

Research on “The Meaning of Life” in the Field of Ethics ——From the Perspective of Perceiving Time

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Abstract: From the perspective of ethics, the article discusses the “The Meaning of Life” from the perspective of perception time, tries to analyze the presentation of “The Meaning of Life” in different perspectives of perception time, and then explores the well-being pursuit of “The Meaning of Life” in different perspectives of perception time, in order to find an ultimate way to pursue “The Meaning of Life”——A kind of Virtuous Well-Being.

Keywords: The Meaning of Life; Perception of Time; Aristotle; Augustine; Virtuous Well-Being

1. The Basic Meaning and Main Theory of “The Meaning of Life”

At the beginning of the article, the author makes a language analysis of “The Meaning of Life” and introduces the basic views of naturalism and supernaturalism view of life. The naturalistic view of life holds that a person’s life can acquire meaning even in a purely physical world. The supernaturalist view of life relates its “The Meaning of Life” to The God. This different context stems from people’s view of the “Time” problem. Based on the premise of “Life”, we can perceive that “Life” passes like “Time”, and because of the existence of “Time”, our life has a limit, and due to the existence of limits, our life has “Meaning”, if “Life” itself is infinite, “Meaning” will not exist.

1.1 Analysis of the Basic Meaning of “The Meaning of Life”

Contemporary philosophers (represented by Metz Thaddeus, Svendsen Lars, Thomson Garrett, Mawson Timothy, Jean Paul Sartre, Campbell Stephen, Sven Nyholm, and others) have sorted out and analyzed the issue of “The Meaning of Life”, and based on the three common basic uses of “Meaning”, they have launched an analysis of “Meaning”. Metz proposed three basic uses of the meaning of “Meaning” in The idea of a Meaningful Life, namely: 1. Sense-Making (including comprehensibility, clarity, or coherence); 2. The Purpose of Meaning; 3. The Significance of Meaning, including value. The author will also discuss the meaning of “Meaning” around these three basic uses^[1].

Metz expressed that the meaning of life exists in the tension between time and life. The presentation of “Life” will vary in different time dimensions, and the meaning of life will also vary. This is also the issue that the author will discuss later—the correlation between “Time” and “Life”. So, as the fifth life question was raised at the beginning of this section, the presentation of “Meaning” often accompanies the presentation of “Life”, because we live in a world with time as the dimension. In survival, we will meet and even form some rough marks. And these “markers” often become our very strong focus, and “The Meaning of Life” unfolds in this tension between “Time” and “Life”.

1.2 Naturalistic view of life

The main theories of “The Meaning of Life” include naturalistic life view, supernatural life view, mixed life view, and nihilistic life view, among others. Based on the purpose of the article, the author mainly introduces the first two theories of “The Meaning of Life”.

The naturalistic view of life (represented by philosophers such as Taylor Richard, Frankfurt Harry, Smuts Aaron, Peter Singer, etc.) believes that material life is the core of the meaning of life, and even without a spiritual realm, a meaningful life in essence is

possible. In *God, Soul and the Meaning of Life*, Metz divides the naturalistic view of life into two different variants: the moderate and the extreme. The moderate view is that although a truly meaningful life can exist in a pure physical universe, as is well known to science, a more meaningful life is possible if a spiritual realm also exists^[2].

1.3 Supernatural view of life

Overall, the supernatural view of life holds that the existence of God and the “appropriate relationship” with God are sufficient and necessary to ensure a meaningful life, although the specific details may vary. In the history of Western philosophy, there are countless philosophers who hold supernatural views on life, including Augustine, Aquinas, Edwards, Pascal, and many contemporary analytical philosophers.

The supernatural view of life associates meaningful life with the existence of God. In his book *The Absurdity of Life Without God*, Craig William Lane states that “the essential foundational attributes of a meaningful and happy life, as perceived by the supernatural view of life, are considered most reasonably anchored in the existence of God.” To some extent, a qualified supernaturalist also needs correct faith and proper living and practice, Although there is still a lot of debate on the details.

2. The presentation of “The Meaning of Life”: Perceiving Time

According to the previous discussion, “The Meaning of Life” is presented in the tension between “Time” and “Life”. Perceiving “Life” and obtaining “Meaning” in the way of “Time” is often done from the perspective of “Perceiving Time”. Regarding perception of time, Baden distinguishes it in his *Decoding Time*. The perception of time, represented by Augustine’s view of time, is an idealistic view of time that emphasizes the perception of time by the mind (inner perception), and measures “Life” by “Present”, displaying “Meaning” through “Memory”; The perception of time, represented by Aristotle’s view of time, is a relational view of time that focuses on perceiving time through movement (external perception), measuring “Life” in “Moments”, and presenting “Meaning” through “Present”^[3].

2.1 Plato’s View of Time

Plato’s view of life was also influenced by his view of time, and his discourse on “time” and “existence” in his theory of ideas also formed the expression of the non true and true aspects of life in his view of life. In his ideal realm, Plato believed that ultimate well-being is a result of spiritual harmony. In Plato’s view, our souls are controlled by reason, and the reason why humans have desires and unwell-being stems from the soul deviating from the control of reason. We can only return to the rational design plan, making the various elements of the soul harmonious, and then we will be happy. This kind of well-being is ideal, presented towards rationality, and is an anchor in the pursuit of the concept of “good”, not dwelling in others.

2.2 Aristotle’s Time View of “Movement”

Aristotle differs from his teacher in that he examines time from the perspective of the ontology of time, paying more attention to people’s external perception, and tending to examine time from the perspective of “movement”, just as he believed that although time is not movement, it cannot be without movement. In the process of measuring “time”, Aristotle used “instant” as his standard of measurement. Aristotle’s the meaning of life also unfolds in the process of “instantaneous” measurement, and his view of life highlights a tension between “life” and “time” in the process of presenting time “instantaneous”. “Meaning” then appears in the form of “Present”.

2.3 The “Soul” Turn of Augustine’s Time View

For the question of the existence of time, Augustine gave the answer, “Time exists in an extension of the mind.” Since Augustine’s spiritual experience of time is based on the present perspective, even if we measure the present or present time, it is actually a panoramic view of the past, future, and present. Augustine clearly measured the present time in the present way. Augustine measured “time” in the “present” way, and his meaning of life also unfolded in the process of measuring “present”. Augustine’s view of life demonstrated a tension between “Life” and “Time” in the process of presenting “present” of time, and its “Meaning” was manifested in the form of “memory”^[4].

3. The Ultimate Pursuit of “The Meaning of Life”: A Virtuous Well-Being

The meaning of life arises from the tension and hesitation between time and life. The author also mentioned earlier that this tension and hesitation must be based on a certain context, which is the “contextualism” discussed by the author. In contextualism, the tension between “Life” and “Time” forms different “views on life” and also has different meanings of life. The naturalistic view of life is based on a natural context, which not only refers to a language environment, but also a collective term for all things closely related to the subject’s life. And the supernatural view of life is also based on a supernatural context that is different from the natural context

(let's call it that), and the subject living in this context is also influenced by this context.

3.1 Naturalist views on Well-being

As mentioned earlier, the Aristotelian view of time perceives the “passing” of life in the form of “moving” time, and measures life in the form of “moments”. The naturalist’s “meaning of life” is presented in the Aristotelian view of time in the form of “moments” and also manifests in the form of “present”. We constantly “encounter” in life, measuring it in the moment. This measurement is carried out in the tension between “time” and “life”, ultimately forming “rough marks”. These “marks” (Aristotle referred to as “present”) are the expressions of our “meaning of life”. And the ruler of measurement, as we mentioned earlier, is well-being with virtue. This is the ultimate way for naturalists to present the meaning of life or their ultimate goal.

3.2 Supernaturalists views on Well-being

As mentioned earlier, Augustine’s view of time is to perceive the “passage” of life in the form of “spiritual” time, and also to measure life in the “present” way. The “meaning of life” of supernaturalists is presented in Augustine’s “current” measurement of time and manifested in the form of “memory”. Supernaturalists “encounter” in life, measure “encounter” in the present, and this measure also exists in the tension between time and life, ultimately forming “rough marks”. These “marks” (Augustine referred to as “memory”) are the expressions of the meaning of life of the supernaturalists. And supernaturalists and naturalists share a common pursuit of the ultimate meaning of life, that is, the measure of well-being is also a virtuous one. Next, the author will introduce the well-being views of supernaturalists and examine their answers to the question of virtuous well-being.

3.3 Marxist views on Well-being

Although it is helpful for our thinking on the meaning of life, it lacks some action guidelines. The Marxist concept of well-being, with labor as its core practice, provides a practical path for the pursuit of well-being issues. The author will then explore the Marxist concept of well-being in order to find action guidelines on the issue of well-being.

In Marx’s view, “Time” is not only a quantitative result, but also a modern time in which we live. This modernity of time, in Marx’s view, stems from the idea of justice, and time begins to measure human life or labor in a positive and just way in modernity. In Marx’s field of discourse, humans cannot exist in an isolated way from heaven and earth, therefore humans must be social, and this social nature creates that humans must work and live in groups. Therefore, in Marx’s view, time is fundamentally a description of the labor process of human groups, especially in the process of modernity..

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