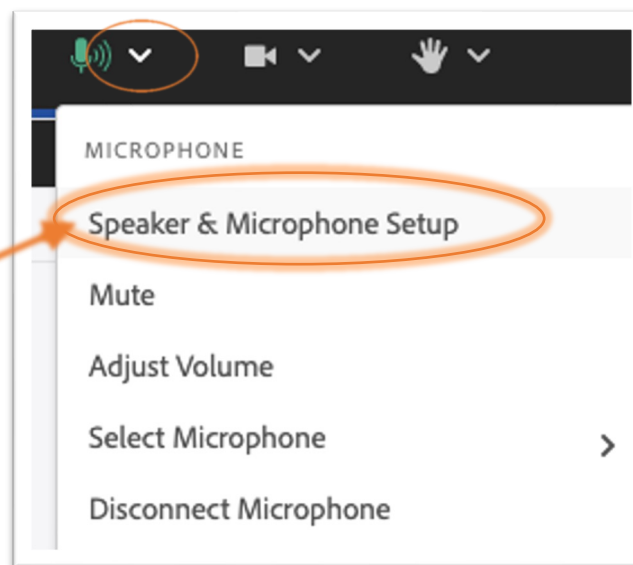


Tutorial 4: The Value of Life

- Have you made sure that your headset is switched on?
- Have you turned on the microphone in the room controls?
- Have you tested your microphone?
- Have you muted the microphone?
- Have you turned on the sound?



The Open
University

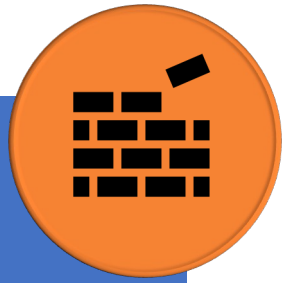
	Microphone		Sound		Raise Hand
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A333 22J Tutorial 4

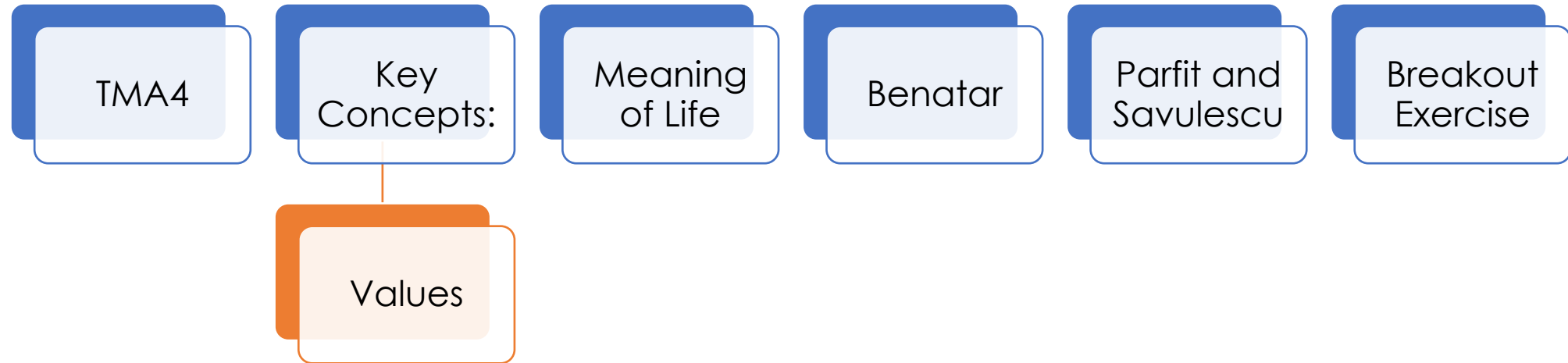
Key Concepts in The Value of Life

Objectives

- To discuss TMA4
- To clarify some key concepts, problems and questions related to starting a life.
- To consider what we might be thinking about when asking the question, “Does life have meaning”
- To think through how to break down an argument and use that break-down to attack it (Benatar)



Overview of Tutorial



TMA 4

Part 1 (80%)

- Write an essay of no more than **2000 words** in answer to the following question:
 - Is life meaningful?

Part 2 (20%)

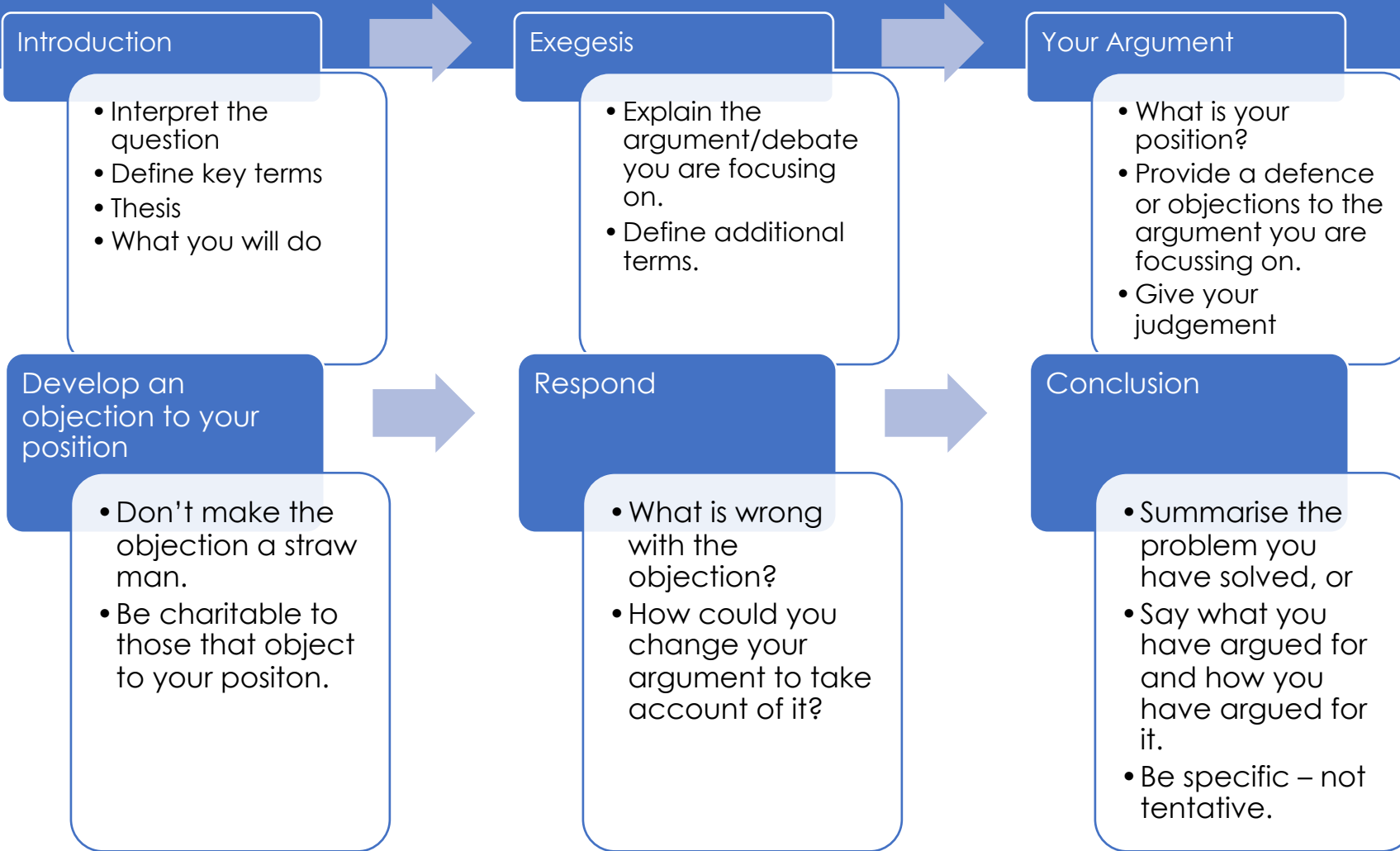
- In no more than **500 words**, write an annotated inventory of module materials that might be used in constructing an answer to **one** of the two extended essay (EMA) questions. Your inventory should include some reference to independent study materials.
- In no more than **250 words**, a brief account of how you might build on your experience of writing assignments on A333 (including your tutor's feedback) when planning and/or writing your extended essay.

TMA 4.1 Guidance

- *Easiest way to answer: "yes" or "no"*
- *Provide your interpretation of the question.*
 - *Define key terms – "life", "meaning"*
- *There is a lot of study material available – be selective.*
- *You might provide a critical discussion of two views.*
 - *Build a case for your thesis by explaining what is right or wrong with them.*
 - *Make sure the views you discuss give answers to the question as you interpret it.*
- **Stronger answers will also explain and respond to possible counterarguments.**



A simple plan



Relevant Study Material

Book 4, Chapter 4 'Does life have meaning?'

Book 4, Reading 4 'Wolf on meaning in life and why it matters'

Book 4, Reading 5: 'Cottingham on religion and the meaning of life'

The audio recordings: 'The meaning of life (Part 1)' and 'The meaning of life (Part 2)'

The independent study associated with Book 4, Chapter 4 (10!!!)

The **optional further material** for Book 4, Chapter 4.

TMA 4.2

Guidance: Inventory



- Your EMA question options:
 - Is killing an innocent person always wrong?
 - Critically assess claim (P).
 - (P) Clarifying what we mean by 'value' helps us to tackle and solve philosophical problems.
- You will need to NARROW DOWN the question to a particular topic.
- You need to think about the options for your approach.
- Review the materials so far.
- Make notes of relevant material.
- You are expected to use only material that you have already studied, up to Week 22 but can look ahead.
- Say which question you will investigate and how you will approach the question.
- Create an annotated bibliography of material, with a short note about each item's relevance. (7-8 items)
- **500 Words.**



TMA 4.2

Guidance: Reflections

- How might you build on your experience of writing the TMAs so far for the EMA.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses.
- Draw from your own experiences.
- Reference your Tutor's feedback.
- What skills will you need to write the TMA.
- **250 words** – so be selective.

What are you going to do differently?

General
“Do-
Differentlys
”
From TMA3

1. **Signposting.**
2. **Tell me your answer.**
3. Set out the problem and what is at stake.
4. Set out arguments clearly.
5. Putting things in your own words.
6. **Define your terms.**
7. Who is your reader?

Key Concepts

Values

Values 1 (Book 3)

Instrumental

**Pursued for the sake
of something else.**

Final

**Pursued for their own
sake.**

Values 2: (Book 4)

Instrumental	Personal	Intrinsic
<p>Cigarette Lighters Typewriters</p>	<p>Friends Child's first drawings A good single malt Football</p>	<p>The Mona Lisa The last surviving Foetus</p>



Values 2: (Book 4)

	Instrumental	Personal	Intrinsic
Virtue			
Wellbeing			
Life			
Pleasure			
Money			

Is it good to be born?

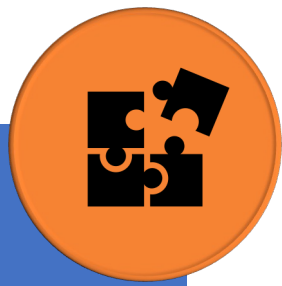
Procreative asymmetry: starting a wretched life is forbidden, but starting a good life is permitted but not required.

Benatar: “Coming into existence is always a net harm so it is always wrong to procreate”

Breaking down Benatar's argument that it is better to never be born.

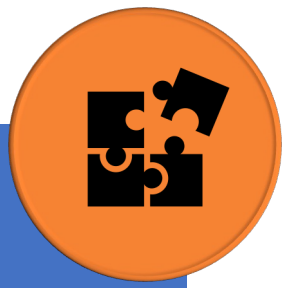
Benatar: Reading

Breaking down Benatar's argument that it is better to never be born.



Breakout: Key Claims in Argument

- Read through *Reading 3: Benatar on why it is better never to come into existence* (pp. 180-182)
- Identify the key claims in the argument that lead to his conclusion that it is better never to come into existence.
- Note down the key claims in the notes pod.



Key Claims in Argument

1: There is a fundamental asymmetry between harms and benefits in terms of when they are present and absent

2: Coming into existence is always a net harm

3: It is always wrong to procreate



Where do we attack?

*****There is no point starting off by attacking the conclusion.**

Assumption

1: There is a fundamental asymmetry between harms and benefits in terms of when they are present and absent

2: Coming into existence is always a net harm

3: It is always wrong to procreate

Where do we attack?

*****There is no point starting off by attacking the conclusion.**

Assumption

1: There is a fundamental asymmetry between harms and benefits in terms of when they are present and absent

2: Coming into existence is always a net harm

3: It is always wrong to procreate

?

?

?

?



Objecting to a tacit assumption?

The assumptions of the argument appear to be hedonistic...

Pleasure = Good; Pain = Bad

If pleasure and pain are not the criteria for whether a life is worth living, then this argument is not persuasive.

This is less of an objection, perhaps, than a question about who Benatar's argument might appeal to : *will the premise appeal to someone who does not share Benatar's hedonistic assumption?*

I will come back to this point.

Attacking 1....



Benatar justifies claim 1 by presenting us with 4 claims demonstrating the asymmetry.

- 1) the presence of pain is bad
- 2) the presence of pleasure is good.

However, such a symmetrical evaluation does not apply to the absence of pain and pleasure, for:

- 3) the absence of pain is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone,
- 4) the absence of pleasure is not bad unless there is somebody for whom this absence is a deprivation

“My view about the asymmetry between (3) and (4) is widely shared.”



Benatar: The asymmetry explains our intuitions

Benatar asks us to accept the asymmetry because the qualifications made map the intuitions we have:

There is a strong duty to avoid bringing into existence people who will lead miserable lives,

No corresponding duty to bring into existence people who will lead happy lives

This isn't a foolproof move... (this sort of argument has value, but is not overriding).

- We could reject the asymmetry,
 - 1) Find a different way of explaining the intuitions, or
 - 2) Bite the bullet, and admit our intuitions are wrong.



Argument for 1

Assumption

1.Bad	3.Good
2.Good	4. Not Bad

1: There is a fundamental asymmetry between harms and benefits in terms of their presence and absence

3&4 are qualified claims about value



Without the qualifications, I intuitively don't agree:

3) The absence of pain is good.

4) The absence of pleasure is not bad.

A life without *any* pain whatsoever would be GOOD.

But surely a life without *any* pleasure *would be* BAD.

But.....

What work are the qualifications doing

3) Absence of of pain = good - **even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone.**

= **Intrinsic good** : adds to the overall good in the world.

4) Absence of pleasure = not bad **unless there is somebody** for whom this absence is a deprivation.

= **Not a Personal bad???**

3 & 4 – Two asymmetries...

X exists	X does not exist
Pain presence Bad	Pain absence Good
Pleasure presence Good	Pleasure absence Not Bad

X exists	X does not exist
Pain presence <i>Intrinsic Bad Personally Bad</i>	Pain absence <i>Intrinsic Good</i>
Pleasure presence <i>Intrinsic Good Personal Good</i>	Pleasure absence <i>Not Personally Bad</i>

Benatar is slipping between different senses of value: what if we don't?

Personal Value

X exists	X does not exist
Pain presence Bad	Pain absence Not Good
Pleasure presence Good	Pleasure absence Not Bad

Intrinsic Value

X exists	X does not exist
Pain presence Bad	Pain absence Good
Pleasure presence Good	Pleasure absence Bad

Even if we think that (1) is true, does (2) follow?

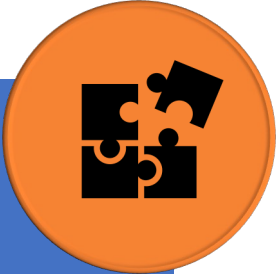
“This asymmetry entails that coming into existence is always a net harm”

Benatar

X exists	X does not exist
Pain presence - 1	Pain absence + 1?
Pleasure presence + 1	Pleasure absence 0
0	+ 1

Imogen

X exists	X does not exist
Pain presence - 2	Pain absence + 1?
Pleasure presence + 6	Pleasure absence 0
+ 4	+1



Summary of Objections



1: There is a fundamental asymmetry between harms and benefits in terms of when they are present and absent

2: Coming into existence is always a net harm

3: It is always wrong to procreate

Question hedonist assumptions

Reject asymmetry

2 doesn't follow from 1

3 doesn't follow from two. I didn't try to do this, but people have!

Anticipating a response....

For top marks. We have to think about ways in which Benatar might come back at us and defend himself against our objections.

Hedonism Assumption.....

ME: "Benatar's argument will only appeal to hedonists, if our criterion for what makes life worth living is not the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain then this argument won't persuade us."

B: The argument does speak of the presence of pleasure as a good and the presence of pain as bad etc. However, you could stick any preferred value in, and the asymmetry argument would work.

ME: Could you demonstrate that. That's your job....

ME: *Establish that if I used a different criterion the argument would not work.....*

**think* I could do this with Aristotelian Virtue.*

Procreative Beneficence: Parfit and Savulescu

“The principle of selecting the best child of the possible children one could have.”

Parfit:
“If you wait
you will
give your
child a
better life”



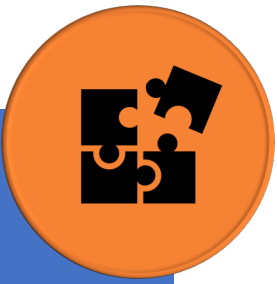
- 1) If S does not have child (A) now and waits 7 years to have child(B) she will give B a better life.
 - The child (A) she would have had now will never exist.
 - Both (A) and (B) would have lives worth living.
 - (B) will have the life that is overall better.
- 2) S ought to wait and have child (B)



Parfit: The Same Number Quality Claim

- Q: If in either of two possible outcomes the same number of people would ever live, it would be worse if those who live are worse off, or have a lower quality of life, than those who would have lived.

Key Claims



1:Q

2: Waiting and having Child B is the better of the 2 outcomes

3: We ought to bring about the better outcome.

4: S ought to have the Child B

Parfit Anticipates Objection

The implications are unpalatable:

If we accept the conclusions, we are saying (at some point after child A is born), It would be better if child A had never existed.

“We may shrink from claiming, of this girl’s actual child, that it would have been better if he had never existed.”

Parfit's Response to the anticipated objection.

...is to bite the bullet – and to ask his readers to do as well.

“I believe that, if I was the actual child of this girl, I could accept..[that it would have been better for her actual child not to have been me/for me not to have existed].

“[This] does not imply that my existence is bad, or intrinsically morally undesirable. The claim is merely that since a child born later would probably have had a better life than mine, it would have been better if my mother had waited, and had a child later. “

Savulescu:



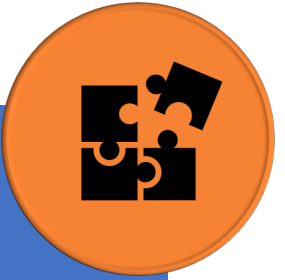
- Procreative Beneficence:
- Selection for non-disease genes which significantly impact on well-being is morally required.
 - Parent's should select the best child.



Things to think about:



- You may find this paper distasteful.
 - I personally find it a difficult read. However, that makes me only want to break it down and analyse it more and reflect on how I can create a coherent position against it.
- What is the moral force of should in the claim that parent's should select the best child?
- Does Savulescu's argument seamlessly follow on from Parfit's? If you agree with Parfit, are you committed to agreeing with Savulescu.
- Are the stakes different? (Foetus, embryo, **gamete**) – does that matter?
- If you can mount a strong objection against Parfit, what does that mean for Savulescu.
- What are the key terms you need to clearly define when analysing Savulescu's argument?



Ch 4: Does Life Have Meaning?

What do we mean by meaning?



- Your answer to your essay question, “Is life meaningful?” is going to depend on what you think that “meaning” means in this context.
- Typically “words...sentences.. have meaning” (p.135)
- Apparently this “represents an...attempt to take words altogether literally, and rein in how they can appropriately be used” (p.135).
- Nonetheless “meaning” is pretty vague.
- There are some other candidate meanings for “meaning” in this context, and we need to get clear on which ones we are going to be talking about.

MEANING?



What do we mean by meaning?

Is there a **point** to life?

Is there a **purpose** to life?

Does life have a value?

Does life have worth?

Does life have significance?

Is life absurd?

Are there meaningless lives?

Is existence pointless?

Is existence ridiculous?

Is it without significance or value?

More questions?

What sorts of lives have meaning?

What sorts of things give meaning to life?

Is that meaning subjective or objective?

Does a meaningful life have to be pleasant?

Does a life have to be successful to be meaningful?

If life has a value - is that an instrumental value?

If life has a value - is that a final value?

If life has a value - is that a personal/intrinsic value?



What meaningful ness isn't(?)

Metz, Thaddeus, "The Meaning of Life", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)

“Yet another relatively uncontroversial element of the concept of meaningfulness in respect of individual persons is that it is logically distinct from happiness or rightness (emphasized in Wolf 2010, 2016). First, to ask whether someone’s life is meaningful is not one and the same as asking whether her life is pleasant or she is subjectively well off. A life in an experience machine or virtual reality device would surely be a happy one, but very few take it to be a *prima facie* candidate for meaningfulness (Nozick 1974: 42–45). Indeed, a number would say that one’s life logically could become meaningful precisely by sacrificing one’s well-being, e.g., by helping others at the expense of one’s self-interest.” Metz

What will you mean by meaning/lif e? (A few steers)



“In this essay I will argue that life does indeed/does not have meaning, where meaning is understood as *****.”

“The term “life” also requires clarification. For the purposes of this essay I will take “life” to mean”

“When discussing the question of whether *** life/***lives has/have meaning, the term “meaning” can be understood in a number of different ways. I will be focussing on meaning understood as. This is because...”

“In addressing the question of whether life has meaning, understood as ****, I will be focussing on the arguments of.....”

“In this essay I will argue against X claim that life has meaning, where life is understood as *** and meaning as ***. However, the term meaning can be understood in a number of ways, and I will argue a more convincing account of “life” having “meaning” is suggested by, Y. Y understands “meaning” in this context as....”

Local vs Global Meaning

LOCAL MEANING

There is an “objective” list of things that make people’s lives meaningful?

Is the question of whether our lives have meaning in some sense “up to us” – how we feel about it?

What gives us a reason to act or go on?

(Meaning **in** life)

GLOBAL MEANING

A more abstract perspective:
Is life necessarily meaningless?
God gives life meaning..

Humans evolved by chance – we are just vehicles for the propagation of our genes?
We’ll all be dead in 100 years...

The human race won’t exist in 1,000,000 years.

In the grand scheme of the universe, we are insignificant...

(Meaning **of** life)

Susan Wolf: Local Meaning – loving lovable things...

“According to the conception of meaningfulness I wish to propose, meaning arises from loving objects worthy of love and engaging with them in a positive way. What is perhaps most distinctive about this conception of meaning, or about the category of value I have in mind, is that it involves subjective and objective elements, inextricably linked. ‘Love’ is at least partly subjective, involving attitudes and feelings. In insisting that the requisite object must be ‘worthy of love’, however, this conception of meaning invokes an objective standard: Not any object will do, nor is it guaranteed that the subject’s own assessment of worthiness is privileged. One might paraphrase this by saying that, according to my conception, meaning arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness, and one is able to do something good or positive about it. “(p.183)

What bearing does Death have on the meaning of life?

- *“ We’re all going to die!”*
- *If that’s true – how can life be meaningful?*
- *But would being immortal change that?*
- *Would immortality detract from the meaningfulness of life?*
- *(Cf. Williams (1973) “The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality” in your independent reading)*

Williams: Immortality is pointless



- Categorical desires: reasons to keep going, fundamental life goals around which one organises one's life activities,
- Contingent desires: ephemeral desires.
- Eventually you would run out of categorical desires.
- You would have no reason to go on - your life would lack a point and purpose.
- Or: You could generate new categorical desires, but they are not the ones you have now.
- Neither option is desirable, so immortality is not desirable.

Nagel and the Absurdity of Life



It is often remarked that nothing we do now will matter in a million years. But if that is true, then by the same token, nothing that will be the case in a million years matters now. In particular, it does not matter now that in a million years nothing we do now will matter. Moreover, even if what we did now were going to matter in a million years, how could that keep our present concerns from being absurd? If their mattering now is not enough to accomplish that, how would it help if they mattered a million years from now?

Whether what we do now will matter in a million years could make a crucial difference only if its mattering in a million years depended on its mattering, period. But then to deny that whatever happens now will matter in a million years is to beg the question against its mattering, period; for in that sense one cannot know that it will not matter in a million years whether (for example) someone now is happy or miserable, without knowing that it does not matter, period.

(Nagel, 1979, pp. 11–12 ; p.152 in Book)

If the universe
came about
by chance,
then
necessarily
there is no
point to my
life.....?



- If something is true of the whole (the universe)
- Does it follow that this is also true of its parts?

Division and composition

There are two fallacies here, which are in obvious ways related. Here is an example of the **fallacy of division**, derived from the Greek philosopher Anaxagoras:

- Water is wet, so the parts of water – its atoms – are wet.

And here is an example of its opposite, the **fallacy of composition**, from a more famous Greek philosopher, Aristotle:

- The parts of a man – eyes, hands, lungs, kidneys – each have a function, so man as a whole has a function.

Cottingham on Religious *praxis* and meaning

Ticking the boxes of an objective list only goes so far.

We get disappointed when we don't tick the boxes.

Religion offers hope..

The practices of religion give meaning to those who adopt them.

Adopting religious practices will eventually train you into a religious mindset.

Philosophers/Types of Meaning



Philosopher	Meaning	Lives
Wolf	Local/worthwhile	Individual
Williams	Local/purpose/point	Immortal/Individual
Cottingham	It's complicated..	It's complicated..
Nagel	Global (in) Significance	Human Life/But all life really

Breakout Exercise 2



- What were the most significant pieces of feedback you have received? How do you intend to take account of that feedback in future assignments?

Review

