

Presentation. The Meaning of Life –Revisited

Enric Mallorquí-Ruscalleda
Princeton University/Indiana University of Pennsylvania

The thematic study that I currently have the honor of presenting responds to both personal and research interests, which for me are two necessarily interdependent facets of all humanistic endeavors. It also constitutes an effort on behalf of the journal *Notandum*ⁱ to join in the debate on “the meaning of life,” which has lately taken on new vigor. Attention to this topic has been manifested in criticismⁱⁱ by what has come to be called “The Happiness Turn,”ⁱⁱⁱ but is also seen in and through other forms of cultural production. We might note, for example, the tribute paid the topic by the alternative band Coldplay in their album *Viva la vida*,^{iv} or the many new graduate programs that are being offered globally related to the meaning of life. All of these are indicative of the interest that the topic generates in part as a result of existential anxiety and the questioning of values and belief systems^v that we face as we approach the end of postmodernity, much as happened with the waning of the modern age.

This project is a two-volume compilation of an interdisciplinary nature, as befits the character of the collaborating journal and as is necessitated by a topic as wide as human experience of meaning. It contains the work of several well-known specialists from both sides of the Atlantic, coming from many traditions and fields. As can be seen by the brief biographies that accompany each piece, fields as disparate as linguistics, philosophy—here, hermeneutical, phenomenological and educational—and literature, artistic and literary creation, and psychology are represented.

Although they are arranged alphabetically by author, the essays all speak to issues relevant to the topic of meaning, and more particularly to the meaning of life in its many expressions, with the final aim of offering a global vision of the difficulties that all readers face regarding both the world in which we live and reality in general.

Our volume opens with philosophically oriented studies, all of which provide a vocational and methodological framework of both theoretical and practical value for future reflection on the meaning of life from within distinct humanistic fields: our scholars include Mexican hermeneutist Mauricio Beuchot, Italian phenomenologist Daniela Verducci, Catalanian psychologist and best-seller Xavier Guix, and Brazilian philosopher Jair Militão.

Also from within philosophy, we have an article by Brazilian philosopher Sílvia Regina Brandão, who discusses suffering in accord with Viktor Emil Frankl:^{vi} it is the true path through which one comes to understand the meaning of life, as evidenced by Job’s lament, “Militia est vita hominis super terram” 7:1. From here follow a series of studies that take up specific literary texts and other fictional media, such as movies and television and their relationship to popular culture. For example, Spanish linguist Eva Núñez Méndez offers a critical analysis of one of Isabel Coixet’s movies, and Brazilian philosopher João Sérgio Lauand studies the character of Robert Barone from the well-known American television series *Everybody Loves Raymond* (1996 – 2005).

Continuing with texts of fiction, we include the collaborative efforts of two literary scholars: The American Lydia H. Rodríguez, who analyses aspects of feminine writing in the Spanish language, and Spaniard Sixte Marcos Vicens, studying the texts of playwright, poet and actor Antonin Artaud.

Moving into more uniquely creative terrain, we include the previously unpublished work of two great artists, including a poetic composition written by Peruvian poet and literary critic Roger Santiváñez specifically for this volume, and a plastic art piece by the Catalanian artist and doxologist Sergi Barnils.

Together with these studies, we republish two classic texts by renowned Catholic thinker Josef Pieper; additionally, we include a study by German philosopher Berthold Wald that presents a comparative study on Pieper's most famous work and that of Thomas Aquinas. Saint Thomas' master work is also analyzed by Brazilian philosopher of education Jean Lauand. Completing the review of religious approaches to the topic of the meaning of life we include the study of another literary scholar, American Alisa J. Tigchelaar, whose work is dedicated to another Christian thinker, Protestant, C. S. Lewis, whom she relates to other authors who discuss religious faith: Sor Marcela de Félix y Miguel de Unamuno.

Given the interdisciplinary open-endedness of a volume about the equally capacious subject of meaning, we have welcomed projects in a number of languages. In my case, I have chosen English as it is the academic *lingua franca*, and also to make this work initially available to a wider readership.

Note that the texts which constitute our project on the meaning of life are joined by a bibliographic essay by Sònia Boadas Cabarrocas and an interesting article by Ivanise Monfredini and Adriana Silva that meet editorial needs that fall outside the auspices of our study.

I would like to close this brief introduction by saying that this thematic study would not have been possible without the intellectual and financial support of Professor Jean Lauand, who is both Professor of Philosophy of Education (Universidade de São Paulo), and editorial director of the periodical that has generously hosted our project. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for the great interest he has shown this project and also for his much-appreciated help. I would also like to thank those who have authored projects for two volumes, without whom this project would not have been possible either.

Finally, I dedicate the two volumes that follow this introduction and make up the interdisciplinary study on the meaning of life to my parents, Maria del Carme Rusalleda Rissech y Ramon Mallorquí Puigdevall (1946 - 2008), who have always filled my own with meaning.

E. M. R.
Indiana, Pennsylvania
January 14, 2011

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. "The Happiness Turn," *Happiness. New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 63 (2007-2008): 7-14.
- . *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke UP, 2010.

- Eagleton, Terry. *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2003.
- Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1997 [1946].
- . *Psychotherapy and Existentialism: Selected Papers on Logotherapy*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1967.
- . *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*. New York: Vintage Books. 1973 [1946],
- . *The Unconscious God: Psychotherapy and Theology*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1975 [1948].
- Grondin Jean. *Du sens de la vie*. Montreal: Bellarmin, 2003.
- Klemke, E. D., and Steven M. Cahn Steven M. Eds. *The Meaning of Life: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2007.
- McMahon, Darrin M. *Happyness: A History*. Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006

NOTES

ⁱ *NOTANDUM-Revista Semestral Internacional de Estudios Académicos*. This journal has been published since 1998 and is co-edited by the Centro de Estudos Medievais - Oriente & Ocidente – of the Universidade de São Paulo and the Faculdade de Direito /Inst. Jurídico Interdisciplinar de Universidade do Porto.

ⁱⁱ See, for example, E. D. Klemke y Steven M. Cahn, eds., *The Meaning of Life: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2007); Terry Eagleton, *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2003); and Jean Grondin, *Du sens de la vie* (Montreal: Bellarmin, 2003).

ⁱⁱⁱ The term was coined by Sara Ahmed in “The Happiness Turn,” *Happiness. New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 63 (2007-2008): 7-14. From the same author also comes *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. Of equal interest is Darrin M. McMahon’s *Happiness: A History* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006).

^{iv} I discuss their treatment of the topic in “The Meaning of Life in Coldplay’s *Viva la vida*,” which I have recently submitted for publication.

^v My doctoral dissertation, “*Quijotes a lo divino: la búsqueda del sentido de la vida en la España de los Habsburgo*,” covers just this topic.

^{vi} His best-known work is *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1997). This work was originally published in 1946 as *Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager*. Other noteworthy studies in which he develops his philosophy are *Psychotherapy and Existentialism: Selected Papers on Logotherapy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973 [1946]), and *The Unconscious God: Psychotherapy and Theology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975 [1948]).