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メタデータ	言語: English
	出版者:
	公開日: 2015-11-25
	キーワード (Ja):
	キーワード (En):
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	所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.24729/00006961

Journal of Philosophy of Life Vol.5, No.3 (October 2015):50-65

Is Meaning in Life Comparable?
From the Viewpoint of 'The Heart of Meaning in Life'

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to propose a new approach to the question of meaning in life by criticizing Thaddeus Metz's objectivist theory in his book *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study*. I propose the concept of "the heart of meaning in life," which alone can answer the question, "Alas, does my life like this have any meaning at all?" and I demonstrate that "the heart of meaning in life" cannot be compared, in principle, with other people's meaning in life. The answer to the question of "the heart of meaning in life" ought to have two values, yes-or-no, and there is no ambiguous gray zone between them. I believe that this concept constitutes the very central content of meaning in life.

1. Introduction

In Federico Fellini's 1954 film, *La Strada*, the Fool encourages Gelsomina, a young female member of a circus troupe who has little talent, little skill, and little social value.

> *THE FOOL*: You may not believe it, but everything that exists in the world has some purpose. Here . . . take . . . that pebble there, for instance.
> *GELSOMINA*: Which pebble?
> *THE FOOL*: Oh . . . this one, any one of them . . . Well . . . even this serves some purpose . . . even this little pebble.
> *GELSOMINA*: And what purpose does it serve?
> *THE FOOL*: It . . . but how do I know? If I knew, do you know who I'd be?
> *GELSOMINA*: Who?
> *THE FOOL*: God Almighty who knows everything. When you're born, when you'll die. Who else could know that? No . . . I don't know what purpose this pebble serves, but it must serve some purpose. Because if it is useless, then everything is useless . . . even stars. . . . At least that's what I

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> think. And even you . . . even you serve some purpose . . . with that artichoke head of yours.[1]

In this sequence, the Fool stresses his idea that everything in the universe serves some purpose no matter how useless or worthless it may look, although no one can exactly know what purpose it may serve. It is only God that knows it. He says, "If it [this pebble] is useless, then everything is useless."

I do not believe in God, but the Fool's words eloquently explain my personal sentiment on meaning in life, which is in sharp contrast with Thaddeus Metz's objectivist approach in his book, *Meaning in Life: An Analytic Study*. In this paper, I criticize his objectivist approach to meaning in life and instead propose my own argument using the concept of "the heart of meaning in life."

2. Metz's Interpretation of Meaning in Life and its Problems

Metz classifies theories of meaning in life into two categories, namely, supernaturalism and naturalism. The former is the view that meaning in life should be interpreted in relationship to a spiritual realm, and the latter is the view that meaning in life can be acquired in a purely physical world.[2] The latter, naturalism, is further divided into two categories, namely, subjectivism and objectivism. Subjectivism is the view that meaning in life can be acquired by obtaining the objects of one's "propositional attitudes," and objectivism is the view that one's life is meaningful "in itself" at least in part regardless of one's propositional attitudes.[3]

Metz defends objectivism. He calls his idea "the fundamentality theory." The basic idea of his fundamentality theory is described as follows.

> A human person's life is more meaningful, the more that she employs her reason and in ways that positively orient rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence.[4]

Metz argues that fundamental conditions of human existence can be interpreted

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[1] Bondanella and Gieri, p.121.
[2] Metz, p.19, p.79.
[3] Metz, pp.164-165.
[4] Metz, p.222.

in terms of the good, the true, and the beautiful. For example, Mandela and Mother Teresa tried hard to improve devastated people's fundamental living conditions; scientific discoveries by Einstein and Darwin contributed much to the progress of fundamental knowledge of humans and the universe; and Picasso and Dostoyevsky's works lead our eyes to the most fundamental layer of the world of the beautiful.[5] Their lives are all meaningful because they oriented their rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence on the level of the good, the true, and the beautiful.

The final version of his fundamentality theory is as follows.

> A human person's life is more meaningful, the more that she, without violating certain moral constraints against degrading sacrifice, employs her reason and in ways that either positively orient rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence, or negatively orient it towards what threatens them, such as that the worse parts of her life cause better parts towards its end by a process that makes for a compelling and ideally original life-story; in addition, the meaning in a human person's life is reduced, the more it is negatively oriented towards fundamental conditions of human existence or exhibits narrative disvalue.[6]

This statement is composed of two parts: the part dealing with fundamental conditions of human existence and the part dealing with one's life-story. Metz claims, with regard to the former, that the life in which one orients rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence is more meaningful than the life in which one does not orient it towards them and, with regard to the latter, the life which exhibits narrative value is more meaningful than the life which exhibits narrative disvalue.

Let us see an impressive example that Metz uses in his book. He stresses that great meaning is conferred, intuitively, on the lives of Mandela and Mother Teresa.

> In contrast, their lives would not have been notably important had they striven to ensure that everyone's toenails were regularly trimmed or that no one suffered from bad breath, even if these conditions were universally

[5] Metz, pp.227-233.
[6] Metz, p.235.

> desired (or needed!). Why are the former plausible candidates for substantial significance, while the latter are not?[7]

Here he concludes that the actual lives of Mandela and Mother Teresa are more meaningful than the hypothetical lives which are made up solely of trimming toenails or preventing bad breath.

Concerning the life-story, Metz suggests that the lives in which "its bad parts cause its later, good parts" by virtue of "personal growth or some other pattern that makes for a compelling life-story that is original," are more meaningful than the lives which are solely "repetitive," "end on a low note," or "intend to replicate another's whole-life."[8]

One of the most basic presumptions of Metz's objectivism is that we can compare one's meaning in life with the other, by observing their lives from the outside, and can reach the conclusion that one life is more meaningful than the other. I have grave doubts about this way of thinking.

Let us go back to the dialogue in the film *La Strada*. The central message there was that every life has meaning no matter what social value it may have. After having seen the film, many viewers would think that the life of Gelsomina, which was the continuance of a series of small events and ended in tragedy, was, indeed, full of dignity and divinity, comparable to those of sacred religious figures. Gelsomina did nothing to orient her rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence, and the tone of her life became dimmer and dimmer toward the tragic end point. Hence, according to Metz's fundamentality theory her life should be considered to have very little meaning compared with Mandela or Mother Teresa, however, many of us would probably have just the opposite impression. For the viewers, Gelsomina *is* Mandela or Mother Teresa. The life of a person of no importance can have equal meaning to the life of a distinguished person. Something strange is happening here. We might call it "the dialectic of meaning in life." This, however, is no more than my personal impression of the central message of the film. In the following paragraphs I am going to translate it into more theoretical language.

In Metz's fundamentality theory, "meaning in life" can be interpreted as the significance of socially and narratively valuable life. By the words "socially

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[7] Metz, p.227.
[8] Metz, p.235.

valuable life”[9] I mean a life in which one positively orients rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence. According to his final prescription, the more social and narrative value a person’s life has, the more her life becomes meaningful.

Let us consider the life of Gelsomina. We can ask, “Is it possible that the life of Gelsomina has a great meaning despite the fact that her life was actually one without any social or narrative value?,” and answer this question positively. If this is correct, Metz’s interpretation of meaning in life in his final prescription should be considered to be wrong.

If we look into the world of literature and religious texts we can easily find many stories in which the life of a person without any social or narrative value is depicted as having tremendous meaning at the deepest spiritual level. This shows that people have never limited meaning in life to a person’s social or narrative value, and in some cases they have found great meaning in other characteristics such as sincerity, faithfulness, or industriousness. I dare say that the life of a person can have grave and utmost meaning even if it is made up of a repeated routine of toenail trimming or the prevention of bad breath.

Let us consider the lives of Mandela or Mother Teresa. Interestingly, it is possible to imagine a situation in which they ask themselves, “Is my life meaningful despite the fact that my life has been socially and narratively valuable to the fullest degree?,” and then they respond negatively to this question. For example, it is possible for them to “think” that their lives are completely meaningless because they had an experience of telling a lie, only once in their life, to their beloved friend, although their lives have been full of social and narrative value. This shows that meaning in life is not logically equal to social and narrative value (because if they are logically equal it should be that it is incorrect to “think” in that way). The important point is that even Mandela or Mother Teresa are able to doubt the meaning of their own lives, and those who advocate Metz’s theory of meaning in life should “correct” their doubt by saying, “Oh, your doubt is wrong. Your life ought to be meaningful according to our theory!”

Even a person whose life fully satisfies Metz’s fundamentality theory is able to legitimately doubt the meaningfulness of their own life. Here lies the most essential characteristic of the concept of meaning in life.

[9] This is not Metz’s phrase but mine.

In this section, we have demonstrated that Metz's fundamentality theory fails to grasp the meaningfulness of Gelsomina's life. In the following sections, I will leave Gelsomina's case and inquiry into a much deeper dimension of meaning in life.

3. The Heart of Meaning in Life

First, I would like to explain my understanding of the concept of "meaning in life." When we talk about meaning in life, we do not necessarily or solely talk about a person's social and narrative value. In many cases, our question of meaning in life takes a form similar to the following.

> Alas, does my life like this have any meaning at all?

I believe that what is asked or lamented in the above question constitutes the very central content of meaning in life. I want to call it "the heart of meaning in life." This question emerges from the deep layer of my heart when I notice that the solid psychological ground which was supporting the affirmative basis of my life has suddenly collapsed or disappeared into nothing. The most important point here is that the words "my life" in this question point to the life of oneself, that is to say, the life of a person who is now writing this text, or the life of a person who is now reading this text. "My life" means the life of myself who is now writing this text, and "my life" also means the life of the reader of this text, that is to say, the life of "yourself," my dear reader! *You* are supposed to pose this question, "Alas, does my life like this have any meaning at all?" This is not a general question which can be equally applied to anyone. This is the question that can only be applied to the life of myself when it is uttered by me, or to the life of yourself when it is uttered by you. This can be extended to the life of him/herself when the question is uttered by him/her.

A question about "the heart of meaning in life" is completely different from a general question about the meaning in life, such as, "What is meaning in life in general?" A question about "the heart of meaning in life" is to be answered, in principle, only by the person who uttered it. There is no general answer to a question about "the heart of meaning in life" that is equally applied to everyone. Furthermore, it is very important to understand the following distinction. Generally speaking, we can say that a question about "the heart of meaning in

life" can be answered by the person who uttered it, whereas in the case of the reader of this text, it is only for your own actual life that you can legitimately talk about "the heart of meaning in life." Only for the life one has actually lived and is going to live, can one talk about "the heart of meaning in life" and, in the case of the reader, it is for your own life that you can talk about it. Let us keep this in mind and delve deeper into this topic.

Metz often says that the life of Mandela or Mother Teresa has significant meaning because they positively oriented their rationality toward fundamental conditions of human existence. We have to pay special attention here to the fact that Metz does not talk about "the heart of meaning in life" because Metz, himself, is neither Mandela nor Mother Teresa, that is to say, he is living the life neither of Mandela nor of Mother Teresa. Metz is talking about the meaning in life of persons other than himself. Metz can talk about "the heart of meaning in life" only when he refers to Metz's own actual life. This is the logical conclusion that is derived from the concept of "the heart of meaning in life." And we should note that throughout his book, Metz never talks about "the heart of meaning in life." From my viewpoint, Metz fails to discuss the most important aspect of meaning in life in his academic discussion of this topic. His philosophical analysis has not yet reached the layer that I want to make most clear.

Metz might classify my position under a certain type of subjectivism but I think this is wrong because subjectivists, in Metz's sense, do not also talk about "the heart of meaning in life." According to Metz, subjectivism is the view that meaning in life can be acquired by the acquisition of the objects of one's "propositional attitudes." It is clear that in this kind of subjectivism "we" can talk about "his" or "her" meaning in life by referring to their acquisition of the objects of their propositional attitudes. However, this is not what "the heart of meaning in life" really points to because "the heart of meaning in life" of his or her life can only be legitimately talked about by him/herself, not by us. Hence, my position is not even subjectivism in Metz's sense.

For instance, Metz describes a dominant form of subjectivism as follows.

> (S_1) A human person's life is more meaningful, the more that she obtains the objects of her actual pro-attitudes such as desires and goals.[10]

[10] Metz, p.169.

In this sentence Metz talks about someone else's meaning in life. This shows that what Metz is talking about is, by definition, never "the heart of meaning in life."[11] Metz discussed subjectivism throughout Chapter Nine, but my position in this paper is not dealt with in any pages in that chapter.

And it is crystal clear that my position is not supernaturalism because I do not have any religious belief. Metz's classification of meaning in life fails to catch "the heart of meaning in life" in my sense.

Of course, it is possible for Mandela or Mother Teresa to utter, "Alas, does my life like this have any meaning at all?" In this case, their question is without doubt one about "the heart of meaning in life." However, when we ask "Does the life of Mandela or Mother Teresa have any meaning at all?," we completely fail to pose the question about "the heart of meaning in life" for Mandela or Mother Teresa.

It is true that as a result of the accomplishments of Mandela and Mother Teresa many people's fundamental living conditions were dramatically improved. In this sense we sometimes say their lives had great meaning and this makes sense in our ordinary language. But it is important to know that here "the heart of meaning in life" in Mandela or Mother Teresa is never being talked about. It is made possible only when they themselves talk about meaning in their own actual life.

In the same vein, I can talk about "the heart of meaning in life" only when I talk about the meaning in my own actual life. However, at the same time, my judgment on meaning in life will be attained under the strong influence of the state of the human relationships that surround me. For example, whether I was able to make my friends and/or my family happy would play a crucial role in evaluating meaning in my life. Hence, whilst it is only I who can legitimately talk about "the heart of meaning in life" in the case of myself, it is human relationships and broader contexts surrounding me that strongly assist in determining the evaluation of meaning in my life.

Let us turn our eyes to "my counterfactual life." Is it possible for me to talk about "the heart of meaning in life" in my counterfactual life? For example, it makes sense to say, "if I were a billionaire, my life would be tremendously meaningful," but I must say that in this case I fail to talk about "the heart of meaning in life." The reason for this is as follows.

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[11] The same holds true of S_2 and S_3. Metz, pp.176-179.

As was discussed earlier, “the heart of meaning in life” refers to what is asked or lamented in the question, “Alas, does my life like this have any meaning at all?” Here we have to pay special attention to the phrase “my life like this.” This phrase clearly means “my *actual* life like *this*,” not “my *counterfactual* life like *that*.” Hence, when I talk about “the heart of meaning in life” I must be talking about my actual life like this, not my counterfactual life like that. When I am talking about meaning in life in my counterfactual life in which I am a billionaire, I am not answering the question, “Alas, does my life like this have any meaning at all?” because in my actual life I am not a billionaire; I am no more than an upper-middle-class college teacher. It is only when I talk about my actual life in which I am an upper-middle-class worker that I can talk about “the heart of meaning in life” in the life of myself. Of course, it makes sense for me to say, “if I were a billionaire, my life would be tremendously meaningful,” but in using this sentence I can only mean something other than “the heart of meaning in life” that we have been discussing so far.

Then what about meaning in my life in the past? Is it possible for me to talk about “the heart of meaning in life” as of my life one year ago? Before thinking about this question, let us examine what the phrase “my life like this” means in a strict sense. In this phrase, “this” means my actual life, and my actual life is the life I am experiencing here and now which is made possible by the accumulation of what I have experienced up until the present. I can talk about “the heart of meaning in life” solely in respect of my life of this kind. Hence, it is now clear that in the case of my life in the past I cannot talk about “the heart of meaning in life” because “my life like this” is not the phrase that denotes a certain time-point in life in the past. Of course, it makes sense to say, “if I were the person that I was one year ago, my life would be more meaningful than this,” but this is not the sentence which stands for “the heart of meaning in life” one year ago in my life. According to this line of thought, we can also conclude that I cannot talk about “the heart of meaning in life” for my life in the future.

It might be helpful here to refer to Theo van Willigenburg’s concept of “an internalist view on the value of life.” According to van Willigenburg, the goodness of life is “in some sense always related to what is, or could be, experienced as valuable by the person who is leading that life,” and the important thing is “not whether others value these goods, but whether I value

them from *my* perspective."[12] At first sight, his argument looks similar to mine; however, he believes that the goodness of a person's life cannot be determined only by that person's self-judgment. Hence, whilst he uses the term "internalist," he actually supports the idea that the value of one's life is determined both by one's own internal judgment and by the external facts and/or contexts. He concludes that "my internalist position rejects the experience requirement posed by experiential subjectivism."[13] His discussion is complicated and twisted because he does not clearly distinguish between the concepts of value, goodness, and meaning. It seems to me that although the value and goodness of one's life cannot be determined only by one's inner judgment, with regard to "the heart of meaning in life," it ought to be determined in a purely internalist fashion, that is, only by the judgment of the person who is leading that life.

What I am arguing is not that objective approaches are totally senseless, but that although objective approaches can accurately explain some ordinary usages of the words "meaning in life," they can never grasp the layer of "the heart of meaning in life" we have discussed so far.

Metz criticizes "first-person" approaches to meaning in life because most of us "are concerned about whether, say, the lives of our spouses and children are meaningful, and not merely because the meaning of our own life might depend on the meaningfulness of theirs."[14] Of course I understand what he wants to say, and I agree with him that in our ordinary life we usually think like that. Nevertheless, we have to keep in mind that the "meaningfulness" in Metz's words is something completely different from "the heart of meaning in life" in our sense. I can never talk about the meaningfulness of my spouse's life or my children's lives at the level of "the heart of meaning in life."

4. "The Heart of Meaning in Life" Cannot Be Compared

An important conclusion is to be derived from the above discussion, that is, it is totally impossible to compare "the heart of meaning in life" among people. Meaning in life is incomparable at the level of "the heart of meaning in life."

First, it is impossible to compare my "meaning in life" with other's "meaning in life" at the level of "the heart of meaning in life." The reason is

[12] van Willigenburg, p.27. Italic by van Willigenburg.
[13] van Willigenburg, p.29.
[14] Metz, p.3, note 3.

simple. It is impossible to talk about "the heart of meaning in life" in the life of others, and hence, it is logically impossible to compare it with mine. Metz writes in his book that, "For all I know, my life is, so far, more pleasurable than Emily Dickinson's was, but less meaningful than Albert Einstein's."[15] I understand that here he is talking about his version of the objective interpretation of meaning in life. If he were talking about "the heart of meaning in life" in my sense, what he is talking about would be total nonsense.

Second, it is impossible to compare someone's "meaning in life" with another's "meaning in life" at the level of "the heart of meaning in life." I cannot talk about "the heart of meaning in life" in the life of others, hence, it is logically impossible to compare them. It is logically impossible for me to compare Metz's "meaning in life" with Einstein's "meaning in life" at the level of "the heart of meaning in life." It is also logically impossible for me to compare Mandela or Mother Teresa's "meaning in life" with that of an ordinary, mediocre person at that level.

Third, it is impossible to compare "meaning in life" in my actual life with "meaning in life" in my counterfactual life at the level of "the heart of meaning in life." The reason for this was explained earlier. This may be one of the important points that distinguishes my theory from other subjectivist ones.

The above discussion shows that "the heart of meaning in life" in my life cannot be compared with anything at all. This means that it is impossible to say that meaning in my life is greater or lesser than meaning in some other life when we are talking about "the heart of meaning in life." It transcends all comparisons.

This means that it is completely wrong for me to answer the question, "Alas, does my life like this have any meaning at all?" in a form such as "my life has a greater meaning than such and such" or "my life has a lesser meaning than such and such." The only possible answer will be either "my life has meaning" or "my life does not have meaning." The answer ought to be one of two values, a binary yes-or-no, black-or-white, and there is no ambiguous gray zone between the above two answers. This may sound counter-intuitive, but if any comparisons are to be prohibited at the level of "the heart of meaning in life," this should be the only conclusion to this matter. It exists, or it does not exist. There is no third answer between them. What is questioned here is not the

[15] Metz, p.63.

question of comparison or degree, but the question of existence. We are now in the realm of ontology.

Of course, it sometimes happens to me that I cannot provide this kind of yes-or-no answer to the question of "the heart of meaning in life," but this is not a big problem. What I argue here is that if I can actually answer the question, my answer will have to take the yes-or-no style. An interesting conclusion derived from this is that if I feel that my life has even just a bit meaning, then it means my life has complete, fullest meaning at the level of "the heart of meaning in life." If I am thinking a bit like that, fullest meaning has already been endowed to me. It is only when I think that my life does not have any meaning at all that I am allowed to say that my life does not have meaning. It seems to me that there is an interesting asymmetry between the existence and non-existence of meaning in life at the level of "the heart of meaning in life."

You may think that I am comparing "existence of meaning" and "non-existence of meaning" whilst I am arguing that meaning in life cannot be compared, and because this is an apparent contradiction, my reasoning is totally wrong. I do not necessarily think so. This is closely connected with the discussion of anti-natalism. For example, I can say that I exist now, and this makes sense, but when I say this I do not necessarily compare my existence with my non-existence. It is very hard, or almost impossible, to imagine what it really means that I do not exist now. Of course I can "think" about a possible world in which I do not exist whilst other things do exist, however, it is impossible to "imagine" what that possible world looks like in a strict sense because in that possible world the subject, this *I*, who can perceive that possible world from the inside, does not exist at all. In order to compare two possible worlds I must be able to imagine what they look like; therefore, it is impossible to compare the world in which I exist with the possible world in which I do not exist.[16] We have to completely distinguish imagining from thinking.

If this reasoning is correct, then the same thing can hold true in the case of meaning in life. When I talk about the existence of meaning in life, I do not compare it with the non-existence of meaning in life. No comparison is needed in talking about meaning in life at the level of "the heart of meaning in life." I understand that this discussion requires a more sophisticated and detailed analysis to be undertaken elsewhere.

[16] This is one of the main reasons why David Benatar's argument is considered to be wrong. See my forthcoming paper.

It seems to me that to answer "yes" to the question of "the heart of meaning in life" is to give affirmation to the whole process of my life up until the present. This suggests that "the heart of meaning in life" can be talked about for one's whole life up until the present, not for one's part life in the past.[17] This should further lead to "birth affirmation," saying yes to the fact that I have been born into this world. In contrast, to answer "no" to the question is to negate the whole process of my life and this will lead to "birth negation," saying no to the fact that I have been born, that is to say, "better never to have been." Here the philosophy of meaning in life gets connected with the philosophy of birth affirmation, which I have been inquiring into in recent years.[18]

In the previous section I argued that the life of Gelsomina can have a great meaning despite the fact that her life was actually one without any social or narrative value, and, in some cases, the life of a person can have grave and utmost meaning even if it is made up of a repeated routine of toenail trimming or bad breath preventing. Metz criticizes this way of thinking. Remember Metz's words: "[T]heir lives would not have been notably important had they striven to ensure that everyone's toenails were regularly trimmed or that no one suffered from bad breath, even if these conditions were universally desired (or needed!)." Here let us think deeply about the above case from the viewpoint of "the heart of meaning in life."

First, imagine the life of mine that is made up of a repeated routine of toenail trimming or bad breath preventing. You may think that such a life does not have any meaning at all. Nevertheless, this is not my actual life. This is my counterfactual life. Hence, I can never make a judgment on this kind of counterfactual life of mine at the level of "the heart of meaning in life."

Second, imagine the life of a third person that is made up of a repeated routine of toenail trimming or bad breath preventing. As we discussed earlier, it is impossible to talk about other people's meaning in life at the level of "the heart of meaning in life." The situation is the same as in the first case. I have to say Metz's words above appear to be totally senseless from our viewpoint.

Third, imagine a case in which a person whose life is made up of a repeated routine of toenail trimming or bad breath preventing says that "my life has a significant meaning at the level of 'the heart of meaning in life'." What should

[17] I am going to discuss this topic, by referring to Chapter Three of Metz's book, in my forthcoming paper.
[18] For example, see Morioka (2011).

we think of this person's words? I believe that all we have to do is to accept the words as they are and never say that they are right or wrong. We should refrain from saying that such a life has lesser meaning than Mandela or Mother Teresa, or that such a life does not have much meaning at all. The same thing can be said about a person who is no more than just alive and whose life is nothing more than that.

There remains a question on which we have to make a deliberate consideration. That is the question of whether the life of those who deeply injure others should also be considered, in some cases, to have meaning at the level of "the heart of meaning in life." Let us consider the life of Hitler as an extreme example. First, it is possible to imagine a case in which my life is just the same as Hitler's, but this is the case of my counterfactual life and my actual life is completely different from it, hence, I cannot talk about meaning in this hypothetical case at the level of "the heart of meaning in life."

Second, then, what about my actual life? I have to say that in my actual life I have injured and afflicted many people, and even now I might be letting someone suffer from what I am doing to him/her. In such a life of mine, can I say that my life has meaning at the level of "the heart of meaning in life" in spite of the above fact? It is extremely difficult to draw a definite conclusion for this case, but I believe that I am able to answer yes to this question. This is made possible only when I sincerely review the injury and suffering I have done to others, and only when I think deeply about how I am going to rework my relationship with them, and only when I think deeply about how I am going to make relationships with others whom I encounter in the future.

Third, what if someone like Hitler says that his life is full of meaning at the level of "the heart of meaning in life"? He would say that what he has done to people has significant meaning because he has successfully flourished in a way of life which no one other than him can ever accomplish in human history, and hence, even if what he has done to people has been nothing but a series of grave injuries and suffering, his life should be considered to have significant meaning at the level of "the heart of meaning in life." Many people would feel disgusted and nauseated hearing his words, and, emotionally speaking, I too feel like giving him a slap on the cheek. However, interestingly, if he is talking about his own "heart of meaning in life, there are no mistakes in the use of the words "meaning in life" in his argument. Hence, no matter how hard it is for us to accept his words, all we have to do is to accept them as they are, and we have to

refrain from affirming or negating his argument on meaning in life. If we criticize him and say, “your life has no meaning at all,” these words should be considered totally wrong as long as they are said about “the heart of meaning in life.” We have to keep in mind that here lies the true uniqueness of the concept of “the heart of meaning in life.”

Following that, we have to criticize him and argue that his whole life is *ethically* wrong and is never *ethically* justified. We have to say to him that a life of afflicting a great number of people should be ethically negated and should never again happen in this world. Although “the heart of meaning in life” and “goodness or evilness of life” are interconnected, the level of “meaning” and the level of “goodness/badness” should be clearly separated from each other in their ontological status. With regard to others’ lives, we cannot make a judgment on the former, but we can do it on the latter.

Then, if there is a recreational drug user/addict whose life has never been improved, and he has never tried to improve the fundamental conditions in our society, but is fully satisfied with his life from the bottom of his heart, can we say that his life has meaning? From a common sense view, we would say that such a life does not have much meaning, but strictly speaking, if he himself believes that his life is full of meaning at the level of “the heart of meaning in life,” we cannot affirm or negate his words and all we have to do is just accept his opinion about his meaning in life as it is stated. Of course I will never recommend such a life to others and I will argue that one’s life free from such drug addiction would be by far the better life. Nevertheless, at the level of “the heart of meaning in life,” I dare say that we ought to refrain from judging the meaning in life of others from the outside and just accept their words as they are.

Let us go back to Gelsomina’s case. We pointed out that whilst most of us would find meaning in Gelsomina’s life, Metz’s fundamentality theory cannot find so much meaning in her life because she did not try to orient her rationality towards fundamental conditions of human existence.

Then, what does the theory of “the heart of meaning in life” say about Gelsomina’s life? The answer is already clear. At the level of “the heart of meaning in life,” we cannot talk about the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of Gelsomina’s life, nor can we compare it with that of another person’s life. What Gelsomina did was just to live her “miserable” life honestly and sincerely. The meaning of Gelsomina’s life transcends all of us at the level of its heart.

In this paper I have demonstrated that there exists “the heart of meaning in

life," a layer that cannot be compared with anything, in the layers of the question of meaning in life. I believe that this layer constitutes the very central content of meaning in life because the question of meaning in life becomes a most pure and painful one, not when it is posed in an objective form, but when it is posed and directed toward your own actual, irreplaceable life.

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