

AN INVESTIGATION OF CONDITIONS FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE

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ABSTRACT According to purpose theory (PT), God's existence, telic creation of human beings, and human libertarian free will are necessary conditions for human life to be objectively meaningful. In this paper, I raise and respond to four objections to PT: two concerning insufficiencies and two regarding ambiguities in the theory. I conclude that PT-advocates have relatively effective replies to the second insufficiency objection and to both ambiguity objections, but that PT is vulnerable to the first insufficiency objection.

KEYWORDS: purpose, meaning, value, certainty, absurdity

*Strange to know nothing, never to be sure
Of what is true or right or real, ...*

*And yet spend all our life on imprecisions,
That when we start to die
Have no idea why.*

—Philip Larkin, *Ignorance*

Introduction

According to purpose theory (PT), God's existence, telic creation of human beings, and human libertarian free will (LFW) are necessary conditions for human life to be objectively meaningful. In contrast to various naturalistic theories, Thaddeus Metz (2012, 2013), who coined 'purpose theory,' calls it a supernaturalist theory of the meaning of life. He also classifies PT as a God-centered theory, as opposed to

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soul-centered theories, which associate the meaning of life with having an immaterial and immortal soul. [This distinction seems somewhat blurry, since one might argue that PT is both a God-centered and a soul-centered theory insofar as having LFW is evidence for having an immaterial soul. Moreover, PT might benefit from postulating an afterlife (perhaps an immortal one), which I suggest in the “Objections and Replies” section.] In a previous article (Crozat 2018), I examined PT, raising and answering two objections that seem to reduce the theory to the absurdity that God is irrational. In this paper, I continue the investigation of PT. I raise and respond to four objections: two concerning insufficiencies and two regarding ambiguities in the theory. I start by addressing some key terms. I close by indicating that PT is vulnerable to the first insufficiency objection, though there are plausible answers to it.

Key Terms

Suppose that, as Joshua Seachris (2019) has argued, an objectively meaningful human life requires a triad of factors: intelligibility (I^{Meaning}), significance (S^{Meaning}), and purpose (P^{Meaning}). With respect to I^{M} , our lives must be coherent or intelligible from a transcendent perspective; a meaningful human existence requires connection to something greater than ourselves, some larger context which renders our existence understandable and consonant with that context. Without I^{M} , human life is incomprehensible in the sense of lacking a sense-giving ontological structure. S^{M} is axiological: our lives require objective significance. Human beings must have intrinsic value, and the fact that we exist both collectively and individually should matter in a non-subjective way. S^{M} is also construed as normative. Things that bear S^{M} ought to be valued, and thus human life is worthy of being valued. And P^{M} is telic: there must be a purpose to our existence, one which is consistent with our autonomous appropriation of it. According to Seachris (2019: 367), the link between the meaning of life and P^{M} ‘has always largely been taken for granted’ as central to what we seek when we inquire into the meaning of life. One might hold that this triad is necessary for human existence as such to be meaningful, and for each particular human life to have meaning. The former sense might be called *universal meaning* and the latter *particular meaning*.

Arguably, PT explains this triad of factors. Seachris (2019: 377) suggests so, though he does not use the term ‘purpose theory’: ‘God, transcendence, and religion give our lives and their parts a deeper traction within a “sacred and cosmic frame,” and allow for definitive resolution to the ills of this life. They provide a powerful fittingness between entrenched human longings and hopes and an ultimate ontological-normative architecture hospitable to them.’ On PT, the existence of God, God’s creation of human beings for a purpose (say, to flourish as images of God, to be mor-

ally and intellectually virtuous, etc.), and our possession of LFW – which we can use either freely to appropriate or to reject this purpose – are necessary for human life to be objectively meaningful. Many theists hold that God exists *a se* and thus that his value is self-contained. He is the source of human worth, yet needs no other source for his value. God's telic creation of us as rational beings in an ordered world gives our existence a purpose, provides us with a transcendent context that meets the need for intelligibility, and explains the intrinsic value of human life.

As I use the term in the Objections and Replies section below, by 'absurd,' roughly, I mean *incongruous*; absurdity is something like the absence of I^M . Thomas Nagel (1979: 13) roughly characterizes the term as follows: 'In ordinary life a situation is absurd when it includes a conspicuous discrepancy between pretension or aspiration and reality: someone gives a complicated speech in support of a motion that has already been passed; a notorious criminal is made president of a major philanthropic organization; you declare your love over the telephone to a recorded announcement; as you are being knighted, your pants fall down.' In this sense, an existentially significant state of affairs is absurd if it involves a fundamental belief that the state is meaningful or worthwhile although the belief might well be false because there is a gap between the subjective confidence with which one holds the belief and the evidence available to support it.

Here is another example of the gap. Suppose that Brown is stranded in the desert. He needs to drink water in the next 15 minutes or he will die. He finds what seems to be a source of water. He has reliable evidence that half of the water in the area is potable, while half is toxic. Drinking potable water would save him; toxic water would kill him. Yet he does not *know* if the water he has found is safe or toxic. This is an existentially significant state of affairs which encroaches on Brown's welfare. If he refrains from drinking, he will die. If he drinks, he might live or he might die. It seems practically rational to drink the water, since epistemically he would have a .5 probability of staying alive. And he has reason to hope that the water is safe. We can imagine Brown thinking to himself 'I don't know if this water is safe, but if I want to survive, I've gotta believe that it is safe.' Yet his choice to drink might be incorrect, since the water could be poisonous. There is a lacuna between the understandable degree of confidence he places in his belief and the evidence available to support it. This type of lacuna indicates an apparent problem with our epistemic condition, which I will address in the next section.

By 'epistemic certainty,' I mean the impossibility of being wrong given one's evidence. Here is a common analysis of epistemic certainty: if p is epistemically certain for S , then S cannot be wrong that p given S 's evidence for p . Epistemic certainty differs from psychological certainty, which is a matter of one's being convinced or confi-

dent that his belief is true. Psychological certainty is subjective; epistemic certainty is non-subjective. Several recent arguments support the claim that epistemic certainty is required for knowledge. For example, see Mizrani (2019) and Climenhaga (2021). In the next section, I investigate four objections to PT.

Objections and Replies to PT

Insufficiency Objection 1

Aristotle claimed in Book I of *Metaphysics* that by nature human beings desire to know. However, for many desired items of propositional knowledge, we do not know them with epistemic certainty. Regarding human meaning, there is a factor which seems absurd: in this life, we do not know with epistemic certainty that human existence is (universally and particularly) objectively meaningful; perhaps it is missing I^M , S^M , P^M , or some combination of these. Thus, for us, it is epistemically possible that human existence, our lives, and the world itself are meaningless. Maybe our predicament is as James Tartaglia (2016) argues: human life is meaningless precisely because there is no adequate account for an objective human purpose. Perhaps ontological naturalism is true, in which case, arguably, life has no objective meaning.

Notwithstanding our ignorance, for practical reasons we assume that the world and our place in it matter. We hold that human existence as such, and our own lives in particular, are meaningful and worth living to a degree compatible with the degree of seriousness we invest in them. And we invest much indeed. As Nagel (1979: 15) writes, we pursue our lives with energy, attention, and gravity; life is a ‘full-time occupation to which everyone devotes decades of intense concern.’ Granted, this might be nothing but subjective meaning. However, in daily affairs, we presuppose that human life is intrinsically valuable. One can see this by reading the daily news, which often highlights various kinds of protests concerning the way that humans are treated. Neil Gorsuch (2006: 158-59) underscores the presupposition: ‘We seek to protect and preserve life for life’s own sake in everything from our most fundamental laws of homicide to our road traffic regulations to our largest governmental programs for health and social security.’

Arguably, the fact that we presuppose objective human meaning and worth is *prima facie* support for the belief that life is objectively meaningful. For as Roderick Chisholm (1979: 15-16, 18) noted, we should be guided in philosophy by those propositions we all presuppose in our ordinary activity. We have a right to believe these propositions until there is a sufficient reason to reject them. However, despite

its practical rationality, the belief that life is meaningful is a defeasible position. It epistemically might be the case that life is objectively meaningless. Nevertheless, we adopt assumptions about life that we do not *know* are true. In this sense, our lives involve an existential leap or bluff. We are like the politician who assumes that he will win an election and acts accordingly, though he knows that he might lose, or like the poker player who pretends that he has a winning hand despite the likelihood of having a losing one.

In short, according to this objection, *there is a gap between the degree of justification supporting our assumptions about the meaning of human life and the strength with which we believe those assumptions*. This is a problem. The presence of this lacuna makes our epistemic condition absurd in the way that, say, an athlete's efforts would be absurd if he were to train rigorously for a competition which he only later finds was a farce. Were an evil alien of higher intelligence to observe our epistemic predicament, he might ridicule us and its absurdity. A benevolent alien might pity us for the same reason.

Insufficiency Objection 1 holds that PT is inadequate for objective meaning because it does not possess the resources to avoid the absurdity of human life with respect to our epistemic condition. We can construct the following argument to support this objection. Call it the Gap Argument (GA).

1. If there is an epistemic gap (as described in italics in the preceding paragraph), then our epistemic condition is absurd.
2. There is an epistemic gap.
3. Therefore, our epistemic condition is absurd.
4. If our epistemic condition is absurd, then a fundamental aspect of human existence is absurd.
5. Therefore, a fundamental aspect of human existence is absurd.

To defend (1), the objector might claim that were human life to possess the meaning-triad, it is rational to expect that we would be able to know beyond reasonable doubt that our existence is meaningful. We are by nature rational and meaning-seeking creatures, as David McPherson (2020) argues. But a world in which human life is objectively meaningful and we naturally seek to grasp reliably such meaning – yet never succeed in doing so – is a world in which an important aspect of I^M is missing.

In support of (2), one might argue that, in terms of the degree of justification needed for propositional knowledge, the bar for propositional knowledge is sufficiently high to rule out, at least in this life, knowledge that life is meaningful and knowledge that life is meaningless. On such matters, we are limited to reasonable beliefs at best and wishful thinking at worst. The evidence available to us underdeter-

mines a conclusive judgment on whether life is meaningful.

Regarding (4), since human beings by nature are rational meaning-seekers, and thus that which is essential to us includes faculties of reason and meaning-seeking, the fact that our epistemic condition is absurd indicates that something basic about our existence is also absurd. Now, given this support for GA, how might the defender of PT respond?

Response to Insufficiency Objection 1: To start, the Christian theist might be inclined to assert that human life is not absurd, despite the supposed plausibility of (1), (2), and (4). He might argue that, on the basis of special revelation, one is justified in holding that human life matters. Since the Second Person of the Trinity, an omniscient person, became incarnate to save us, we are objectively worth saving and thus not bereft of S^M . However, this response seems to leave (5) intact, since (5) is also about I^M .

Consequently, the advocate of PT should seek a more robust reason to deny (5). Here is one attempt. (1) and (2) do not specify the duration of the lacuna. Hence, its temporal scope is indeterminate. The gap might be transitory. Perhaps at some point, either in pre-mortem or in post-mortem life, we will be equipped to: (a) come to know with certainty that life is objectively significant, intelligible, and purposeful, both universally and particularly; and (b) appropriate this knowledge and act accordingly. Such factors would eliminate the absurdity. Without these opportunities, however, the gap seems permanent and the absurdity appears to hold. Therefore, assuming that it is unlikely for human beings to obtain pre-mortem knowledge about the meaning of life, it seems that PT-advocates should grant that PT requires a commitment to post-mortem insight concerning such knowledge.

On this response to the objection, (1) is true only if the gap is never closed or bridged. However, a closure or bridge would suggest the following modification of GA:

- 1*. If there is a temporary epistemic gap, then our epistemic condition is absurd.
- 2*. There is a temporary epistemic gap.
3. Therefore, our epistemic condition is absurd.
4. If our epistemic condition is absurd, then a fundamental aspect of human existence is absurd.
5. Therefore, a fundamental aspect of human existence is absurd.

Here, the defender of PT has reason to deny (1*) or (2*) or both. A temporary gap does not make our epistemic condition absurd because once the gap is closed, we will possess the knowledge requisite to ameliorate our undesirable epistemic condition,

and therefore eliminate the absurdity of our condition. Alternatively, the supporter of PT might argue for a lower bar concerning propositional knowledge, thus making pre-mortem knowledge of human meaning obtainable for human persons.

If (1) refers to a temporary gap (i.e., if (1*) is the relevant claim), the theist can deny (1*). And if (1) refers to a permanent gap, the supporter of PT can argue that the actual gap is merely temporary, and thus that (2*) is true, which enables a denial of (3). In short, it seems that GA equivocates on 'epistemic gap.' Here, the supporter of GA might respond that there is no equivocation, since 'epistemic gap' in GA consistently refers to a permanent gap, which would thus focus the dialectic on a discussion of whether the gap is permanent or temporary.

At this point, further objections to GA linger. Consider (i): knowledge with epistemic certainty is not needed for the topic at hand, since knowledge does not require epistemic certainty. In reply, the advocate of GA can note that there are plausible defenses of epistemic infallibilism, which is the view that knowledge requires such certainty. Climenhaga (2021) argues that infallibilism provides a superior explanation for several important epistemological claims as compared to versions of fallibilism. Infallibilism offers a better account for why there is a lack of knowledge in Gettier cases, why knowledge is more valuable than non-knowledge, why knowledge justifies rational action, and why knowledge permits one to stop inquiring into that which is known. Moreover, as Mizrahi (2019) notes, one can argue that the factivity of knowledge entails epistemic certainty, and since it is not controversial to suppose that knowledge is factive (i.e., knowledge that p entails that p is true), one can cite an uncontroversial reason to accept epistemic infallibilism. Given these and other arguments, epistemic infallibilism is a reasonable position.

Yet suppose *arguendo* that knowledge does not require epistemic certainty, at least not in all cases. It remains plausible for the supporter of GA to hold that the standard for knowledge is high enough to preclude the attainment of knowledge in this life concerning I^M and P^M . Or one might argue that the standard for what counts as knowledge varies relative to the epistemic circumstance. For instance, the epistemic contextualist might claim that for issues of lesser human significance (say, that there is a tree in the yard), the knowledge bar is lower but for topics of great existential import such as the meaning of life, the knowledge bar is set quite high. In a conversation about the tree in the yard, 'knowledge' picks out some relatively low degree of epistemic justification. But in discussions about the meaning of life, 'knowledge' refers to epistemic certainty, or something close to it.

The reply to (i) raises another objection to GA: (ii) reasonable belief about the meaning of life is enough to avoid the absurdity of the lacuna. An acceptable reply by the defender of GA is that perhaps reasonable belief alone is sufficient as an epistemic

makeshift useful in this life, but it is not enough to provide a permanent epistemic home; we cannot make do with mere justified belief forever. We cannot settle with forever seeing through a glass darkly. Eventually, we need to know with certainty. Otherwise, we will always live an existential gamble in which the pertinent evidence underdetermines our belief in life's meaning. This gamble would be unseemly for a rational agent concerning crucial existential issues.

In addition, one might object to GA that: (iii) knowledge with epistemic certainty on this issue is not possible, and thus it is not the case that we ought to possess it. In response, the defender of GA might grant that the attainment of epistemic certainty on this issue would require a significant change in our epistemic capacities, but that such a change is possible, especially on the assumption that God exists, has designed human life to understand and fulfill a divine purpose, and can enable us to discover this purpose. [One might notice here that the defender of GA is in a position to construct something of a divine hiddenness argument: if God exists, then probably he would not hide the meaning of life from us; but the meaning of life is (at least partially) hidden from us, both in terms of whether there is one and what it is if there is one; hence, probably there is no God. I cannot pursue this argument here, though the theist likely can provide plausible accounts for why the meaning of life is partly hidden from us.]

Lastly, one might object to GA that (iv): knowledge of life's meaning is self-evident. To respond, the supporter of GA might recall the distinctions between I^M , P^M , and S^M . Arguably, certain aspects of S^M are self-evidently knowable, such as that human beings possess intrinsic value. But it is hard to see how, in this life – short of knowledge-by-acquaintance accessible via a mystical experience which is not widely available to us – one could acquire self-evident knowledge of I^M and P^M . The burden of proof is on the defender of self-evident knowledge concerning these issues.

In sum, with respect to Insufficiency Objection 1, there is a set of plausible concerns that we lack knowledge of the objective meaning of life. This factor makes our epistemic predicament absurd, thereby constituting a serious objection to PT. The PT-advocate has various plausible responses to these concerns, although the objector to PT has rational replies to these responses. At this point, I conclude that PT is vulnerable to Insufficiency Objection 1, and I leave the reader to explore this aspect of the dialectic further. I now turn to another objection concerning insufficiency.

Insufficiency Objection 2

As noted in Insufficiency Objection 1, an afterlife seems necessary to close the epistemic gap. In an afterlife, humans might come to know with epistemic certainty

that life is meaningful and what that meaning is. But one might press that there are additional reasons for believing that meaning requires life after death. For instance, as William Lane Craig (2013: 162) has argued, if life ends in permanent death, then life is pointless. 'If life ends at the grave' he writes, 'then we have no ultimate purpose for living.' A similar point holds for the universe, he claims: 'If its destiny is a cold grave in the recesses of outer space, then there is no goal, no purpose, for the universe.' On Craig's view, immortality is required for human meaning. Since PT does not have an immortality condition, PT is an inadequate theory of meaning.

In response, one might say that PT addresses necessary but not collectively sufficient conditions for human meaning. PT can be expanded or incorporated into a more complete theory which includes an immortality condition and any other necessary condition. Doing so would not nullify the contribution of PT regarding some important conditions for life's meaning.

It should be noted here that this response seems to obligate the PT-advocate to defend the *plausibility* and the *value* of human immortality. I do not have the space to address the former point, though it has been treated elsewhere. However, I will discuss the latter point.

Bernard Williams (1973) argues that human immortality is objectively undesirable because it would be intolerably boring. Roughly, Williams' position is that human life is such that its worth depends on the availability of interesting projects. Since this availability is limited, human life has limited value. On this view, it seems, human life is instrumentally valuable for the sake of completing intrinsically worthwhile projects. *Pace* Williams, I find his argument problematic, as I will explain below. But first, let me set up the argument with a paraphrase of his interesting thought experiment:

Suppose that you are turning 42 today and that upon the moment of your turning 42, you discover the following: you are immortal; you will be 42 forever; and you will endure with humanly-apposite physical and mental well-being for an indefinite time.

This situation seems desirable *prima facie*. But Williams argues that the situation is not good at all. He says that in such a life, one would accomplish all the human projects and satisfy all the human desires objectively worth accomplishing and satisfying, after which one would become unbearably bored. Note that, according to Williams, this state of boredom would last forever and that it is an intrinsically bad state of affairs. In short, Williams argues something like the following:

- I. Whatever is intrinsically bad is objectively undesirable.
- II. Living a human life forever is intrinsically bad.
- III. Thus, living a human life forever is objectively undesirable.

I agree with (I). It is plausible to hold what philosophers call the *fitting-attitude* (FA) analysis of value: roughly, value is a matter of objective desirability; i.e., that which is valuable is objectively worthy of a suitable attitude of desire, esteem, respect, or approval such that it would be worthy even if no one were to desire, esteem, or approve it. Value is objective or *mind-independent*. It is not relative to our valuing attitudes and not something we invent.

Similarly, that which is of disvalue is objectively *unworthy* of desire, esteem, etc. – which means that something which is objectively bad is bad even if some person happens to like it. I am inclined to accept the FA analysis, and therefore have no objection to (I).

What about (II)? Williams seems to hold that what makes anthropic immortality a bad state of affairs is that, though it might be attractive at first, eventually one would run out of worthwhile projects and reach an unending state of ennui. He seems to assume that a permanently boring human life is not worth living. One can object to this assumption. For example, one might argue that human life is intrinsically valuable, regardless of the quality of its experience, and thus that it remains worthy of living even during a state of boredom.

Williams also assumes that exhausting the availability of valuable projects is a necessary condition for human immortality. This assumption is dubious. *Pace* Williams, he might suffer from a lack of imagination here. It is epistemically possible that there is a limitless source of worthwhile projects available to immortal humans, especially if there is a perfect being capable of creating evermore the circumstances for these experiences. Since the existence of God is defensible, so is the existence of a potentially infinite number of valuable projects and experiences for created human beings. [Note that I do not say that theism is conclusively provable, at least not by human thinkers. I do not find that it is strictly provable, since I hold a high standard for proof, nor do I think atheism is conclusively provable. But I do claim that both positions are *defensible* in the sense that are reasonable arguments for each position.] Socrates might be enjoying an unending number of philosophical conversations, which given some of his comments in *Apology*, would seem for him a source of great contentment and flourishing.

Furthermore, Williams assumes that a worthwhile human life consists *only* of the completion of valuable projects. On this view, what makes life worth living is *only* the fact that it consists of a limited number of valuable, purpose-oriented tasks to get done which in fact we can get done. Hence, if one is immortal, one will finish every task on this list. This would be something like a long bucket list, except that after completing all of the items, one will not die, but rather continue to live forever in a state of listless (or list-less!) boredom.

I am inclined to deny the assumption that a worthwhile human life consists only of the completion of projects; this seems to be a consequentialist, hustle-bustle view of human life common in contemporary Western Civilization. This is the leisure-deficient culture of 'total work' that Joseph Pieper (1952) rejected in *Leisure: the Basis of Culture*. Arguably, contemporary life is overstuffed with practical projects. There is an infeasible set of things to get done, such that the human experience is reduced to a frantic pace of checking things off the to-do list. Consequently, the human person is reduced to what Pieper called a 'functionary' in an inhuman life of utilitarian productivity. We cannot keep up with the to-do list, rendering absurd a merely task-oriented way of life. Dishes pile up; the car needs an oil change; the law of entropy determines that no matter how many times one sweeps the porch, more dirt will accumulate. Who can read every email and keep track of every new password? And what kind of life is it that is spent trying to do so? No wonder Williams holds that an afterlife of forced productivity would be unbearable.

In short, there is more to life than the tumult of practical projects. Now, in fairness to Williams, there are more important projects than housework and vehicle maintenance. We can imagine an afterlife much like this one, except that we are immortal and that there are no dishes to wash. Instead, our energies are entirely devoted to valuable intellectual, artistic, and athletic projects. Yet it is important to emphasize that there are valuable things in life which are not projects to get done. It seems to me that Williams missed this point and that he was unaware of the sort of rich human experience that Pieper had in mind. Moreover, the theist might be inclined to argue that the beatific vision of God would never become boring, nor would it require the completion of projects.

In any case, although I agree that there are valuable projects to complete and that a well-lived human life involves finishing some of these tasks, I do not believe that only task-completion deserves our attention. There are intrinsically valuable activities and experiences. These are things one does *for their own sake*. William Frankena (1973: 87-88) has articulated a list of things that have intrinsic value, such as being alive, consciousness, happiness, beatitude, truth, knowledge, true belief, wisdom, beauty, love, aesthetic experience, friendship, justice, peace, freedom, novelty, and more. These are not merely projects to check off of some list. And there might be an endless number of such goods and experiences available to the immortal human. [Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin (2014) also emphasize this point.] For the theistic religious person, experiencing God is good for its own sake, and perhaps the highest of human welfare goods. For the non-theistic religious person, perhaps experiencing a non-theistic higher level of reality is good for its own sake. But we do not need to limit such experiences to religious life. Doing philosophy, creating art, learning, read-

ing, enjoying friendships and family relationships, playing a sport, and hiking in the mountains are activities that are doable for their own sakes. Simple rest and leisurely thought can be intrinsically good. We need not do such things merely for the sake of getting them done, as if they were errands. Instead, we can enjoy them for what they are. [Kieran Setiya (2018) seems to agree, and for a similar reason. He claims that there are telic and atelic activities. Even if telic (or what I have called ‘purpose-oriented’) activities come to an end, we still have atelic activities, which are worth doing for their own sakes.]

Moreover, when engaging in some activity for the sake of the activity itself, we experience its value in the present. If one writes philosophy for the sake of philosophizing, one experiences its intrinsic value *now*, and for as long as he is doing it, regardless of whether he completes a project. If an artist paints or sings simply for the sake of creative activity, she experiences that value in the present. In contrast, for merely purpose-oriented tasks, the final value is achieved in the future. One does not access such final value *until the job is done*. Once done, that valuable accomplishment ends, and one needs a new task to accomplish so as to obtain more telic value. In this sense, such tasks are like the boulder of Sisyphus: once pushed to the top of the hill, it rolls to the bottom and he must start the pushing over and over again, *ad infinitum*.

Consequently, I find that Williams’ evaluation of immortality is flawed. Even if it were the case that we could accomplish every telic project worth completing – which is a debatable proposition, since the number of such projects might be potentially infinite – it would not follow that life is no longer worth living. One might have things to do that are intrinsically worth doing, not for the sake of achieving some future goal, but for the non-instrumental value of the relevant experience. These experiences might merit endless repetition, and there could be an endless number of such experiences. When one appreciates a beautiful sunset, reads a great novel, or listens to the *Moonlight Sonata* for its own sake, one does not say “Well, I’ve done it. No need to try that or anything like it again.” Rather, one can enjoy repeating the experience and other similar ones. In short, human immortality is desirable under appropriate circumstances and thus valuable. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky’s Alyosha underscores the point in a noteworthy aspiration: ‘I want to live for immortality, and I will accept no compromise.’

I will now consider two ambiguities concerning PT.

Ambiguity Objection 1

‘Purpose’ in PT is ambiguous. Creative activity is essentially telic. One does not create by accident, but for some end or purpose. As Aristotle put it at the beginning of *Nicomachean Ethics*, every art, inquiry, and pursuit are thought to aim at some

good end. But there are at least two senses of 'purpose' with respect to creative activity, since there are two senses of 'creation.' To see this, distinguish between (a) creative work to produce some object and (b) the object generated via such work; 'creation' can refer to (a) or to (b). A creator might ascribe purpose to (a) but not (b), to (b) but not (a), or to both (a) and (b).

Consider a painter. The painter might engage in the creative activity of painting merely for the sake of his love for the process, or for the sake of exercising his artistic faculties, and yet not ascribe any purpose to the art object that results from his effort. Or the painter might paint to enter his artefact into an art contest and, in this case, does not paint merely for the sake of the process. Another artist might paint both for the sake of the creative activity itself and to produce a result for which he intends a separate purpose. Thus, a painter can paint for the sake of painting. I will call this *intrinsic purpose*. And a painter can paint for the sake of using the product for some external end. I will call this *extrinsic purpose*.

PT is ambiguous between intrinsic and extrinsic purpose. Regarding the former sense, PT can be construed as holding that God creates human beings for the sake of his own creative activity, but not because of some end he has in mind for human existence. On the latter sense, PT can be read as holding that God creates human life with an end in mind for human beings, and perhaps for each individual human, and yet does not ascribe any inherent purpose to his creative work. Alternatively, PT might involve God having a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic purposes concerning his creation of human life. I suspect that the natural interpretation of PT is that God creates human beings for an extrinsic purpose. This seems to be the sense of 'purpose' Seachris describes concerning P^M .

What follows from holding that PT is a matter of extrinsic purpose? One might argue that if God were to assign human life a purpose, then God would degrade us, since he would be treating us merely as a means to some end he alone has selected, rather than treating us as ends in ourselves. Since God is perfect, he would not degrade us. Thus, God cannot assign us a purpose. [Kurt Baier (2000: 104) raised this objection. Sartre (1987: 13-16) articulated a similar point.]

In reply, one can grant that God's assigning us a purpose involves treating us as a means, but not *merely* as a means. Assuming that God gave us LFW and rationality, he designed us with the ability freely and thoughtfully to accept or reject his assigned purpose, a purpose the fulfilment of which (according to the PT-advocate) is good for us. Moreover, God can encourage us to appropriate his purpose freely, thereby treating us as ends in ourselves. As Metz (2013: 206) reflects,

'Suppose that the end God assigned us were to exercise our free will in a moral way. Informing us of such an end need not be condescending,' Metz supposes God saying:

‘There is something I would like you to do with your life, and this is the reason that you exist. Specifically, I would like you to be a moral person. Your free will is such that I cannot cajole you into exercising it morally, and your moral choice would be valuable only if it were made freely. Therefore, I must ask you to pursue the fundamental end of pursuing moral ends.’

What follows from taking PT as a matter of intrinsic purpose? Suppose that God created human beings merely for the sake of engaging in his own creative activity. He did not have an end in mind for us as products of his creative work. On this view, it seems that God degrades us in a different way. He creates us as persons worthy of concern, and yet shows us no concern, since his attention is wholly on his own creative work rather than on us and the vicissitudes of our predicament.

The PT-defender can reply that the natural way to think of God’s purpose for human life is that it is an extrinsic purpose. This interpretation is consistent with Seachris’ description of P^M . Therefore, the PT-advocate is not obligated to construe the reference to ‘purpose’ in PT as a matter of only intrinsic purpose. The defender of PT can reject the ‘intrinsic purpose’ reading and hold instead that God created human beings according to a good extrinsic purpose, even if he also ascribes intrinsic purpose to his own creative activity. This extrinsic purpose does not degrade us, since God does not treat us as mere means to the attainment of an end that he selected for us. I turn next to the second ambiguity concerning PT.

Ambiguity Objection 2

On PT, the meaning of human life is objective, rather than merely subjective. There is an ambiguity here worth examining. The objectivity holds with respect to us, since it is mind-independent regarding the human mind or any created mind. However, the meaning is subjective with respect to God in a way similar, *mutatis mutandis*, to the way in which, according to divine conceptualism, so-called abstract objects are subjective insofar as they are ideas in God’s mind. In short, on PT, human meaning is not purely objective. Rather, the meaning is objective in one sense but subjective in another. Human life is objectively meaningful insofar as the source of meaning is completely independent of human attitudes. However, human life is subjectively meaningful because its meaning is grounded in God’s purpose, which springs only from the divine mind. PT should thus be described as a mixed theory: objectivist concerning human attitudes, but subjectivist regarding the divine mind. The subjectivist aspect of PT weakens it, according to this objection, since human

meaning is dependent on God's attitudes about the world and not on our attitudes.

The PT-advocate can admit that PT is partly subjectivist and yet hold that this point does not weaken the theory. The advocate can retain a strong sense in which life is objectively meaningful insofar as the meaning is not a product of human attitudes, which as Kant (1964: 96) noted are vulnerable to 'the boisterous importunity of inclination.' Avoiding this importunity is a benefit, since the farrago of human inclinations is not a reliable guide to something as important as the meaning of life. In contrast, God's purpose is independent of our preferences and beliefs, and thus provides a universal, stable, and transcendent source of human meaning even if that meaning is subjective from God's perspective. Moreover, PT holds that we have the freedom to accept or reject God's purpose, and thus although meaning is dependent on God's mind, he does not coerce us into accepting his purposes. In an important sense, our choices and actions are up to us.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have continued what is now a two-article examination of PT. I have raised and answered several objections to the theory, suggesting that it is defensible under specific modifications and assumptions related to divine knowledge (Crozet 2018), human knowledge, the significance of immortality, and the meanings of 'purpose' and 'objective.' In particular, in this paper I have demonstrated that PT is defensible against Insufficiency Objection 2 and against both Ambiguity Objections. The case of Insufficiency Objection 1 is different; it seems that PT is vulnerable to this problem. Although the defender of PT has reasonable replies to the set of concerns articulated in Insufficiency Objection 1, the objector to PT has plausible responses to those replies. As such, whether or not PT is an adequate theory of the meaning of life is an open question. Problems remain concerning the nature of knowledge, the existential importance of epistemic certainty, the absurdity of our epistemic condition, and the plausibility of life after death. I do not have space to pursue these inquiries here, but would be content for the reader to explore them further.

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