

Remember the Good Ole Days.....Finding Meaning in Human Life 2023

Thomas A. Burns PhD.

Klamath Falls, Oregon

Remember the Good Ole Days

Remember the Good Ole Days

When Earth was the center of the Universe.

Remember the Good Ole Days

When Humans were God's pinnacle Creation.

Remember the Good Ole Days

When Almighty God was concerned with the details of the life of every individual human being.

Remember the Good Ole Days

When, at the end of life – if you believed in God as the creator of everything and in the divinity of his anointed assistants, and if you abided during your life by God's Commandments [or Confessed your "sins" in your last breath] - God would judge you worthy, invite you into Heaven and you would enjoy Everlasting Life with all the other "Approved" Beings.

Or

Remember the Good Ole Days

When, at the end of life – if you behaved approvingly during your life – you could be reincarnated as an "Improved" Being on your way to an eventual state of Everlasting Enlightenment shared with all of your other enlightened ancestor Beings.

What Happened to the Good Ole Days??

Science Revealed

Earth is Not the center of the Universe,
Earth Is Not the center of Anything,
Earth Is so minimal it is nearly impossible to locate in the vast Cosmos.

Science Revealed

On a planet that is insignificant even in its own galaxy, humans amount to next to nothing.
Humans are merely one late species on Earth among all other complex species, all of which go extinct eventually, existing for but an instant in a vast time period, leaving only a very few of their fossilized bones as remains to "Prove" they ever existed as a species, much less as individuals.

Science Revealed

There was no sign of God in this vast Cosmos,
No sign of Heaven or Hell anywhere,
No need to attribute any part of the Cosmos to any kind of supernatural agent,
No basis for contending that a God has anything to do with Reality or with the lives of humans in this Reality.

Post Science – What Has Happened to Meaning In Life for Humans?

Option #1 - Recommit to the Religious Perspective

Accept the direction of the established religious authorities,
Contend that the pre-science worldview of religious belief remains accurate,
Ignore the findings of science, or deny the truth of the scientific facts, or claim science is the work of Satan, all while enjoying the standard of living benefits provided by the technology motivated by science,
Continue to accept on faith the basic tenants of religious belief in God and the moral and end of life proclamations of the associated pantheon of religious notables [prophets, saints, gurus, ayatollahs, saviors],
Enjoy the support of a community of like-minded believers.

Option #2 - Nihilism

Humans are so insignificant in the totality of Reality that there is no ultimate Meaning in their lives as either a species or as individuals,
Humans just exist as one organic form of life until they eventually go extinct,
The only possible goal for humanity is to continue to compete in the meaningless, ongoing struggle for survival of the species.

Option #3 - Existentialism

Accept the main findings of science, but disregard the dire implications for the value of human life in science's Big Cosmic Picture,
Focus exclusively on the role of humans in the context where they live – Earth,
Meaning in the life of individuals and their societies is a function of the extent to which they contribute to sustaining the species and conditions on Earth that favor their continued survival,
Cooperation at all scales is essential in pursuing this goal,
Allow for the possible colonization of other planets by humans in the solar system and beyond – given the potential option of genetic engineering.

Option #4 - Spiritualism

Humans have the intuitive capability to extend their experience of self to any scale – micro to macro,

Exploring this capability, humans can experience themselves as participating in the whole of Reality – whatever the scale,
Humans can find a sense of greater meaning in their lives by experiencing themselves in this larger, more inclusive frame while at the same time they cooperate in a manner to contribute to sustaining the species and their surrounding ecology wherever they exist.

Conclusion

Those humans that respect the discoveries of science face the fact that humans are much less significant in Reality than they believed themselves to be in the “Good Ole Days.” On the other hand, they are less dependent upon the agency and evaluation of a supernatural entity – God, and more responsible for the behavior of both themselves and the societies they create. It is a serious question whether humans can manage this increased responsibility in the environment of a narrower domain for assessing meaning in life.

Nihilism reduces meaning in life to successful competition for survival. Existentialism and Spiritualism focus attention on the importance of cooperation at all scales in determining meaning in life. Spiritualism looks to the experience of unification at all scales of reality to offer strong support to this cooperative orientation. In this context, the weaker our complex societies are socially and ecologically, 1) the greater the negative impact is to how meaningful our lives are at that important scale and 2) the more we are forced to retreat to lesser scales (family and community) to assert meaning in our lives.

What will it be?? 1) Return to the religious perspective and depend on God’s human interpreters to determine what defines a meaningful life, 2) Make life all about continuing to compete for survival in a meaningless existence, 3) Celebrate cooperation and responsibility at all scales as the keys to successful societies and positive meaning in life, or 4) Support #3 with an expanded sense of self identity connecting humans to all scales of reality.

Meaning and where we find it in life depends on what option we select and pursue. And as we learn more about our reality, Meaning is always up for grabs. Imagine the extent of the changes that may occur in our notion of Meaning when we know the nature and workings of dark energy and dark matter, which together our best theoretical scientists now believe constitute about 95% of Reality. It seems that the more we know, the more we discover we do not know! Our options for finding meaning in life evolve, and we must always be prepared for changes – even major changes. Or, we can always reject further knowledge, pretend we have the answers, and adopt the contention that “ignorance is bliss.”