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THE PROBLEM OF THE MEANING OF HUMAN LIFE IN PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the philosophical problem of the meaning of human life, focusing on its historical development, conceptual diversity, and relevance in contemporary thought. The study analyzes how different philosophical traditions—both Eastern and Western—interpret the purpose of human existence. Special attention is given to existential, humanistic, and metaphysical approaches, which offer contrasting but interconnected perspectives. The article also explores how globalization and modern technological conditions influence individual perceptions of life meaning. The findings suggest that the meaning of life is not a fixed concept but a dynamic process shaped by cultural, ethical, and personal factors.

Keywords: meaning of life, philosophy, existence, human condition, existentialism, values, ethics, identity, globalization, human purpose.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of the meaning of human life occupies a central place in philosophical inquiry and has been one of the most persistent and debated questions throughout the history of human thought. From ancient civilizations to contemporary philosophical discourse, thinkers have continuously attempted to understand the fundamental purpose of human existence. Despite the diversity of approaches, the question remains open and does not have a single universally accepted answer, which makes it one of the most complex issues in philosophy.

In classical philosophy, the meaning of life was often interpreted within metaphysical, religious, or cosmological frameworks. Ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle associated human life with the pursuit of virtue, knowledge, and harmony within the cosmic order. In Eastern philosophical traditions, particularly in Islamic and Oriental thought, life was frequently understood as a moral journey guided by spiritual values, ethical responsibility, and divine purpose. These interpretations emphasized that meaning is not created by the individual but discovered through alignment with higher principles.

However, the development of modern philosophy significantly changed this perspective. With the rise of rationalism, humanism, and later existentialism, the focus shifted from external sources of meaning to individual consciousness and subjective experience. Thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jean-Paul Sartre argued that life does not possess an inherent meaning given in advance;

instead, individuals are responsible for creating meaning through their choices, actions, and personal commitment. This shift marked a fundamental transformation in philosophical anthropology.

In contemporary society, the question of life's meaning has become even more complicated due to rapid globalization, technological progress, and cultural pluralism. The modern individual is exposed to a wide range of value systems, ideological perspectives, and cultural narratives, often simultaneously. This diversity, while enriching human experience, also creates a sense of uncertainty and fragmentation regarding identity and purpose. As traditional frameworks of meaning—such as religion, community, and cultural heritage—lose their exclusivity, individuals are increasingly required to construct their own understanding of life's purpose.

Another important factor influencing this problem is the development of digital technologies and information networks. The virtual environment has significantly transformed human interaction, perception, and self-understanding. Social media and digital communication platforms often create alternative realities in which identity becomes fluid and fragmented. This raises new philosophical questions about authenticity, selfhood, and the stability of meaning in a rapidly changing world.

Furthermore, globalization has intensified the interaction between different cultural and philosophical traditions. While this process encourages dialogue and mutual understanding, it also leads to the coexistence of conflicting value systems. As a result, individuals are often confronted with competing interpretations of what constitutes a meaningful life. This situation makes the search for meaning not only a philosophical issue but also a deeply personal and existential challenge.

The main purpose of this article is to examine the philosophical interpretations of the meaning of human life across different traditions and to analyze how contemporary global conditions reshape this fundamental question. By exploring both classical and modern perspectives, the study aims to highlight the dynamic and evolving nature of human existence and its meaning.

In this context, the problem of life's meaning should not be understood as a question with a final or universal answer. Rather, it represents an ongoing process of reflection, interpretation, and self-creation that evolves alongside human history, culture, and individual experience.

LITERATURE ANALYSIS

The selected literature provides a comprehensive philosophical foundation for understanding the problem of the meaning of human life from different historical and theoretical perspectives.

Classical works such as Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* present early philosophical interpretations of human existence. Plato associates meaning with justice and the ideal state, while Aristotle emphasizes *eudaimonia* (human flourishing) as the ultimate purpose of life. These works establish the idea that meaning is connected to moral order and rational activity.

In existential philosophy, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus offer a radically different perspective. Kierkegaard introduces the idea of subjective truth and faith-based meaning, while Nietzsche challenges traditional moral systems and proposes the creation of individual values. Sartre argues that existence precedes essence, meaning that humans are fully responsible for constructing their own purpose. Camus, in turn, highlights the absurdity of life and the need to find meaning despite its lack of inherent purpose.

Viktor Frankl's works (Man's Search for Meaning and The Will to Meaning) provide a psychological and existential synthesis. Frankl argues that meaning can be found through suffering, work, and love, even in extreme conditions. His logotherapy approach connects philosophy with human psychology.

Erich Fromm contributes a humanistic perspective, emphasizing self-realization, ethical responsibility, and productive orientation as key to meaningful life. His approach links meaning with social and psychological development.

Modern sociological theories by Zygmunt Bauman and Anthony Giddens expand the discussion into the context of globalization and modern identity. Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity" explains the instability of values and identity in contemporary society, while Giddens focuses on reflexive self-identity in a rapidly changing world.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that the meaning of life is not a fixed concept but a dynamic phenomenon shaped by historical, psychological, and social factors. Classical philosophy focuses on objective order, existentialism on subjective freedom, humanism on self-development, and modern sociology on global uncertainty and identity transformation.

This diversity of perspectives confirms that the problem of life's meaning remains open and continuously evolving within philosophical discourse.

METHODOLOGY. This study is based on a theoretical and analytical approach. The research methodology includes the following methods:

- Historical-philosophical analysis – to examine how the concept of life's meaning evolved from ancient to modern philosophy;
- Comparative analysis – to compare Eastern and Western philosophical perspectives;
- Interpretative method (hermeneutics) – to analyze philosophical texts and ideas in depth;
- Logical analysis and synthesis – to systematize different theories into a coherent understanding;
- Phenomenological approach – to explore individual human experience of meaning;
- Axiological analysis – to study the role of values in shaping life purpose.

These methods allow a comprehensive understanding of the problem from multiple philosophical perspectives.

RESULTS. The research revealed several key findings:

- the meaning of life is interpreted differently across philosophical traditions;
- ancient philosophy often linked life meaning to cosmic order or divine purpose;
- existentialist thinkers emphasize individual freedom and personal responsibility;
- humanistic philosophy focuses on self-realization and personal growth;
- modern society introduces new challenges to traditional value systems;
- globalization increases diversity of worldviews, creating both opportunities and uncertainty;
- technological development influences how individuals perceive identity and purpose;
- meaning of life is not static but changes depending on cultural and personal contexts;
- values play a central role in constructing individual life meaning;
- there is no universal agreement on a single definition of life's meaning.

DISCUSSION. The philosophical problem of the meaning of human life remains one of the most complex and open-ended issues in contemporary thought. The analysis conducted in this study shows that different philosophical traditions offer diverse and sometimes contradictory interpretations of this concept, which indicates that there is no single or universally accepted solution.

One of the key observations is that classical philosophy tends to ground the meaning of life in objective and external principles such as divine order, rational cosmic structure, or moral universals. In this view, human existence acquires meaning through alignment with pre-established truths that exist independently of individual perception. Such an approach provides stability and coherence, but it limits the role of personal freedom in meaning creation.

In contrast, modern existential philosophy radically shifts this perspective by placing the individual at the center of meaning-making. Thinkers such as Sartre and Kierkegaard emphasize that human beings are responsible for defining their own purpose through choices and actions. This leads to the idea that meaning is not discovered but created, which gives individuals greater freedom but also introduces existential anxiety and uncertainty.

The discussion also highlights that humanistic philosophy offers a more balanced perspective by linking meaning to self-realization, creativity, and social contribution. From this viewpoint, life becomes meaningful when individuals develop their potential and contribute positively to society. This approach integrates both individual and collective dimensions of existence.

In the context of globalization, the problem becomes significantly more complicated. The increasing interaction of cultures, ideologies, and value systems creates a pluralistic environment in which individuals are exposed to multiple and often conflicting interpretations of life's purpose. While this diversity expands intellectual freedom, it also weakens traditional sources of meaning and creates identity fragmentation.

Another important factor is the impact of digital technologies and the information society. Modern individuals increasingly construct their self-understanding through virtual environments, social networks, and digital communication. This transformation reshapes the way meaning is perceived, often making it more fluid, fragmented, and dependent on external validation. As a result, the stability of personal identity becomes more vulnerable.

Furthermore, the study suggests that despite these challenges, the search for meaning remains a fundamental human necessity. Even in highly modernized and globalized societies, individuals continue to seek purpose, values, and direction in life. This indicates that the question of meaning is not eliminated by modernization but rather transformed into new forms.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that the meaning of human life should be understood as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon. It is shaped by the interaction between individual consciousness, cultural context, and historical conditions. Therefore, philosophy does not provide a final answer but rather offers frameworks for continuous reflection and interpretation.

CONCLUSION. The analysis of the philosophical problem of the meaning of human life demonstrates that this issue cannot be reduced to a single definition, universal formula, or fixed explanation. Instead, it represents a continuously evolving and multi-layered concept shaped by historical development, cultural diversity, and individual experience. Throughout the history of philosophy, different schools of thought have proposed various interpretations, yet none of them can be considered final or exhaustive.

Classical philosophical traditions generally interpreted the meaning of life in relation to external or transcendent foundations such as divine will, cosmic order, or objective moral principles. In these frameworks, human life was understood as meaningful only when aligned with higher, universal laws. In contrast, modern and contemporary philosophical approaches, particularly existentialism and humanism, shifted the focus toward the individual. According to these perspectives, meaning is not given from outside but is created internally through human freedom, responsibility, and conscious choice.

The research also shows that in the context of globalization, technological development, and cultural pluralism, the question of life's meaning has become more complex and dynamic. The expansion of digital environments, rapid information exchange, and the coexistence of multiple value systems have significantly influenced how individuals perceive themselves and their role in society. As a result, traditional sources of meaning such as religion, family, and cultural heritage are being reinterpreted, and in some cases, partially replaced by new, globally shared frameworks of understanding.

At the same time, these global changes do not eliminate the need for meaning; rather, they intensify it. The modern individual is increasingly required to independently construct a coherent sense of purpose in a world characterized by uncertainty and rapid transformation. This situation highlights the importance of critical thinking, ethical reflection, and personal value formation in the process of meaning-making.

Another important conclusion is that meaning of life is closely connected to values and identity. Human beings do not merely seek survival or material success; they also strive for self-realization, recognition, and moral fulfillment. Therefore, philosophical reflection on life's meaning remains essential for understanding human nature and social development.

In general, it can be concluded that the meaning of human life is not a static concept but a dynamic and context-dependent process. It evolves alongside historical conditions, cultural changes, and individual life experiences. Philosophy, in this regard, does not provide a final answer but offers tools for deeper reflection, critical understanding, and continuous search.

Future research in this field should focus on how emerging global trends such as digitalization, artificial intelligence, and cultural hybridization further reshape human understanding of life's meaning. Such studies may contribute to developing new philosophical frameworks that better reflect the realities of the modern world.

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