solving the problem of the meaning of life, the subjective-objective dichotomy is false. Subjectivism (egoism) and objectivism (living for the sake of higher values, moral duty) are compatible if life that promotes positive values is understood as meaningful. This concept includes subjective and objective elements that are inextricably linked to the affirmation of positive values. Wolf argues that the meaning of life arises when someone acts in accordance with the subjective desire to do something objectively valuable. Meaning can arise when subjective attractiveness meets objective attractiveness, and the person is able to do something with it or with it (Wolf, 2010). It is the intersubjective agreement that gives life some objective value. For objectivism, sacrificial behavior in the name of false values (false for our culture) is completely meaningless. Intersubjectivism, on the other hand, will make a conclusion about the relative meaningfulness of such behavior for a specific cultural context.

*Classification of approaches to the meaning of life by determination: freely created by the subject or imposed from the outside.*

Religious, cultural, family tradition authoritatively lays down attitudes to a number of meanings in the course of socialization. The development of which determines the position in the social hierarchy. Either the subject chooses or even forms the meaning of his life.

For the supernaturalist position, the meaning is certainly given. The freedom of the subject can consist only in accepting and fulfilling this meaning, or not understanding or renouncing it.

Sociological naturalism analyzes the meanings existing in society, and, accordingly, can investigate exactly what meanings society usually imposes on a person. But such studies are not aimed at finding meaning and analyzing it, but only at stating the current state of affairs in society.

Existential naturalism, aimed at the actual search for the meaning of life, proceeds from the fact that the meaning is created by man himself (classics of this approach from Sartre to Wolf).

However, is there a human meaning beyond choice? Thaddeus Metz poses a question like this (Metz 2019), and demonstrates that meaning can be sought beyond choice. The fact is that the ability to make decisions is not the only significant aspect of human life. Many everyday practices in which a person is immersed from day to day do not imply what is commonly called "choice", but nevertheless they make sense. For example, emotional experiences, everyday communication, aesthetic contemplation and many other things that are important and have a certain meaning. Human beings deprived of consciousness can also be in a meaningful state (little children, or seriously ill in a coma (de Muijnck, 2013; Thomas, 2019)). In addition, as many researchers show (Tartaglia, 2015; Mawson, 2016) what has been created for a certain reason can be endowed with meaning to some extent, as opposed to what has arisen by chance. Nevertheless, not everything that was brought into

existence in a certain way must necessarily include any action on the part of a person, and even it does not have to be chosen by a person to fulfill the goal set by him.

There are also stronger statements that a person's actions are never something that makes sense or does not have it (Metz, 2019, p. 409). By definition, the meaning of life cannot be arbitrarily accepted, but only cognizable. According to this approach, the realization of the meaning of life or a significant change in the world logically cannot be what creates meaning. On the contrary, meaning is a mandatory sense-forming structure, defined by a narrative interpretation. In other words, meaning is already implicitly present as the basic structure regulating human behavior. It follows from this that when we investigate the meaning of life, we ask to what extent and in what respect the individual "perceives the meaning of the sign". For example, the religious theory of the meaning of life will consist in understanding natural phenomena through the supernatural, while the aesthetic approach to the meaning of life will include the transfer of the subjective significance of the event, in the form of a work of art (Repp, 2018).

Few people doubt the aspect of the problem that connects the meaning of life and human free will. The realization of freedom as one of the variants of the meaning of life is invariably present in culture. At first glance, it seems obvious that the prerequisite for the existence of meaning is human free will. If a person is only a toy in the hands of fate, then asking about his meaning is the greatest absurdity. However, this thesis is opposed by the hard incompatibilism of Derk Pereboom (2013), who argues that idea of life without free will is not destructive for morality and meaning of life, but even can be fruitful.

## Naturalisms' antinomy of the meaning of life

In most modern approaches, the classification of answers to the question of the meaning of life for various reasons is not taken into account. Similarly, researchers do not always distinguish between the question of meaning in life and the question of the meaning of life. The semantic difference that we pay attention to, as a rule, is constructed in the process of forming an answer, the multivariance of which reflects the very specificity of the question about the meaning of life. Usually we are dealing with an immanent subjective freely conscious meaning, or a transcendent objective externally imposed meaning.

The search for the "meaning" of life cannot be satisfied with the immanent meaning, the meaning "in life" (not the "meaning *of* life"), since the category of meaning implies a reference to something else that is beyond life. Let's return to the common use of the word "meaning". The meaning of the sign is the object to which this sign refers (there are exceptions - signs-symbols, performative signs, but they further confirm this idea). A meaningless sign is a sign that does not have such an external object.

The complete subjectivation of meaning leads to relativity, and ultimately to nihilism. This statement is based on the fact that the declaration of any subjectively significant meaning of life, due to the plasticity and variability of such meanings, is essentially a denial of the existence of meaning as such. Subjective meaning is the meaning of the game. The choice of a particular game, what is postulated by the activity itself - language or, better here, "meaning" games. It is unlikely that a suicide inquires about such a meaning! In any case, such an understanding of meaning makes further discussion about

meaning impossible, since it is a matter of subjective preference; tastes are not disputed. It is not for nothing that one of the most authoritative thinkers on this issue, S. Wolf, speaking about the subjectivity of meaning, emphasizes the necessary moments of objective value in it.

At the same time, the recognition of the existence of an irrelevant, externally imposed meaning is the approach of supernaturalism, playing on this field will not bring naturalism success. All the answers of naturalists given in this spirit will be quasi-religious (for example, the quasi-religion of the "builders of communism" in the Soviet Union with its cult, rituals, morality...) The acceptance of an irrelevant meaning presupposes the existence of a value absolute, which can endow us with an unconditional meaning. There is no such absolute in the natural world.

Therefore, naturalistic responses fall into *an antinomy of meaning*:

*the meaning of life must be both objective, immanent, and freely accepted by the subject.*

6. *The key to overcoming the antinomy is to clarify language expressions.*

In fact, much of this confusion lies in incorrect word usage. Meaning is the meaning of a sign, even a symbol. When we ask about the meaning of life, we presuppose its existence as a symbol, a mystery waiting to be solved. *The aim* is not only something that is determined by my will, but also determines my will.

Can there be a free objective and immanent meaning? Value acquires objective significance when it is able to aim all the elements of the process. The aim is subjective as long as it exists only in the consciousness of the subject, but when it has started an activity, it begins to acquire more and more objectivity. The aim of life is what directs subjective aims and values to objectification. And it becomes the aim of all life to a greater extent as a person strives for it. Freedom here is not in knowledge, but in the creation of necessity.

Attempts to clarify the meaning of the expressions used in the discussion of the meaning of life are carried out in modern philosophy. For example, Joshua Seachris (2019) reveals three aspects of the meaning of life: I-Meaning (intelligible, meaning as understanding), P-Meaning (purpose) and S-Meaning (significance, value). The most important one is I-Meaning. Thus, the establishment of meaning often consists in placing something in a broader context or whole: words in sentences, paragraphs, novels; musical notes in bars, movements, and symphonies (that is, movement from simple sound to music), parts of a photograph within the whole photograph. Meaning - is understanding in a broader context. The absence of such meaning is acutely felt in the culture of Macbeth - Beckett - Camus... Many people think that the naturalistic history of the universe is, in fact, an absurd story "told by an idiot". Macbeth and Camus will not be satisfied with naturalistic answers to this question. At the same time, even if something is clear, i.e. some explanation is given, it may be false. We must also assume that if there is a meaning, then it can be terrible and evil. Although the I-Meaning is the most fundamental, the answer must be found to all three questions, otherwise it will be incomplete; this position is called "semantic holism" by Seachris. Which means returning the discussion about meaning in life to an already existing paradigm. Question of aim is argued to be less fundamental. We will agree by pointing out that the question of meaning *is too* fundamental for the naturalistic method.

On the other hand, Metz's work (2019) emphasizes many absurd conclusions that we can come to if we continue to search for meaning in the existing paradigm. Metz points out that modern solutions to the question of the meaning of life most often look like practical recommendations for a person or humanity to gain meaning. Attention is focused on the actions that a person could perform in order for his life to be filled with meaning. These may be some positive common values (love, morality, creativity, etc.) And, on the contrary, there is no meaning in life, which either just continuously "rolls a stone uphill", or in an "Experience Machine".

However, today this issue is covered from a completely different angle. Researchers are asking about meaningfulness beyond humanity, questions about the significance of certain non-human individuals in the physical world: from the supposed meaningfulness of animal life (Purves & Delon, 2018) before any natural phenomenon capable of having beneficial effects (Thomas, 2019), even sandwich (de Muijnck, 2013).

If we reformulate the question of the "meaning of life" in the question of the "aim of life", it takes on a more pragmatic sound and loses its mystical overtones, gets research back on track. Is there an aim in my life? - Only an activity can have an aim. Activities can be private, "small" - playing chess; or more global - studying at a university. The question of the aim of life as a whole depends only on me, whether I consider my life as a whole, as a single activity.

The wholeness of life is not a theoretical problem, it is created by the activity itself (and it is not a purely practical question - it is the level of judgment abilities - Kant's teleology refers to this ability). Whether a certain aim is worthy of my whole life is determined by whether this aim can bring together all my particular activities, that is, it is decided practically (and the aim affects my activities not directly, but through my will). Therefore, the question of the aim (meaning) of life does not have a clear solution and causes so much discussion.

The aim of life has a dual character: objective (value) and subjective (will) (or ontogenoseological - the answer to the question what? and how?) (Gnatic et al, 2018).

However, understanding the meaning of life as the aim of life has its own specifics. The aim is transcendent to the activity, and at the same time immanent, because it is present in the activity itself as something that gives it integrity. The fact is that there are two concepts of an aim: immanent (dynamic) and transcendent (rigidly deterministic).

There is a transcendent aim when there is a creator and he creates an entity for his aim by his own design. Then this essence is completely predetermined in its existence (essence before existence; Sartre's knife). This entity can have no meaning by itself, it is meaningless without the creator's intention.

An immanent goal is something that is created by the process itself (such goals are legitimate in the conversation about the evolution of matter). That is, the very movement of the object, the direction that it chooses and becomes the aim (and, on the other hand, forms the wholeness of the object). Therefore, if a person has found the meaning of life, he will strive for some aim. If he does not strive, meaning has not generated an aim, such meaning dissolves in itself.

What is the objectivity of the aim of life? The created necessity should not be broken by the "truth of life". It should fit into the practical reality of human and social activity, and should not remain a castle in the air.

Oblomov will say: the aim of my life is to make people happy... and continues to lie on the couch. So it's not an aim, it's the appearance of a aim.

Faustus will say: the aim of my life is to make people happy... and bring misery to the world. So this is an aim, but the false aim or misunderstood.

The aim of life itself, without its realization, can be neither true nor false, but it can be a life endowed with this aim.

The aim of life is the aim *of life*. Without life itself, i.e., without will, values, or activity, it has no meaning. This approach develops the ideas of philosophical anthropology in relation to the meaning of life, but unfolds it in a more specific and pragmatic direction.

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