



Self-Interest

The Search for Meaning Can't Be Navigated with GPS

A lot has changed since the first person with the mental capacity to do so looked up into the night sky and wondered, *Why am I?*

In the interim between then and now, the value of the question has shifted from existential to experiential. At the time, survival was the paramount concern, so the base answer—to survive long enough to make little early humans—was all that mattered. Indeed, a solid argument can be made that the real and only “meaning” of life is to live long enough to procreate, because that continues the species, which is the rock-bottom purpose of all living things. You are here because all of your ancestors were smart enough, fast enough, good-looking enough, and they survived long enough, to procreate.

When we ask what the meaning of life is, I don't think any of us are searching for or are satisfied with the flat answer “to continue the species.” We're searching for what it's all about, what we can do while we're here, how we can

make an impact, or maybe how we can not only continue the species but advance it. We're looking for something more, for the experiential answer.

If life is to be fulfilling, the meaning of life must be fulfilling.

The answers we receive from those who are supposed to know are, at best, momentary misdirection. How long will a new phone feed your hunger to do more with your life? Do you really think an extra bedroom you can use as an office will make it all okay? Will an extra \$10,000 spent on your wedding make your subsequent marriage \$10,000 stronger? How long will you accept the hope of life after death as a substitute for life now? How long will your parents influence how you live your life? Will you always live in fear? How long will it take for you to realize the best moments of your life happened while you were out there challenging yourself, not while you were sitting in front of the television watching actors live imaginary lives? Doesn't the fact we're all working for vacations and weekends indicate there is something fundamentally wrong with how and why we work?

The search for meaning has moved beyond the biological to, for most, the spiritual or scientific. But spirituality is no more than a socially accepted hallucinogen, and science may not be capable of—and hasn't yet bothered with—defining meaning that resonates. Though many would say the answers lie somewhere between science and spirituality, I think that's a cop-out assertion that sounds good but can't withstand the most surface examination. You've tried them both. So have I. If either did the trick, I wouldn't be writing this book, and you wouldn't be reading it.

Regardless of what side you're on, to figure it all out, you must turn your greatest asset—your mind—inward to answer the questions of existence and meaning.

For the purposes of this book, the “meaning” of life will be what is most important to *you* about yourself and the world at large. Meaning is what you think and value about life based upon your Moral Code, Values Code, and Ideals Code—all of which you'll develop as you move through this book—combined with your reason, experience, and passion.

To discover “Why am I?” first you have to shrug off the story discussed earlier and begin to ignore external influences. You have to ask yourself questions that are usually considered negative, questions we're erroneously told are unproductive. Speaking from personal experience, so long as I continued to ask positive questions, altering “What am I doing wrong?” to “How can I do this better?” I was unable to get to the nut of my problems. The hard, simple, liberating truth is that *the problem is always you*, and *the solution is always you*.

You will never find fulfillment by continuing to do what you're doing. If you are unfulfilled, if life has no meaning to you, if you're feeling numb or desperate or frustrated, quit making excuses and accept that you're doing it wrong. Ignore the charlatans and the “top ten” lists. A diet won't work. A hobby won't make it all go away. Burying yourself in work will only push you further from the solution.

What's necessary is an examination of your thoughts, beliefs, values, and ideals. Putting yourself under a microscope is the clearest path to finding meaning deep enough and personal enough to fuel your life.

What will you do with it once you've determined the meaning of your life? We're rational beings, but we make gut decisions, decisions we'll never control. How do we solve that hurdle? Are we doomed to peel away the onion with our intellect before helplessly watching our dreams dissolve in tears when our nature kicks in?

It doesn't have to be that way. You *can* put yourself in a place where your gut decisions will be made within the framework of the unique meaning and purpose of your life. A rudder won't do you much good on land in a car but can make the difference between being adrift and on course on the ocean.

That's part of our strategy. Through the right questions, you'll build your unique framework of meaning and purpose within which to live your life, so the unconscious, gut decisions you make will flow from conscious decisions, informing the actions you take and keeping your every step on a fulfilling path.

But before we begin building, we have to tear down what's there by exposing the external forces and influences that have subtly and not-so-subtly informed, guided, and/or forced every decision you've made since the day you were born.