**Chapter 2: The Consciousness Meaning (CM) Model: Conceptual Infrastructure**

**Abstract:** When a mental state is within an individual’s consciousness; that is, when the person is aware of the mental state, then meaning is imparted to it. (A mental state (MS) includes, for example, a belief, intention, purpose, or thought, representing external or internal stimuli.) For a normal person, consciousness is a prerequisite for an MS to have meaning. In other words, when an MS is in consciousness, it is bestowed with meaning. Meaning has various qualities and levels, which are determined by the nature of the event being represented in the consciousness.

For the purposes of the current discussion, two sources of events are identified that determine the type and degree of conscious experiences, which have different meanings:

1. Events constituting*sensory stimuli* that activate humans’ five senses or sensations of cold and heat, or that cause emotions such as pain, pleasure, or fear (for example, a strong and sudden stimulation);
2. Events constituting*abstract stimuli* that originate in one’s mind, such as thoughts, ideas, and imaginations.

*Sensory stimuli* elicit conscious feelings and emotions. When a normal person is conscious of these, they acquire a sense of meaning, often a high-intensity meaning regarding one’s life. *Abstract stimuli* (such as thoughts, ideas, and imaginings) often acquire an ordinary, everyday meaning that has low impact, by virtue of being in consciousness. However, if these thoughts and ideas have been empowered and internalized by the individual, they acquire special meaning in the person’s life, for example religious beliefs or ideological values which guide the individual’s life.

By ‘consciousness’ I refer to a person’s inner subjective world. This includes, among other things, sensory experiences, such as seeing shapes and colors, and hearing sounds; feelings such as pain, fear, anger, pleasure, and joy; thoughts; and the individual’s awareness of the emotions, sights, sounds, and thoughts that come to his or her mind. This definition of consciousness refers to an experience so obvious and mundane that most people don’t pay attention to it, because it fills every second of our lives, aside from when we sleep or otherwise lose consciousness, such as resulting from a head injury. (Dreams are an especially interesting kind of consciousness that appear during certain stages of sleep.) Consciousness is the experience of being alive, our existence within the sensory experiences throughout our lives, and which ends only at death.

Some philosophers use the term ‘qualia’ to characterize this phenomenon in various ways, for example, as the way things are perceived by an individual who is feeling pain, seeing a color, or conceiving an idea. Given these characteristics, I think the term that comes closest to describing this unique mental phenomenon is ‘conscious experience’ or, more briefly, ‘consciousness’. Sometimes I also use the term ‘awareness’ to indicate that an individual is conscious of something; that is, the conscious individual is in a state of awareness regarding something. There is not yet a completely satisfactory explanation of consciousness (see Rakover, 1990, 2007, 2018). Due to the failure to explain this phenomenon in accordance with the rules of the scientific method, I will refer to it as an initial explanatory factor, similar to that of the gravitational force in physics. That is to say, consciousness (the conscious experience) will serve as an explanatory factor for the behavior of humans (and other higher animals). This phenomenon, which has not yet been adequately explained and understood, is also specific to each individual person and, to a certain extent, to each of the higher animals. Based on this assumption, I offer two propositions for explaining the concept of ‘life-meaning’. In the next section, I briefly discuss the reasons and arguments for why consciousness has not yet been sufficiently explained. In particular, I describe a theory of how the experience of consciousness comes from the neurophysiological activity of the brain.

**The Consciousness Meaning (CM) Model: Two Types of Meaning Based on Consciousness**

**Meaning 1: Innate Meaning**. Despite previous writings asserting that the world itself is indifferent and meaningless, and it is humans who attribute meaning to the world (that is, to people, animals, plants, and inanimate objects), I offer here as a basic premise that the world of human beings is enveloped and saturated with meanings of varying qualities and degrees. I propose that normal humans (and, to some extent, the higher animals) are born with an inherent tendency to attribute meaning to the world, which is mediated by the conscious experience of sensory stimuli (as distinguished from abstract stimuli). I suggest that awareness of stimuli and sensory states such as sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, awareness of body posture (proprioception), pressure, heat, cold, pain, pleasure, and so forth, provide an innate and basic meaning to life. These are conscious experiences through which people feel that they are alive and enjoying their life, by the conscious experience of, for example, seeing shapes and colors, hearing sounds and the like. In other words, I suggest that the conscious experience of seeing a pretty color, hearing a pleasant sound, feeling soft material, tasting something sweet, causes a person to experience joy. Even when a person feels afraid of darkness or frightening noises, these unavoidable experiences and feelings are part of a person’s normal, everyday world and an innate aspect of the structure of a human being. I propose that these conscious feelings constitute ‘life-meaning’ through which one feels alive and well, and that this process of imparting meaning to life is innate for a normal person. Since this process is immediate and automatic for a normal person, it can be suggested that being conscious provides the basic meaning to human life; and that life-meaning is the experience of conscious feeling. Moreover, because conscious feeling is a primary, innate trait (although, as stated, a neurophysiological explanation has not yet been found) and because the current assumption states that a person is imbued with this type of conscious experience from birth, I call this: ‘Meaning 1: Innate Meaning’.

As mentioned above, this trait of consciousness is found in humans and also, to some extent, in the higher animals. I do not believe that even the most sophisticated robot will ever achieve a state of consciousness and meaning of life (in this context, read about the thought experiment 'The Chinese Room': Searle, 1980; and see below). This is illustrated in the following example: a robot has been designed to look like a woman and programmed to behave exactly like a human mother right after giving birth, including reactions to sight, touch, and smell, and behaviors such as embracing and kissing the newborn baby. There is no difference between the behavior of the human mother and the behavior of the robot mother. When the nurse brings the human infant to the robot mother, her behavior towards it will be the same as that of a human mother. Furthermore, there will be no difference in the behavior of a human mother and the robot mother if the nurse puts a robot infant in their lap; both will reject the robot infant and search for a human baby. This is precisely the rationale behind this example. While the behavior of the human mother, in rejecting the robot infant, is clearly understood, the behavior of the robot mother is puzzling: wouldn’t we expect her to adopt the robot infant and reject the human infant? If indeed the robot mother had a consciousness and awareness of meaning similar to that of a human mother, we would expect her to reject the human baby (that is not of her kind or ‘flesh of her flesh’) and adopt the robot infant, which was constructed out of the same materials from which she was built. However, the robot does not possess meaningful consciousness, as does a human being. It is only a machine, albeit a sophisticated one, programmed to mimic human behavior (in which case it exhibits a strange, somewhat pathetic imitation).

Therefore, a normal person in a state of consciousness is aware of sensory stimuli, such as seeing the sunlight in the morning, and it is possible to suggest that this gives life meaning. That is, the conscious experience of seeing sunlight elicits a positive feeling, the pleasure of being alive. However, it can also be argued there can be no meaningful perception of sunlight (meaning that is expressed as pleasure in the sense of sight and pleasure of being alive) unless there is a normal person in a state of consciousness; someone who is conscious of the sunlight.

Although I assume that being aware of sensory stimuli, under normal conditions, automatically implies a life-meaning that involves the enjoyment of the experience of existence, this condition is limited to a certain area of sensory stimuli. Certain (usually extreme) changes in the level of consciousness are accompanied by a change in the level and quality of meanings, from pleasant and positive meanings to unpleasant, unbearable, negative meanings. In other words, I suggest that the *sensory stimuli* that make people aware of the innate meaning of their life are restricted to a certain range of stimuli, and that exceeding this range can change their consciousness and life-meaning from positive to negative. I will clarify this through several examples.

For example, if the intensity of light becomes excessively bright, the feeling will shift from a conscious experience of pleasantness to a conscious experience of unpleasantness and pain. In this case, a person will do everything possible to reduce the light or escape from it. If this negative situation persists without the possibility of escape (for example, the person is in a vast desert without shelter), a positive life-meaning becomes negative. The individual may not be able to bear such endless torment and may even wish to die.

On the other hand, a person who sees the sun rise over the same green hills, day after day, year after year, may become immune to this pleasant situation. The person’s senses become numb to the dawn, and life-meaning wanes as awareness is diminished. In such cases, the person may seek out a geographical change and go to new, exotic places to diversify and refresh the sensory stimulation, in order to return a rejuvenated state of consciousness and life-meaning. Furthermore, while a slight feeling of anxiety or fear may increase a person’s sense of being alive, strong feelings of fear elicit a desire to end the distressing situation, and one may develop physical or behavioral disorders (such as disengagement and withdrawal into oneself, obsessive behavior, suicidal thoughts, or physical tics).

Section A:

Following this description, Meaning 1 – innate meaning – can change over time, in terms of both intensity and quality (from positive-pleasure to negative-suffering and vice versa). To support and illustrate the attribution of these theoretical traits to Meaning 1, it is appropriate to invoke here, as an analogy, another system that functions in a similar way: the immune system in the bodies of humans (and animals). The functional strength of this system changes over time. For example, in old age, the immune system weakens, and does not function as well as it does at a young age. Moreover, this system, whose positive function is to protect the body from invasion of harmful organisms (such as bacteria) under certain conditions can work against human health, and thus this system can be both positive and negative. For example, an autoimmune disease is caused by the immune system attacking normal cells and tissues, a response that results in inflammation and destruction of healthy tissues. Thus, just as the immune system usually manages to protect our bodies (except in cases in which the body is invaded by lethal bacteria or destructive radiation that overwhelm the immune system, which destroy the body and causes death, or in cases of severe autoimmune diseases), similarly, it can be suggested that Meaning 1 protects our minds from depression and suicidal thoughts that may arise from a perception of the meaninglessness of life and its inevitable end. However, in extreme cases such as severe life crises that make life seem futile, the natural protection offered by Meaning 1 may be diminished or overcome. (In this respect, Meaning 1 can be called the ‘immune-system meaning’).

What emerges from this analysis is that Camus’ claim that life is meaningless (because death is inevitable and the world is incomprehensible) is inconsistent with the assumption of Meaning 1, which asserts that people exist within a stream of positive and negative life meanings due to the ongoing flow of sensory stimuli (see below for more on abstract stimuli). Indeed, even Meursault, the hero of Camus’ novel *The Stranger,* is placed in constantly changing situations related to innate meaning. (The name Meursault is based on the French words for ‘sea’ [*me]*) and ‘sun’ [*soliel*]). Meursault repeatedly describes the light and heat of Algeria. For example, at his mother’s funeral, he writes: ‘The sky was already filled with light. The sun was beginning to bear down on the earth and it was getting hotter by the minute.’ The light and heat are important factors in the murder of the Arab committed by Meursault. Meursault goes to the beach, where he feels assaulted by the glare and heat: ‘…I could feel my forehead swelling under the sun. All that heat was pressing down on me and making it hard for me to go on…. I strained every nerve in order to overcome the sun and the thick drunkenness it was spilling over me. With every blade of light that flashed off the sand…’ Meursault meets an Arab, who had previously wounded his friend with his knife, lying on the beach. Meursault describes what happens next in this way: ‘And this time, without getting up, the Arab drew his knife and held it up to me in the sun. The light shot off the steel and it was like a long flashing blade cutting at my forehead.’ Sweat pours off Meursault’s forehead into his eyes and blinds him: ‘All I could feel were the cymbals of sunlight crashing on my forehead and, indistinctly, the dazzling spear Hying up from the knife in front of me. The scorching blade slashed at my eyelashes and stabbed at my stinging eyes.’ Then Meursault shoots the Arab and kills him. At his trial for murder, when Meursault tries to convince the judge and jury that he committed murder due to the sun, he is mocked and ridiculed.

To this point, the scene seems like a description of how the stimulus of light and heat become unbearable and create a negative innate meaning. However, Meursault feels positive innate meaning even when he is in prison (after being convicted of murder). After meeting with a priest, to whom Meursault emphatically insists that he does not believe in God, he writes: ‘With him gone, I was able to calm down again. I was exhausted and threw myself on my bunk. I must have fallen asleep, because I woke up with the stars in my face. Sounds of the countryside were drifting in. Smells of night, earth, and salt air were cooling my temples. The wondrous peace of that sleeping summer flowed through me like a tide.’ Then he feels a sense of transcendence and thinks about how his mother must have felt rejuvenated at the end of her life. ‘And I felt ready to live it all again too…in that night alive with signs and stars, I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world.’

It should be emphasized here that Sagi (2000) offers a different interpretation of the sun and sea in Camus’ novel, *The Stranger*. While I note Meursault’s conscious feelings regarding nature as examples of positive / negative innate meaning, Sagi sees the various natural stimuli as symbols. The sun signifies the breakdown and dissolution of meaning and the incomprehensibility of an unintelligible world. The sea, in contrast, signifies harmony and unity of the world as a whole. While this interpretation may be emotionally appealing and sheds light on deep interpretive strata of the novel, for me it raises the following question: On what basis is it determined that the world is unintelligible, that it cannot be understood? The following responses to this question are neither adequate nor accurate.

First, it is clear to me personally (and to many others) that the answers religion provides to questions about the world (such as time and its creation) are insufficient and incorrect. Second, it is clear that the world itself does not reveal or explain the secret of the meaning of its existence to humans – such a revelation is not recorded anywhere on earth. Third, it is clear that observing the world and its myriad phenomena will not enable one to understand it, because according to the present approach, observation only leads a person to innate meaning, a conscious awareness of being alive and experiencing pleasure (or suffering) by taking in sensory stimuli. (It is clear that pain and suffering are also accompanied by a feeling of being alive; otherwise why should one wish to die when the pain and agony become unbearable?). So why does Camus assert that the world is incomprehensible?

One possible answer to this question about the incomprehensibility of the world is that science has not yet been able to decipher all the secrets of the world, and nature is still a mystery. Will people eventually succeed in understanding the world? A negative answer to this question is grounded in two arguments. First, the universe is infinite, so it is hard to believe there will ever be a uniform theory to explain the infinite. In fact, one could argue that a complete explanation for an infinite world is impossible. If the explanation is understandable, then either it must be finite, and therefore cannot explain an infinite world of endless and unexpected phenomena, or else the explanation must delineate and limit the world in order to offer a satisfactory explanation. It can be argued that this latter strategy is not useful because such a framework is finite and therefore contrary to an infinite reality. On the other hand, if the explanation for an infinite world must be infinite, then the explanation itself becomes incomprehensible. Second, the scientific method suggests that anyone who claims to have discovered a complete and absolute scientific theory, has in fact deviated from the rules of empirical science and moved into the world of faith (see Popper, 1972).

However, this negative answer has significant flaws. I would not be mistaken if I say that science today knows much more about how the world functions (including animals and humans) than was known in biblical times, the Greek and Roman eras, or the Middle Ages. It is enough to look at the dramatic changes that science has made in contemporary life compared to life in the past, to understand how far the world has come in terms of understanding and progress. Moreover, I believe that the motive for trying to understand the world is a powerful ideal to which humans aspire. This ideal is a source of endless strength, which does not create despair but rather uplifts man’s energy and will to live and to continue to investigate and uncover the mysteries of the universe. Therefore, I find the argument that the world is incomprehensible to be overly simplistic and narrow-minded.

**Meaning 2: Acquired Meaning.** Despite the important role of Meaning 1 as the ‘immune system’ against losing one’s direction in life, the purpose of this system is not to guide a person through life, or to provide a meaningful direction to follow. In essence, Meaning 1 is an innate trait that characterizes all humans in the past, present, and probably the future. In contrast, Meaning 2 – acquired meaning – varies according to culture, place, and time, and is imparted to people by the society in which they live. In other words, society offers individuals various paths towards meaning that are suitable for them and which allow them to integrate into society and contribute to it. Based on the above distinction, the following ideas can be offered: In addition to the innate conscious experience that imparts life-meaning of various qualities and degrees (and, to some extent, a conscious experience among the higher animals), a person can also create, accept, and internalize various goals, values, ideas, and thoughts—namely, abstract events. These events impart a sense of meaning I call: ‘Meaning 2: Acquired Meaning.’ I further differentiate between two types of acquired meaning: ordinary and extreme, which will be elaborated upon below. The moment that abstract events enter into the state of consciousness in the human mind they acquire Meaning 2. In other words, consciousness imparts Meaning 2 to thoughts in an individual’s consciousness. In most cases, the intensity of the abstract events is low. I will refer to this as ‘Ordinary Meaning 2’. But in the following two important situations, Meaning 2 acquires a major and powerful life-meaning:

1. When the content (goals and thoughts) of the acquired meaning is directly related to the individual's life;
2. When abstract ideas undergo long-term emotional empowerment (from childhood onwards), especially when abstract events undergo a process of imparting extreme opinions, attitudes, beliefs or worldviews, such as when an individual undergoes a process of religious or ideological indoctrination. In this case, Meaning 2 becomes a strong (religious, ideological, political) belief, which directs one’s life. In these cases, Meaning 2, acquired meaning, becomes extreme and determines the life of the individual and his or her group. I call this ‘Extreme Meaning 2’.

As can be seen, the difference between Meaning 1 and Meaning 2, for a normal person, lies in the type of stimuli that elicit cognitive events and the magnitude of their designated meaning. Meaning 1 is created by sensory stimuli (light, sound, etc.) that, when they are in one’s state of consciousness, impart life-meaning, a sense of well-being, and pleasure in being alive. In contrast, Meaning 2 is created by consciously connecting to the values and goals developed by society (through socialization and learning), which the individual assimilates completely or partially. Sometimes, as a result of deep internalization of social goals and values (such as the importance of family, loyalty to homeland, religious observance) that society imparts to individuals through special means (such as identification with a leader), certain abstract events become so powerfully significant that they become the sole meaning of life, and completely guide a person’s direction in life. To clarify this, I offer several examples.

Each morning, Reuben opens his bedroom window, watches the sunrise, smells the trees, sees the flowers damp with the morning dew, and hears birds sing. Happy with these conscious feelings of life and being alive, he experiences Meaning 1 (Innate Meaning). On Saturday afternoon, Reuben goes with his friend Yaron to an important soccer match between the Hapoel and Maccabi teams. Yaron obtained front row, center tickets. They eat, drink, and cheer during the game; in short, they both experience great pleasure. Maccabi wins, and Yaron is almost out of his mind with joy, because he is a Maccabi fan. His life is organized around the team’s games and its fan club, and he travels to all Maccabi competitions abroad. However, although Reuben is aware of and enjoys the game between the two competing teams, this does not create in Reuben an Extreme Meaning 2 level of meaning, as it does for Yaron. Reuben’s Meaning 2 also derives from awareness of the game, but it is not as strong as it is for Yaron. This is the difference between the low degree of significance that Reuben attributes to the Maccabi soccer team and the high degree of meaning that Yaron attributes to this team.

While an Extreme Meaning 2, such as a religious belief or ideology, can disappear from a person's life, Meaning 1 remains, although it may be damaged in some cases (as demonstrated below). A life-meaning crisis usually happens in relation to Extreme Meaning 2. For example, Yaron, in the example above, may stop being a devoted fan of the Maccabi soccer team and find different life goals. This may happen as a result of membership in the Maccabi fan club becoming too great a financial burden, or the club attracting new members whose behavior is not compatible with Yaron’s personality and taste.

Many people have become disillusioned with fascist or communist ideology, and their life-meaning changed completely. Similarly, many people change their way of life because they stop believing in God and become secular. This represents a tremendous spiritual crisis that also involves a change in lifestyle. A similar crisis also happens among people whose secular way of life has become dangerous (for example as a result of promiscuity or drug addiction) and the individual seeks salvation and a framework that offer protection from mental and physical deterioration, through faith in God or by joining a religious cult. In most cases involving a crisis in Extreme Meaning 2, a person’s Meaning 1 is not damaged or dissipated.

The opposite is also true. The fact that an individual goes from one way of life to another, for example, from fascism to democracy, from a belief in God to secularism, shows that the person’s innate meaning of life has been maintained at a reasonable level, and this enables the individual to continue to live and seek a new way of life. However, there are extreme cases that also destroy Meaning 1. In essence, there are two cases of this: anguish from aging and illness, or loss of a close family member (spouse, offspring). In the first case, disease and loss of control over basic daily needs greatly diminishes one’s enjoyment of sensory stimuli. A person may feel like a prisoner trapped at home, and may experience incessant fatigue and unbearable physical pain. In addition, the sensory stimuli that the person can still experience no longer produce enjoyment of life or awareness of pleasant sensations; for example, food may taste bland. In this case, a difficult question naturally arises: What is the point of life? In this case, a person loses Meaning 1, the innate meaning of life.

In the case of the loss of a close family member, such a blow can destroy a person’s will to live. First, Meaning 2 is damaged. That is, the way of life built around the cultivation and preservation of the family unit is destroyed, and the person finds no alternative meaning in life. The individual begins a process of withdrawal and disengagement from society and the blocking of both sensory and abstract stimuli. At the end of this process of disengagement, cutting off one’s social network and eventually losing contact with the outside world, Meaning 1 also fades. As a result, the person no longer has anything to support the desire to continue living. Indeed, in Israel, there have been a number of tragic cases in which a father committed suicide on the grave of his son who died prematurely (often in Israel’s wars against its enemies).

There is another difference between Meaning 1 and Meaning 2 (ordinary or extreme). When a normal person consciously takes in sensory stimuli (for example, seeing a landscape, hearing music, drinking coffee) he is not mistaken as to its innate meaning (Meaning 1) and does not have to try to interpret this meaning because it is automatically understood. The person may focus on one sensation or another, but will not err regarding the nature of the sensation being experienced. In contrast, a person may misinterpret Meaning 2 and may be discouraged in attempts to understand it. For example, people may be discouraged when trying to find a job that suits their talents or to find a suitable spouse with whom to begin a family. As a result, another important factor that may undermine Meaning 2 - the disappointment experienced in trying to realize or properly understand this type of meaning – is the tension between the individual's desire to search for Meaning 2 and the fulfillment of that desire.

**How is consciousness related to mental states and how is meaning conveyed?**

Thus far, I have focused on describing the main characteristics of Meaning 1: Innate Meaning as it compares to Meaning 2: Acquired Meaning (ordinary or extreme). I explain that Meaning 1 is the innate life-meaning that allows people (and higher animals) to have the will to live, despite the difficulties and pain that may affect them from time to time. Next, I will address two important questions that underlie this description:

1. How is consciousness related to mental representations (external and internal)?
2. How are conscious mental representations designated with various degrees of meaning?

Here I must admit in full honesty that I do not have complete answers to these two questions. In fact, I can only give some tentative answers. I will begin with the first question.

**Consciousness and Mental Representation**: The conditions under which a particular MS (representing an event that is external or internal to a person) goes from a state of unconsciousness to a state of consciousness, and the ways this happens, have been described in the Conscious Unit (CU) model, developed by Rakover (2019). This model is developed at the functional level rather than the algorithmic or neurophysiological level (see this distinction in Marr, 1982). In brief, the CU model suggests that there is a linking mechanism in the cognitive system that connects units of consciousness to an MS, when certain link conditions are realized. As a result, an unconsciously represented MS is transformed into a consciously represented one; that is, the MS is now in a conscious state. The process of inducing consciousness occurs only if the link-condition, which is also part of the person’s cognitive system, is fulfilled. Once this condition is fulfilled, the linking mechanism can act upon the MS and induce consciousness of it. Following the metaphor of short-term memory (STM), the following process can be proposed: once the link-condition for an MS is achieved, the MS becomes conscious. If the link-condition for the MS is no longer fulfilled, the MS is removed from consciousness. The number of MSs that may achieve a link-condition at one time is quite small, so there must be room for each new MS that achieves the link-condition and enters consciousness. That is, a new MS pushes out an old MS, and the old MS is removed from consciousness. This model, along with some additional assumptions, can explain a number of everyday phenomena, including some problems that faced previous theories such as Higher-Order (HO) theories of consciousness. For example, this model makes it easy to explain the following two observations.

First observation: in front of me is a beautiful black-haired Persian cat. The cat-MS achieved the link-condition and as a result I became aware of this cat and can enjoy its beauty. I turn my head 180 degrees, and now face a window overlooking a green grove of trees. The landscape-MS has achieved the link-condition, and now I am aware of the view through the window, and am not visually aware of the beautiful cat, whose representation is no longer in the link-condition.

Second observation: I made an appointment to meet a friend at the Green Bird café in Tel Aviv. During the drive from Haifa to Tel Aviv, I listened to classical music, Vardi’s Requiem (which in my opinion is excellent operatic music for waking up) and I didn’t think about the meeting once. As I entered Tel Aviv, I was reminded of the meeting. I glanced at the clock and ascertained that I would arrive on time. Again, using the CU model, it is easy to explain these cognitive events: being conscious of the meeting, removal of the meeting from consciousness, and return of the meeting to a state of consciousness.

Similarly, the current model is able to easily explain consciousness of sensory stimuli and even abstract stimuli. The basic explanation, which can be applied to each specific case, is based on the idea that various MSs move in and out of the link-condition when the units of consciousness are introduced and removed, respectively.

What is missing from this model? Essentially, there is no good explanation for how the linking mechanism works. How is the sense of consciousness expressed in these MSs? How is the unit of consciousness that has been created by neurophysiological processes in the brain used by this linking mechanism? However, as stated above, these are questions for which satisfactory answers have not yet been found (see more below).

**Consciousness and Meaning**: How does consciousness designate meaning to an MS? (As explained above, an MS is a theoretical concept that represents one’s external or inner world.) So far, the answer to this question has been that consciousness is a necessary condition for meaning, and that under normal conditions consciousness induces and imparts meaning to an MS. What is the nature of this meaning? The fundamental idea is that meaning is perceived as a positive, pleasurable feeling, essentially a sense of being alive, arising from the fact that one is in a state of consciousness with regard to an MS. But again, as in the answer to the previous question regarding the CU model, so too the CM model, in which meaning is dependent on consciousness, does not provide a description of the mechanism that performs the function and purpose for which it was designed: designating meaning to a state of consciousness. What I have been able to show is that consciousness is a prerequisite for meaning by providing some examples in which an individual suffers from abnormal states as a result of brain injury, poor health, or major spiritual crises. In these extreme situations, a person’s sense of meaning has been damaged and the conscious mechanism that designates meaning has been compromised. As a result of these crises, enjoyment of life may disappear, and suffering may increase to such a degree that the person may no longer wish to live. I cannot offer more than this, although I believe that indirect support for the CM model can be given by the following argument.

It is possible to suggest that consciousness is also a necessary condition for understanding. That is, unconsciousness has no sense of understanding the various explanations and reasons for phenomena occurring in the world. In my book on explanation (Rakover, 2018) I discussed a number of scholars who raise the argument that there is no understanding in the absence of consciousness. I offered the following illustration as proof of this. A robot can easily be programmed to provide the correct answers to any questions related to, for example, classical physics. This robot is able to answer any question about the free fall of objects and explain each calculation with a detailed explanation based on Galileo’s law of falling bodies or Newton’s theory of gravity. Moreover, the robot will never lose patience and will always find a way to offer various additional explanations for whatever was not understood by human students. However, despite the robot’s excellent performance as a teacher who is never wrong and whose explanations would be assessed by experts as being perfect, the following question arises: Can it be said that this robot technically ‘understands’ its own flawless explanations in the same way that the weakest human student understands them? In my opinion, the answer is negative, because the robot does not have the consciousness of even the weakest student.

**Meaningless and absurdity according to Camus and Nagel, in line with the current approach**

In this section, I mainly rely on the following sources: Camus (1985, 1992), Lurie (2002), Nagel (1971, 1994), and Sagi (2000). Camus’ basic argument that life is an absurd state is based on two contradictory concepts. On the one hand, individuals seek to understand the world and their place in it through explanations that unite everything in one meaningful whole (such as belief in God, which Camus rejected). On the other, the world turns out to be silent, indifferent, and incomprehensible, and the specter of death hangs over everything as the only absolute certainty. As noted, this state of life is absurd and triggers a vast spectrum of negative emotions, including the feeling that life is futile; fear of a world that is mysterious, incomprehensible, indifferent, and alienating; dread of the uncertainty and anguish that one may endure, and fear of death that is inevitable. One may wish to commit suicide in order to end this absurd madness once and for all. Indeed, from this absurdity Camus (1992) concludes, in his philosophical treatise *The Myth of Sisyphus* (which, according to Sartre, explains his novel *The Stranger*, see Sagi, 2000) the dramatic assertion, “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy,” (p. 13). Camus chooses life, and therefore struggles against incomprehensibility, lives with absurdity, and does not succumb to it. According to this approach of rebelling against the absurd, Camus sees human life as equivalent to the life Sisyphus, who was punished by the gods by having to push a heavy stone up a mountain only for it to roll back to the bottom just as he reaches the top - an act that is repeated an infinite number of times. Camus suggests that Sisyphus’ act was not a futile and useless torment, but rather a life full of positive and joyful activity. He writes in the conclusion of this essay, “The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy,” (p. 126). In other words, it is the insistence on continuing through this difficult life, despite its disheartening absurdity and meaninglessness, the very choice to live, that gives a person a sense of happiness.

Camus’ outlook on absurdity and method for dealing with the absurd (not by committing suicide, which only promotes death, and although it may end great and unbearable anguish, also puts an end to the joys of life) have elicited many discussions (see Landau, 2017; Lurie, 2002; Sagi, 2000). [It is worth noting here that Camus (1971, 2001) changed his opinion and decided that absurdity is only the beginning of the problem, and later suggested that social unity might help in fighting physical disease, as in his book *The Plague*, as well as in the struggle against Communist dictatorships.]

For criticism of Camus’ concept of absurdity and alternatives to it, we can consider Nagel (1971, 1994), who tries to understand the causes of absurdity, rejects a number of reasons behind it, and finally offers a different explanation from that of Camus. For example, in rejecting the inevitability of death as a reason for absurdity, Nagel (1994) writes, “Perhaps you have had the thought that nothing really matters, because in two hundred years we’ll all be dead. This is a peculiar thought, because it’s not clear why the fact that we’ll be dead in two hundred years should imply that nothing we do now really matters,” (p. 111). It does not seem to me that Nagel’s puzzlement has great weight, because it is possible to accept the argument that the inevitability of death does impart meaninglessness to life [see also Landau, 2017 for additional arguments against Nagel’s claims (1971, 1994)].

1. An individual, ‘Uri’ believes that a meaningful life is a life of important deeds;
2. Uri believes that life is meaningless because death is inevitable;
3. Conclusion: Uri perceives his life as meaningless.

Similarly, the following argument can be made:

1. Uri believes that the meaning of life includes the desire to life and will to stay alive;
2. Uri believes there is no meaning to life because of death (or for any other reason);
3. Conclusion: Uri feels there is no point in the continuation of life (and, possibly, that therefore it should be ended immediately).

Finally, Nagel offers the following explanation for the absurdity of life. According to him, absurdity arises from a comparison between a person’s subjective perception of himself and his life as a matter of enormous significance, and an objective universal perception, which makes the subjective attribution of meaning seem completely irrelevant. Therefore, Nagel (1971) writes:

‘If there is a philosophical sense of absurdity, however, it must arise from the perception of something universal – some respect in which pretension and reality inevitably clash for us all. This condition is supplied, I shall argue, by the collision between the seriousness with which we take our lives and the perceptual possibility of regarding everything about which we are as arbitrary, or open to doubt.’ (p. 718).

On this latter point, he adds: ‘Yet we have always available a point of view outside the particular from our lives, from which the seriousness appears gratuitous.’ (p. 719). [I will call this reasoning the ‘gratuitous argument’.]

For example, from Uri’s subjective point of view, his life seems significant and important, but from a general viewpoint of the entire universe, his small, daily life does not matter at all. Objectively, it does not matter if Uri exists or not, just as it does not matter if some small icy comet is pulled into the sun’s gravitational field and completely burned up. Whether or not this comet existed is completely unimportant.

Nagel explores a number of ways to rid oneself of this sense of absurdity. He eventually suggests that instead of following Camus’ path of resisting and rebelling, the absurdity of life should be viewed with irony. Consider, for example, one of the paths that Nagel (1994) rejected, namely that Uri’s small and mundane life can become significant by engaging in broad religious, social, or political activities that will make the world a better place. However, this suggestion does not solve the problem, and so Nagel writes: “If one’s life has a point as a part of something larger, it is still possible to ask about that larger thing, what is the point of it? Either there’s an answer in terms of something still larger or there isn’t. If there is, we simply repeat the question. If there isn’t, then our search for a point has come to an end with something, which has no point.” (p. 114).

This kind of philosophical argument is called ‘infinite regression’. For example, a given phenomenon is explained by reason A, which then raises the question, what is the cause of A? When reason B is offered, it is then asked, what is the cause of B? And so on, in an endless chain of questions about the origin of the causation. In the present case, can this endless chain of ‘what is the point?’ ever end? If the answer is negative, then the proposed way of dealing with absurdity is useless. However, if this chain can be ended, the proposed method may be helpful. The question, then, is how this infinite regression can be ended.

The answer I propose to end the infinite regression is the basis of the CM model, namely innate meaning, the meaning imparted by conscious awareness of the perception of sensory stimuli. (Again, I will say that this consciousness and meaning also exist, to some extent, in the higher animals.) To clarify this answer, which is also the response to the current approach to the meaninglessness and absurdity of life that emerge from Camus’ philosophy, I will take a step back and first describe, in a nutshell, the concept of absurdity according to these two philosophers.

Although Camus and Nagel both address the phenomenon of absurdity, they offer different explanations for its occurrence; that is, for the conditions resulting in a sense of the absurdity of life. For Camus, absurdity arises from the gap between one’s desire to understand the world and his place in it, and the knowledge that the world is incomprehensible, and that life must end in death. In contrast, for Nagel, absurdity is based on the discrepancy between an individual’s subjective perception that he and his actions are of great importance, and the objective perception that man and his actions have no importance.

In contrast to both of these approaches, the CM model suggests that the chances of a person feeling insignificant and experiencing life as absurd are quite low. This is because a normal person’s life is infused with various levels of meaning, from Innate Meaning through Ordinary-Acquired Meaning to Extreme-Acquired Meaning. It is true that life crises can damage these various types of meaning, but it seems to me that very rarely is the crisis is so terrible that the innate meaning of life is destroyed and a person faces the world without any defense, and expresses despair, depression, and the endlessly echoing thought that life is pointless. As an example, I will briefly describe the conclusions drawn by the author of this book in response to the Holocaust during World War II, which caused me to stop believing in God and to perceive man’s nature as evil at its very core (beliefs I hold unchanged to this day), conclusions that emerged from a long-term spiritual crisis. This crisis developed once I realized the full horror of the Holocaust that was designed, organized, and executed, with extreme efficiency, by the loathsome Nazis. To continue with my personal testimony, I must say that despite the dramatic change in my worldview, I never lost a sense of innate meaning or my path in life, which is associated with university studies and the establishment of a family; I continued living my life, and all this implies. However, I completely rejected the Extreme-Acquired Meaning that had been imparted to me throughout my childhood and youth; that is, Jewish education, belief in God, and the perception that Jews are God’s chosen people. This acquired meaning was transmitted to me in multiple ways, until I became aware of the horror of the Holocaust. (To tell the truth, this education in no way resembles that of ultra-orthodox Judaism.)

It can therefore be said that Innate Meaning is the last line of defense for an individual undergoing a serious crisis, during which he rejects and repudiates the meanings his life had before. One may reject his religion, political beliefs, firmly-held ideology – in short, undergo a massive cognitive-mental crisis – and yet not lose one’s sense of innate meaning, which is imparted by virtue of consciousness, and which grants meaning to all sensory stimuli. Meaning 1 will protect an individual from the sense of meaninglessness and absurdity, so that despite the rejection of Extreme-Acquired Meaning (religious belief, social or political ideology) he may still find meaning in life through the light of dawn, the scent of flowers, the warm pleasantness of the sun on his face, and the love of his spouse. It is not necessary to see in his life a rebellion against absurdity or to perceive it as ironic. His life is filled with various types of meaning, some of which are innately imparted to him (Meaning 1) and some are imparted to him by the society to which he belongs (Meaning 2). As mentioned earlier, these meanings are imparted via educational institutions and their representatives, beginning with parents and family, through kindergarten, school, the military, and finally higher education institutes such as university. The individual begins to acquire these meanings from the moment of birth. For the most part, he internalizes them, and changes or adjusts them according to his natural tendencies. According to the present approach, Meaning 1 can be seen as the most basic meaning that evolved in mankind as a result of the development of consciousness and the ability to be self-conscious. It can be assumed that this ability is the result of evolutionary processes, because a certain level of consciousness is also found in the higher animals. For example, when a lioness in a normal physical and mental state stalks her prey, she is in a state of full sensory awareness, and her own actions and those of her prey are infused with great meaning for her (and for her cubs and the male lion at the head of the family pack).

According to Camus, the meaninglessness and absurdity of life result from the incomprehensibility of the world and the inevitability of death. Earlier, I challenged this idea, and argued, (a) that science manages to explain, to a great extent, many of the phenomena in the world, and (b) that there are many people (myself included) for whom death does not inspire fear, but they are afraid instead of the illness, loss of control, and despair that old age can bring. (To be honest, my fear is not so much death, but rather the fear that I will not be able to fulfill and complete projects that are highly important to me. This unfortunate realization is sad and very upsetting.) However, even if we make a general assumption that man is unable to fully understand the world and that the fear of death has a profound effect on us all, I still believe that nature and evolution have protected man from these negative events through Meaning 1 – innate meaning – which is projected on to the representations in the individual’s consciousness, to the MSs that are in a state of consciousness.

As an example, we can consider Uri returning home at dusk. On the drive back to his house after a busy day, Uri hears a radio announcement about a new discovery in astrophysics. A satellite sent into deep space decades before discovered a new galaxy, millions of light years from Earth, a discovery that raises a number of new and unsolved problems. This knowledge gives Uri the disturbing thought that we will never understand the universe, which is a powerful and fearful mystery. Moreover, as soon as he parks his car in front of his house, Uri receives a text message on his smartphone informing him that his good friend from youth died suddenly of a stroke. As a result, Uri is overwhelmed by the fear of death, and sits in his car, in a state of shock. As he is sitting there, the door of his house opens, and his son and a friend come out to play soccer. The shouts and laughter of the children penetrate his consciousness and gradually distract him from his gloom. He gets out of his car, kicks the ball that had rolled towards him back to the two players, who don’t even bother to thank him because they are so immersed in the game. He watches them, delighted with the rambunctious spectacle, smiles, and enters his home, where the smell of his favorite stew prepared by his beloved wife gives him a great appetite. He changes out of his work clothes into something more comfortable and hears Rossini’s comic opera, “The Barber of Seville”, which his wife is crazy about. She insists that anyone who is depressed should listen to Rossini, because it will immediately drive away his depression, and that Rossini’s music is like a life-saving pill that is effective immediately. Uri thins she is perfectly right.

According to Nagel, the meaninglessness of life and absurdity rise from the objective perspective that, from the point of view of the universe, there is no value to man’s actions - everything is negated by the endlessness of the universe. Some interesting arguments can be made against Nagel’s ‘gratuitous argument’ (see above). First, while the endlessness of the universe may invoke fear in some people due to our ignorance and uncertainty, in other people this situation is precisely what arouses their curiosity and desire to explore and investigate. This difference may be related to genetic development, and some empirical evidence supporting this hypothesis has been found in mice (e.g., Crusio, 2001). Moreover, one might suggest that it is difficult to understand how humans could have spread across and populated the entire planet, as well as man’s great efforts in modern times to explore outer space, without assuming that people have a high level of curiosity that overcomes the natural anxieties arising from the uncertainty of such explorations.

Second, it can be suggested that the truth is that an individual person does not matter, and that things that are taking place light years from where he is have no effect on his life in the here-and-now. What matters to a person is what affects him in the present, and what the people who are important in his life think of him. In this case, consider an artist who is given two options:

(A) His artistic work will be greatly appreciated in his life but forgotten after his death;

(B) His artistic work will not be appreciated during his life, but it will be after his death.

The artist would prefer option (A) over option (B). Similarly, a physicist would prefer option 1 – that his theory would be appreciated by a small number of expert physicists and not by the general public (i.e., the physicist would not become a media star like a rock or pop singer) over option 2 – that his theory will be appreciated by the general public and rejected by a small number of expert physicists.

As in the example described above, even if we accept Nagel’s ‘gratuitous argument’, it can still be suggested that nature and evolution protect man from this through Meaning 1 – innate meaning – which is projected on to the representations in the individual’s consciousness, to the MSs that are in a state of consciousness.

To illustrate, let’s look again at Uri returning to his house in the evening. As he parked his car, he was thinking that he had been doing this same routine for many years and that, in fact, his whole life was one big, dreary routine, and that if anyone was observing the Earth from space, he would not even notice Uri’s routine. Moreover, both Uri and his life are unnecessary and meaningless – it doesn’t matter whether he exists or not. Just as these depressing thoughts were echoing in his consciousness, the door of his house opened and his son came outside with his friend to play soccer ... (see the rest of the story above).

In addition to the fact that the CM model successfully protects one against the absurdity of life through the basic infrastructure of Meaning 1, even when acquired meaning is lost, this model does not raise the negative consequences that are raised by the approach of Camus and Nagel regarding the meaninglessness of life.

Absurdity, Camus believes, can provoke a person to commit suicide, because if everything is meaningless, death is inevitable, and life is nothing but absurdity, then what is the point in making the endless effort to continue to exist? (see also an interesting discussion on this issue in Landau, 2017). Indeed, as has been said before, Camus opens the discussion of *The Myth of Sisyphus* by saying that suicide is the fundamental philosophical problem. The problem with the ‘absurdity-suicide’ argument is that almost every possible action that can be derived from the state of absurdity includes two mutually contradictory assumptions. In fact, this slogan can be suggested: ‘Absurdity leads to X’, in which X represents every possible action. For example, Camus suggests that the rebellion is a reaction to absurdity; but justifications can be made for other reactions to it as well. If all lives are absurd, then why should I alone commit suicide? Maybe I should take with me a few other miserable souls whose lives are meaningless; then I will be like the heroic Samson in the Bible who said ‘Let me die with the Philistines’. Or maybe I will just kill for no reason, because killing doesn’t make any sense either and is absurd. Indeed, the murder of the Arab by Meursault in Camus’ novel *The Stranger* can be interpreted as an absurd act that has no logical explanation! (The description before the murder includes the effect of the heat and the sun, sweat pouring down his face, and the knife that the Arab pulled out while lying down. When Meursault tries to use the sun as an explanation for the murder, the jury laughs.) The scene in which Meursault is sentenced and charged with murder also seems largely Kafkaesque, absurd: what is the point of discussing Meursault’s indifferent attitude to his mother’s death?

Camus may have realized that absurdity stems from everything (including murder, or drinking and eating oneself to death! Why not?). Therefore, he changes his approach in the novel *The Plague* and in his essay *The Rebel,* in which he centers the discussion on the possibility of murder and offers solidarity and fraternity between people as a solution (see also an interesting discussion on this topic by Sagi, 2000). In *The Rebel*, Camus writes:

Awareness of the absurd, when we first claim to deduce a rule of behavior from it, makes murder seem a matter of indifference, to say the least, and hence possible. If we believe in nothing, if nothing has any meaning and if we can affirm no values whatsoever, then everything is possible and nothing has any importance. (p. 8)

He continues:

Hence, if we claim to adopt the absurdist attitude, we must prepare ourselves to commit murder, thus admitting that logic is more important than scruples that we consider illusory. (p. 9)

Similar statements can be made about Nagel’s views on absurdity. If, from an objective perspective as opposed to a subjective one, it emerges that human life has no meaning or value, and it doesn’t matter if a person exists or not, creating absurdity, then why behave only ironically (as Nagel suggests)? Why not commit suicide, murder, rape? Or even find solace in the inevitability of death? In this case, a person who has no accomplishments may say, “It is true that I am nothing; but the richest man in my city, the best-known author, the most famous scientist, and the most successful politician – all, without exception, all will die exactly like I will! So, what is the difference between me and them?”