**Chapter 7: Life-meaning as an explanatory and explained concept**

*In the present chapter I examine the central concept of this book, life-meaning, from two perspectives. First, I ask how this concept can be explained. Second, I explore how this concept can be used to explain individuals’ behavior. Drawing on the life story of the painter Paul Gauguin, who underwent a major life crisis, the current analysis arrives at a developmental model, which indicates how a life crisis often causes a person to replace a previous life-meaning with a new one. Thus, the person’s behavior can be explained in three stages: first according to the previous life-meaning, then according to the crisis and its causes, and finally according to the new life-meaning. One factor that may cause a life crisis is awareness of the inevitability of death. This raises the question of how people arrive at the fantastical desire for eternal life and the hope of having a major and lasting impact on the world. This perplexing question is rooted in the following argument: human life is limited to a kind of metaphorical bubble or vesicle, which cannot receive external inputs or exert an impact outside the life-bubble. Therefore, such aspirations exist only in a person’s unrestrained imagination. This chapter develops an explanation of life-meanings (Innate and Acquired) with the help of three functional systems found in humans. It then discusses the type of explanatory models appropriate to address the complex concept of life-meaning*.

The majority of people live, until the day of their death, without undergoing severe crises that bring them to the verge of self-annihilation or that cause them to lose all sense of life-meaning and their path in life. Nevertheless, a small percentage of people do undergo such disruptive life crises. For example, some people fail to properly realize their way of life and achieve their Acquired Meanings. They may divorce, change their profession, move to another place or even another country, shift from religiosity to secularism or vice versa, or become addicted to drugs. Occasionally, they manage to escape their unbearable situation.

Previously, I described the terrible crisis that Tolstoy went through at the age of fifty, during which he experienced a sense of meaninglessness and rejected his previous way of life. Tolstoy emerged from this difficult crisis and found a new life-meaning, namely by becoming a religious man. However, his particular religious approach was inconsistent with the position of the Russian Provoslavic Church.

As another instructive example of a change in life-meaning, I describe a second artist who underwent a major life crisis; the painter Paul Gauguin. He was born in 1848 in France and died there in 1903. Gauguin was married to a Danish woman (Mette-Sophie Gad), who bore him five children. He worked in Denmark as an investment agent and began painting as a hobby. In 1884, when he was in his mid-thirties, Gauguin abandoned his family and moved to Paris to paint. He briefly shared a residence with Vincent van Gogh in Arles in southern France. Eventually, Gauguin emigrated to French Polynesia, where he lived and painted for many years.

Somerset Maugham’s famous novel “The Moon and Sixpence” (1986) is based on Gauguin’s life. This novel depicts the life of the protagonist of the story, Charles Strickland, a London stockbroker who, at the age of forty, abandoned his wife and children, and moved to Paris and then Tahiti, and dedicated his life to painting (for a discussion of this book see Landau, 2017.) Maugham graphically portrays this great rupture in Strickland’s life: the abandonment of his family, his impoverished and miserable life in Paris and Tahiti, his indifference to everything, and most of all his shocking selfishness. His egoism is manifest in the fact that Strickland robbed a friend who cared for him during a deadly illness. His neglect and exploitation of his wife led her to commit suicide, but even this horrible event did not affect Strickland. The explanation Maugham offers for Strickland’s behavior is that he was madly engaged in the pursuit of artistic beauty through painting, and nothing else interested him in any way. Strickland eventually died of leprosy in Tahiti.

This novel offers a possible explanation for the life of Paul Gauguin. It is probable that Strickland’s insanity – his obsession with painting – also gripped Paul Gauguin. Gauguin and Strickland share rebelliousness against the governmental and religious establishment. However, various differences can be discerned between the details of the lives of Gauguin and Strickland. Unlike the apathetic Strickland, Gauguin was highly sensitive to people’s reactions to his paintings. He exhibited his works, sold paintings, and even served as an interpreter for his art, specifically that created in Tahiti. Moreover, Gauguin missed his children and sent letters to the wife he left behind.

The point I wish to emphasize is that these two important artists (the writer Tolstoy and the painter Gauguin) went through major life crises that led them to change or abandon their previous way of life and start a significantly different way of life. That is, the loss of life-meaning does not necessarily lead to the desire to end one’s life by committing suicide. In the vast majority of cases, the opposite occurs; people change or abandon a previous way of life and choose a new and different path. In the cases of Tolstoy and Gauguin, one can see that the seeds of their life-meanings and new paths in life had already sprouted in their previous lives. Tolstoy had previously been preoccupied with religion, the living conditions of the peasants, and, of course, literature. Gauguin began painting as a hobby while he was still married. Over time, painting took over Gauguin’s entire world, to the point that he abandoned his previous life and family in Denmark.

Based on these two cases, it can be suggested that often the end of one way of life constitutes the beginning of a new one. The majority of divorcees remarry. Leaving one profession is often done in order to begin another. People undertake the difficult effort of moving from one country to another in order to improve their lives. Religion may be abandoned in favor of a secular way of life, or vice versa. In short, it is possible to propose an empirical generalization that when people lose their way in life, they strive to find another path constituting a new life-meaning, especially if the seeds of the new way of life were already planted in their previous way of life.

These examples raise the question of how life-meaning explains a person’s behavior. In answer, I consider again the life of Paul Gauguin. Until 1885, Gauguin lived in Denmark. He married Mette-Sophie Gad and established a family with her. They lived together for about twelve years and had five children. Throughout this time, Gauguin was following the typical way of life that his society had instilled in him. In fact, this lifestyle is generally accepted in most human societies, whether in France, Denmark, or elsewhere – namely, the establishment of a family unit and concern for one’s livelihood. It would be difficult to explain Gauguin’s behavior during this period without taking into account the fact that he had internalized this standard type of life-meaning and realized it successfully for many years.

Before 1885, Gauguin began to suffer from a severe crisis, which eventually led him to abandon his family in favor of a new way of life that held tremendous meaning for him - dedication of his life to the art of painting. A number of factors led to this crisis and help explain Gauguin’s behavior during this period, such as his difficulties in adapting to Denmark and its language, and his dissatisfaction with his progress as an amateur painter. Gauguin’s subsequent conduct can be explained on the basis of his new life-meaning; devotion to the art of painting. He perceived this way of life as being in accordance with his natural inclinations. This analysis of Paul Gauguin’s life is based on a three-stage model:

Stage 1: The individual’s conduct prior to the crisis stage can be satisfactorily explained by a previously acquired life-meaning.

Stage 2: The individual’s conduct during the turbulent crisis stage can be satisfactorily explained by the undermining of the previous life-meaning, leading to restlessness and dissatisfaction. Many of the factors responsible for creating a crisis are rooted in the previous life-meaning. The person experiences problems for which the previous meaning fails to offer a satisfactory solution.

Stage 3: A new life-meaning is acquired, which satisfactorily explains an individual’s conduct during the period following the crisis. It would be difficult to explain the person’s new conduct according to the previous life-meaning, or by referring to the factors responsible for the crisis, whose seeds were planted in the previous life-meaning. The individual’s behavior and conduct are understandable in light of the newly adopted way of life.

Here I must emphasize two points. First, Innate Meaning accompanies individuals through all three stages. It helps them through a crisis and the subsequent changes caused by replacing an old life-meaning with a new one. Second, this three-stage model is based on the idea of a scientific revolution as outlined by Kuhn (1970). Scientific revolution also consists of three stages. First, scientists conduct research in accordance with an accepted and prevailing scientific paradigm of their time. As their research continues, a large number of unexpected phenomena are observed and data are collected that are inconsistent with the prevailing paradigm. A period of scientific crisis arises. In order to address these problems and resolve the crisis, a new paradigm emerges which revolutionizes the previous paradigm. For example, we may briefly consider the major revolution in cosmology, when Copernicus’ heliocentric theory that the Earth orbits the Sun replaced Ptolemy’s previously accepted geocentric theory that the Sun orbits the Earth. Similarly, an old, established life-meaning may be fertile ground for the growth of problems that cannot be resolved by this life-meaning. As a result, the individual enters a period of severe crisis, at the end of which a new life-meaning is adopted, as a solution to this crisis. (Here I refrain from discussing the possibility that a new meaning does not emerge and the individual lives in a period of ongoing crisis.)

**Life crises that undermine individuals’ life-meaning**

As can be seen from this overview, many possible reasons for life crises are related to the circumstances of the individual’s life. One major cause of a crisis is a misperception or unsuccessful realization of the individual’s path in life. Such a crisis may emerge as a result of losing one’s job and the resultant economic difficulties, other major disappointments, one’s own serious illness, or the illness or death of family members.

In my view, Tolstoy’s crisis arose as a result of the fact that the great Russian writer had exhausted all his memories in writing his two massive realistic novels, “War and Peace”, and “Anna Karenina.” He had no remaining raw material from which he could create another major realistic novel. Gauguin was disappointed by his progress as an amateur painter. Camus, like other existentialists, saw no point in life because death is its inevitable end.

Many difficulties that individuals encounter undermine their life-meaning and lead to major disappointments. However, these are not fatal blows. In most cases, a person can recover from an economic setback, recuperate after an illness, and even overcome the depression following the death of a beloved family member. However, the perception that death is inevitable is a serious and fateful component, which may lead to the emotionally dangerous conclusion that there is no point or meaning in life, and the only logical way to end the endless cycle of anguish is to commit suicide. Indeed, Tolstoy wrote in “My Confession” that he considered suicide several times, but never acted on this depressive thought. Camus said that suicide is the most important philosophical issue to discuss.

It can therefore be suggested that the inevitability of death evokes a wide range of emotional reactions in individuals. The general empirical observation of Birth, Blossoming and Death (BBD) does not logically evoke any particular human response, neither suicide nor mindless pursuit of pleasure, neither belief in idols nor in one God who rules the entire universe. These responses are based on the individual’s emotional system, which essentially evokes in each person a strong emotion: fear of death! This also includes fear of illness and suffering in old age, fear of the unknown after death, fear of not living as one wanted, fear of not being able to complete things that one considers vital, fear of losing everything related to Innate Meaning (e.g., being unable to see, hear, or feel) and fear of losing everything related to an Acquired Meaning (Ordinary or Extreme) – e.g., no longer being able to enjoy expanding one’s mind, not being able to read wonderful literature, or no longer being able to participate in the effort to improve one’s society. Moreover, the fear of death goes hand-in-hand with the indisputable and clear recognition that every passing second is lost and will never return. Each lost second is a kind of miniature death. (This is easy to ignore; only at the end of a week or month do people suddenly notice that time has sped by, and say to themselves, “How quickly this week or month has passed, like sand slipping through my fingers.”). This raises two important questions:

1. How does a person deal with the certainty of death, and the passing of each second as a miniature death, the fear of which shatters life-meanings and leads to suicidal thoughts?
2. What is the explanation for a person being overwhelmed by the fear of death, even though rational thought does not necessarily evoke this kind of emotional response?

**Coping**

According to the Consciousness Meaning (CM) model, Innate Meaning enables people to cope with the certainty and finality of death, as well as with the miniature deaths that occur throughout life as the seconds slip by and disappear, one after the other. As long as people are in a state of consciousness, they constantly receive sensory stimuli that fill them with a clear sense of being alive in the present moment, of having life-meaning. They appreciate having lived until the present, experience how pleasant it is to be alive at the moment, and anticipate continuing to live into the future. Acquired Meaning (Ordinary or Extreme) cannot erase a person’s awareness of the inevitability of death, nor the sense of time passing. A person can temporarily forget these fears while engaged in daily life or striving to fulfill one’s dreams (personal, social, ideological, religious). But they can never completely eliminate these fears, which repeatedly return to one’s consciousness. What can successfully fight and eventually overcome the fear of time rushing by is the clear knowledge and awareness that during each of those seconds, one was alive and fully conscious, aware of light and colors, sounds, smells, the taste of a drink. In short, a person understands that those seconds were not wasted, because during those seconds the individual was fully conscious, full of life, and aware of being alive.

**Rational thought**

Knowledge and awareness of the inevitability of death does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that one should commit suicide. Here I will state two logical arguments supporting this observation.

**Inevitability of death**. In order to draw any conclusion from the inevitability of death, we must add several assumptions to clarify feelings about death. It does not seem reasonable to draw a definitive conclusion that X should commit suicide because of the inevitability of death, if X is in excellent health, wealthy, and completely satisfied with his life. However, this pessimistic conclusion can sound reasonable based on the assumption that since death is a certainty, and X is unable to live forever, there is no point in continuing his current life.

**“Life-bubble.”** Ordinary, normal people live in a “life-bubble”, which is finite in both space and time. It can neither affect nor be affected by other places in the world or other creatures on Earth or entities in the universe. (I will refrain from discussing the fantastical possibilities associated with quantum theory, the subatomic world, and all they imply). Based on this concept of the life-bubble, it can be suggested that the perceived meaninglessness of life due to the inevitability of death and individuals’ negligible influence on the universe do not originate from a rational cognitive system, because human life is limited in time and space. Rather, it emanates from their heartfelt desires. This concept of a life-bubble requires a number of clarifications.

First, the concept of a finite temporal-spatial life-bubble is dependent on the empirical generalization of BBD. The life-bubble encompasses the birth, blossoming, and death of an individual. There can be no eternal life or infinite impact in space or time.

Second, this theoretical concept is similar in nature to a theoretical concept within a scientific model. Just as the concept in a model refers to a closed ideal system, so does the concept of a life-bubble refer to the closed system of a normal person. (For example, in Newtonian physics, each planet is represented as a body of mass. The calculation of the gravitational pull between two bodies of mass does not consider the impacts exerted by other planets in the solar system.)

Third, a distinction must be made between a physical impact and a theoretical impact. A physical impact reflects the fact that a person lives in a certain space and time. This type of impact can be perceived through the senses, often immediately, although some kinds of radiation have impacts that can be felt years later. Theoretical calculations in physics are influenced by the ‘principle of locality’, according to which the impacts between objects cannot exceed the speed of light and are limited to the immediate environment. For example, the gravitational pull of our Sun has no effect whatsoever on stars in the Andromeda Galaxy. I will refrain from discussing the implications of quantum theory, especially the famous Einstein–Podolsky–Rosen (EPR) paradox, since it is still being debated, and no definitive conclusions have yet been made.

A theoretical impact is abstract. It is transmitted to the minds of individuals via symbols (writing), art, and memories expressed in speech (as is common). A lifespan can be no more than one hundred and twenty years, at best. Human life is currently limited to the Earth (living on the Moon or other planets currently seems extremely improbable). Actually, human life is even more limited, mainly to the geographical area in which one lives. A person’s actions have no impact on the actions of people in distant locations. It is difficult to assert, for example, that Mrs. Ping’s choice to eat rice for breakfast in Beijing could affect Mr. Gustavo’s financial situation in Argentina. It is even more difficult to assert that the alien WOW living on a planet in the “nearby” Andromeda Galaxy has any effect on the life of Mr. Gustavo. (Of course, a writer with a fertile imagination may invent a compelling story that connects these creatures.) I will not discuss the ‘butterfly effect’, which is associated with non-linear systems whose development depends on starting conditions, although it would not be incorrect to say that a person can be seen as a non-linear dynamic system.

Fourth, I have described that a person in a life-bubble takes actions, absorbs stimuli, and learns. I must now add another dimension, related to the continuation of a person’s impacts after death. This refers to impacts that are ideological, genetic, socio-political, industrial, spiritual, artistic, related to heritage, and so on. These types of impact may have a long-term influence on people living generations after the death of the individual. Even in these cases, it would be difficult for a person’s legacy to exceed the physical limitations of life on Earth, and their impact over time is limited. For example, today we know that the pyramids in Egypt and the Terracotta Army statues in China were built by thousands of people, but we know nothing about the life of any particular worker in ancient Egypt or the sculptors and their assistants in China. It is as if they did not exist. Similarly, the vast knowledge accumulated in the huge library in Alexandria at the time of the Greek Empire was destroyed when the library caught fire. Therefore, it has no effect; it is as if this knowledge never existed.

If we consider the concept of the life-bubble alongside the empirical generalization of BBD, questions arise regarding the origin of the arrogant thought about eternal life and having a major and lasting impact on the world. After all, the data lead to two fairly clear conclusions. First, a person’s life-bubble is temporally and spatially finite. Individuals are not affected by what happens outside the limits of their life-bubble, and they do not affect what happens outside its limits. Second, only a tiny minority of people have any notable theoretical impact after their death. Soon after they die, any minor influence they did have gradually fades.

The answer to the question regarding the aspiration for eternal life must be based not on pure logic, but on irrational human thought. Why? Because the desire to have eternal life and an impact on the universe is based, in one form or another, on a refusal to acknowledge reality. X knows that his life is limited to a life-bubble that does not affect and is not affected by distant parts of the world. So how can it be explained that, despite this knowledge, X ardently wishes for eternal life and a far-reaching impact? The answer lies in humans’ cognitive ability to invent models, including completely imaginary ones, which are inconsistent with reality. This ability gives tremendous pleasure, and people can become immersed in their imaginary models to the point that they forget reality.

Cognitive models can lead to accepted scientific advances, provided they are compared with reality and are found to accurately reflect it. Much of the tremendous scientific progress of our time is based on comparisons between people’s cognitive models and objective reality (see Rakover, 1990, 2018). I call these “realistic models.” I call models that are not compared with reality and do not conform to it “imaginary models.” These latter models are rooted in faith and are characterized by how people respond to them. Believers may completely ignore aspects of reality that do not fit the model. They may try to cover up any discrepancies between the model and reality by citing unfounded justifications and incomplete data that touch upon the imaginary model in which they have faith.

I would like to make two comments on these types of models:

First, following the philosopher David Hume (1888/1967), according to science, it is impossible to predict with complete certainty what will happen in the future based on past experience. (The field of statistics has developed methods for predicting trends of a given population based on a sample from that population. However, statisticians do not claim to predict the future with certainty based on the past, or by applying one situation to another.) In contrast, people’s thoughts, which are often completely irrational, produce imaginary models that predict, with false certainty, what will happen in the future based on the past. However, this exists only in people’s mind, corresponding to their wishes and desires.

Second, because of the features that differentiate between faith and science, science will never be able to fulfill the roles that religion plays. Religious belief is an imaginary model, providing believers with complete assurance that everything that happens is a perfect expression of God’s intentions. Science can never provide such perfect assurance. Scientists cast doubt on their own theories and research methods. One could claim that doubt is a cornerstone of the scientific method. Every theory is viewed as a statement whose truth is only temporary.

Religions (Jewish, Christian, Muslim) are imaginary models based on ideas such as belief in a divine being and its various components, life after death, reincarnation, and miracles. They have no support in reality. Nevertheless, empirical studies report that religion offers believers comfort and peace of mind. They believe the world is under the supervision of the Almighty and that events are conducted according to a standard of justice, even if it is not always understood by people. Belief in God offers life-meaning to the believer (Beit-Hallahmi, in press; Belshaw, 2005). For example, Palgi, Shrira, and Ben-Ezra (2011) found that ultra-Orthodox Jewish Holocaust survivors were better able to cope with their horrific experiences and losses, due to the support provided by their deep faith and sense of belonging to a religious community. According to Landau (2017), numerous scholars have argued that if belief in God is false, then life is meaningless. Why? Because only belief in God promises eternal existence (mental and spiritual) and perpetual impact of people’s actions, and without this belief, human life becomes meaningless and worthless. Landau’s book raises a number of arguments that life can be meaningful even if religious beliefs are incorrect, because religion is only one way to create a meaningful life. The CM model comes to similar conclusions, but for different reasons.

First, Innate Meaning exists in every person from birth and does not depend on any religious belief or socio-political ideology. Second, any Acquired Meaning can provide individuals with life-meaning, just as religious belief does. Any socio-political ideology can offer its followers a type of life-meaning. However, Acquired Meanings and socio-political beliefs are not absolute or eternal. Many people become disappointed with religion and turn to a secular way of life, just as others turn from a secular way of life to religion. Some people abandon a mundane life path for an ideology, and vice versa (abandon their ideology for a mundane lifestyle). Thus, according to the CM model, religious faith should not be seen as a necessary or sufficient condition for life-meaning. People can lead a meaningful life without religious belief (atheists, such as myself). There are also religious people who lose their life-meaning. Therefore, it can be argued that under certain circumstances, religious faith can help believers find life-meaning related to this belief, and nothing more.

**Explaining life-meaning**

To explain life-meaning, this concept must be defined as accurately as possible. As can be seen from this discussion and from the professional literature on the subject, this concept is multidimensional and a clear general definition seems out of reach (see, e.g., Metz, 2013; Messerly, 2012; Seachris, 2019). However, a precise conceptual analysis of the concept of life-meaning is not required in order to make advances in this field (Metz, 2013). In the present book, I address the concept from various perspectives and present three types of life-meaning: Innate, Ordinary Acquired, and Extreme Acquired (individuals learn the latter two types of meaning, and adapt them to their own life path).

I will now explain how these three types of meanings are created. The explanation presented here is not based on the development of a neurophysiological mechanism nor on a mathematical algorithm. It is a speculative description, at the functional level, of a theoretical structure, based on two basic components.

The first component is the CM model described above (see especially Chapter 3). This model assumes that consciousness is a necessary condition for all types of meanings. It is assumed that in a normal person, every mental state (MS) that exists in a condition of consciousness inspires meaning, whose nature varies according to the type and quality of the mental representation. In other words, without consciousness, a person can have no meaning, Innate or Acquired (Ordinary or Extreme).

The second component includes three functional explanatory systems that are involved in the creation of the three types of life-meanings. They function together with the process of layering meaning onto the MS in a person’s consciousness. Thus, they largely determine the nature of life-meaning. This is based on the premise that consciousness is involved in an interactive process with the explanatory systems that address an MS. At the end of the process, this representation is delegated with a certain meaning (Innate or Acquired). The nature and content of this meaning is largely determined by the three explanatory systems that process the information represented by the MS. The ways in which the three explanatory systems are expected to contribute to the design of the meaning will be described below.

To develop this approach, I first describe the systems involved in constructing the meanings according to which people conduct their lives. I then explore how these systems construct the meanings under discussion. Finally, I address the question of what kind of explanatory model is needed in order to explain the creation of these meanings, and how behavior can be explained according to these types of meanings. I call the model that addresses all of these issues an Explanatory Model for Meanings (EMM).

The role of EMM is to address two important goals. The first is to provide a functional description of how explanatory systems construct the above-mentioned three types of meanings. The second is to describe how these three types of meanings explain the behavior of individuals (this description was briefly discussed above).

The behaviors relevant to the current case can be outlined in the following way. Life-meaning is expressed in the path a person chooses to follow in life. This type of life-meaning is expressed, in an integrative way, through all the systems and subsystems required for people to function in the environment in which they live. For example, a man may decide to study a particular profession in order to support himself and his family and provide them with the best life possible. This has enormous significance for him and his family members. Among other things, his way of life determines the quality of life for his family.

**Explanatory systems: A schematic outline**

**The cognitive system.** Beyond the basic processing of information that every MS undergoes (as described in any book on cognitive psychology), people activate their cognitive system in order to address their needs in terms of life path, life-meaning, and significant expenditures of effort and time. They think about it, ponder, wonder, consult, read about the subject, imagine various situations in which life-meaning is expressed, and examine whether they intend to continue in their current way of life or change it. In short, every person cognitively explores and analyzes this subject. In the existentialist philosophy and the philosophy of life-meaning, one can see the application and deep expression of the cognitive system, especially in times of crisis (as mentioned, Camus and Sartre lived through both world wars).

**The emotional system.** The absorption of information (whether tangible or abstract) is largely carried out through emotional processes. For example, people identify with their parents, educators, thinkers, scientists, and religious, political, and ideological leaders. Moreover, normal people respond to life-meaning according to their degree of success in realizing it. People feel positive emotions (satisfaction, enjoyment, pleasure, and power) when they succeed in fulfilling their life-meaning. They feel negative emotions (disappointment, anxiety, depression), when they fail in this mission. Acute crises, such as the death of a family member, serious illness, or loss of livelihood, can lead people to question their way of life or life-meaning.

**The sensory system.** Every person is in a state of consciousness from the moment of birth. (Obviously, many biological processes are conducted unconsciously, but I am not going to discuss them or their impact. The emphasis here is on the state of consciousness, without which there is no meaning.) People perceive stimuli and respond to them in a characteristic way. These sensations provide an awareness of being alive, a sensation instilled by the very fact of being conscious. By this, I do not mean that people are constantly aware of being in a state of consciousness or say to themselves, “How wonderful! I am alive, and my life is a great gift given to me by my parents.” People spend their days dealing with mundane aggravations, often without noticing that they are in a state of consciousness. They do not constantly ask, “Is this the entire meaning of my life?” But sometimes, for one reason or another (in many cases after going through and surviving a severe trauma), a person may suddenly say to themselves, in the words of the famous jazz musician Louis Armstrong, “What a wonderful world!”

These three systems help answer the question: Does the designation of Acquired Meaning by consciousness necessarily invoke the feeling of being alive? My answer is negative. I believe that the feeling of being alive is exclusively related to sensory stimuli. Normal people who live according to their chosen way of life tend to feel their life has meaning. This feeling increases in intensity when a person lives according to an Extreme Acquired Meaning. This type of meaning holds particular strength, especially when the individual achieves goals such as getting married, having children, receiving a coveted job or promotion, completing a complicated and difficult task, or finishing a creative project. In these cases, a person’s sense of joy increases, and the cognitive-emotional systems give the individual self-esteem, joy, and pleasure. However, the feeling of being alive is related directly to sensory stimuli, because this is a product of natural evolution.

**Creating meanings via three explanatory systems**

Here I focus on the contribution of the three explanatory systems to the construction of various meanings, without describing the role of consciousness, which was explained in previous chapters. Innate Meaning is naturally designated by the individual’s consciousness whenever the sensory system perceives stimuli. This type of meaning accompanies individuals during every moment of consciousness, providing a sense of how good it is to be alive. However, a person’s attention is not constantly focused on this state of consciousness or the fundamental meaning of life or the sense of being alive. People tend to be preoccupied with the management of daily life. However, when a sudden and negative change occurs in the conduct of life or some sensory stimuli are dulled or lost, for example, impairment to one’s vision or hearing, the person may suffer grief and anxiety upon realization that an aspect of life has been lost. Part of the great gift of life has been taken away. Under normal circumstances, the emotional system contributes to the meaning designated by consciousness, and the individual is filled with the positive feeling of how wonderful it is to be alive. This feeling may intensify after an individual recovers from a crisis and regains strength, or when something positive happens, such as falling in love. I do not know what mechanism is responsible for creating consciousness, and the literature review given above indicates that the mystery of consciousness has not been solved. I came to the conclusion that consciousness is a primary factor responsible for inspiring life-meaning and understanding. Beyond offering a description of this functional state, I have nothing more to add.

Acquired Meanings (Ordinary or Extreme) are obtained with the help of the cognitive system and may be transformed into a way of life to be followed. Adults adapt these meanings according to their inclinations. Innate Meaning alone is not sufficient, despite its immense importance as the significant basis a person’s sense of being alive, because a person is a social creature. Therefore, people must internalize, from the moment of birth, a huge amount of information, social norms, and so on, which are essential for them to adapt and integrate into the society in which they live.

Seeing a beautiful cat dozing in a tree is a visual perception of beauty that makes me aware of fact that I am alive. Without consciousness, a person is presumed to be either dead or in an artificially sustained vegetative state. (Sleep is also a certain type of consciousness, with transitions between various types and degrees of consciousness, for example, sleeping with and without dreams.) I postulate, based on evolutionary development, that a cat also has a certain level of consciousness and Innate Meaning, but does not need as high a level of Acquired Meaning as humans need. Certainly, the cat must learn how to hunt, get food, and adapt to its living conditions. He needs to mark his territory with urine, learn the hierarchy among the group of cats with which he occasionally comes in contact, and the like. That is, a cat must also learn a certain level of Ordinary Acquired Meaning in order to adapt to its living situation. I do not suppose that the cat learns the types of Ordinary Acquired Meanings in the ways that people do, such as through language, mathematics, physics, chemistry, laws of morality, and so forth. Nor does the cat learn Extreme Acquired Meanings, such as religious, ideological, or political beliefs, via its cognitive or emotional systems. Only people acquire these, through many years of learning and training. This is how people acquire an advanced culture. As the culture becomes more advanced, the effort for learning the necessary Acquired Meanings (Ordinary or Extreme) becomes increasingly complicated.

**Outlines of explanatory models for (a) life-meaning and (b) understanding behavior using life-meaning**

This section outlines the systems responsible for constructing the three types of life-meanings discussed in this book. It further offers explanations for individuals’ behavior according to these meanings (some explanations were given in previous chapters). It is worth reiterating that the explanations are outlined solely at the functional level and indicate the direction that needs to be taken in order to offer full explanations.

The explanations are presented at the level of an outline for two reasons. The first, as stated above and as will be discussed again below, is lack of knowledge. I do not know how the experience of consciousness is created, nor how it inspires meaning and understanding. Second, I assume that, despite this lack of knowledge, what is written here is sufficient. I do not believe that a detailed and lengthy description of, for example, the system of visual perception would help us better understand the conscious experience of seeing a beautiful flower, how the meaning associated with seeing a flower makes a person feel alive, or how this is the basic Innate Meaning that the person experiences. Given this introduction and disclaimer, I can proceed to discuss the way we should explain life-meanings.

**Models for explaining life-meanings**. No mechanisms have yet been proposed describing how consciousness is formed, or how it delegates meanings to mental states. Further, none of the explanatory models that are common in the natural sciences can be used to explain Innate or Acquired Meaning (Ordinary, Extreme) (see Review of Explanatory Models in Rakover, 2018). These models are verified procedures by which scientists provide explanations for various phenomena. The models common in the sciences are appropriate to the way in which, under certain conditions, objectively observable phenomena can be explained. They are not appropriate procedures for explaining behavior that expresses the inner world of humans. For example, it is difficult to explain a person’s conscious feeling upon seeing a bright red anemone or poppy. There is no well-established empirical law or generalization describing the relationship between the conscious experience of seeing flowers and the physical system of visual perception. No cognitive-neurophysiological mechanism been proposed that adequately describes this relationship.

Psychologists can only design an experiment to describe a cognitive mechanism that makes an association or correlation between the experience of seeing a red anemone and a behavioral response. For example they may randomly project on a screen a series of color images of anemone and poppy flowers for a certain amount of time, *T*, which changes during the experiment, and document a particular motor response, such as pressing the right-hand button when a red anemone is projected on the screen and the left-hand button when a poppy appears. The stimuli and responses are considered by psychologists to be objective events. The explanatory mechanism is considered to be objective because it describes the processing of visual information in a way that is analogous to the information-processing mechanism conducted by a computer.

In truth, however, this explanatory mechanism is only a clever way of ignoring the most important component of an individual’s behavior — the person’s sense of consciousness and the Innate Meaning, the sense of being alive, which is intertwined with that sense. Personal subjective feelings have no place in the methodological approach developed in the natural sciences and borrowed by psychology (behaviorism, cognitive psychology, neuro-cognitive psychology, and physiological psychology). In the explanations proposed in the sciences, there is no place for the private world of the individual. Similarly, there is no place in psychology for the consciousness and meanings of each individual. Just as the Earth does not move around the Sun at Newton’s whim, but rather according to the law of gravity that he discovered, so also a person’s behavior must be explained according to a theory describing behavior in certain situations, without reference to that person’s inner world.

This rigid methodology is unsuitable for research of human consciousness and life-meaning. It is no wonder that when the research methodology of the natural sciences is applied to psychology, and especially to aspects of consciousness, something non-methodological occurs. The strict boundaries and definitions of the theoretical concepts and processes as they appear in the natural sciences become loosened. For example, the concept of information is well defined in the sciences (e.g., in physics, information such as heat and temperature, or information as it is understood in the computer sciences). However, in psychology, the concept of information has become breached and is completely undefined. In fact, this concept applies to almost everything: various types and contents of stimuli and responses, and also the processing of information by the cognitive system (see discussion in Rakover, 2018).

**Innate Meaning.** What is the appropriate EMM needed to explain the creation of Innate Meaning? As in the brief discussion above, I repeat that I have no clear answer. In this particular matter, I can only test and analyze the CM model. In this way, it is possible to gain some impression about the nature of the procedure that should be used to offer an explanation of Innate Meaning. The CM model offers a preliminary functional diagram that can be used to answer questions about the construction of this type of meaning. The basic assumption is that consciousness is a primary explanatory factor, and functions as a necessary condition for the acquisition of Innate Meaning. Under normal conditions, consciousness designates sensory stimuli with Innate Meaning. It is assumed that the sense of being alive is integral to the perception of these stimuli as the Innate Meaning held by the individual. In some cases, awareness of the meaning of being alive is sharpened, such as when an individual overcomes a severe crisis, or when the person is undergoing a major emotional awakening. Moreover, Innate Meaning stands out when an individual enters a period of crisis that undermines Acquired Meaning (Ordinary or Extreme).

From this description, it follows that the explanatory model required to address life-meaning must devote attention to the neurophysiological processes related to the subject in question, as well as to processes related to how consciousness designates meaning and understanding to representations in the individual’s mind. As we shall see below, the only explanatory model that attempts to theoretically connect and unify neurophysiological processes with processes that appear in consciousness is a model I developed: The Methodological Dualism (MD) and the Multi-Explanation Framework (MEF) (Rakover, 2018). Before I briefly summarize the MD and MEF model and show its connection to the problem of life-meaning, I must discuss Acquired Meaning (Ordinary, Extreme) in order to build a complete picture of life-meanings. These Acquired Meanings are created and function alongside other important cognitive factors.

Acquired Meaning (Ordinary, Extreme) is transmitted to individuals by society through its various agents and representatives (parents, teachers, educators, leaders, commanders, friends, spouses, etc.). Individuals acquire various life-meanings that allow them to adapt and integrate into the society to which they belong, contribute to it, and help realize its goals. In this regard, I would like to emphasize a few important points. First, individuals are taught in diverse ways, which include learning through imitation, identification with key figures (parents, friends, teachers, commanders, leaders), lectures, books, experiments, and simulations.

Second, the contents that individuals learn, acquire, and internalize are similarly diverse, and typify their societies and cultures. Moreover, content appears in different forms: speech (mouth-to-ear), writing, visual portrayals of people and landscapes, movies, and so on. Thus, it can be suggested that the explanatory model and procedure by which we try to explain the acquisition of life-meaning must address the many and varied factors noted here. These multifaceted factors can be understood as follows. On the one hand, society is interested in its members acquiring certain life-meanings and rules of behavior that will help them achieve its goals. On the other hand, individuals are interested in learning what society offers, because this will help them realize their own goals. (As stated, individuals can choose, according to their natural inclinations, from among the paths that society offers, once they are old enough to stand their ground, rationally and emotionally.) In both cases, one explanatory pattern emerges, an objective explanatory model that takes into account social and personal goals, and offers an explanation for the behavior of the individual. I suggest that the aforementioned objective explanation model, the MD and MEF model that I developed over the years, may best address Acquired Meaning (Ordinary, Extreme) and Innate Meaning (see summary and discussion in Rakover, 2018). First, I briefly explain why the MD and MEF model should be used. Then I describe this model in detail. Finally, I apply it to the problem of life-meaning.

**Why use the MD and MEF model?**

It is difficult to deal with Innate Meaning using a teleological model, because Innate Meaning is automatically designated to any MS that exists in a state of consciousness and represents sensory stimulation (sensory MS). Innate Meaning is an intrinsic part of the evolution of humans (and higher animals that are endowed with a certain level of consciousness). I do not believe that a teleological explanation can be offered for consciousness, which is saturated with meaning and understanding. I believe that the evolutionary explanation in this case is good and certainly satisfactory. As an illustration of this we will consider the following example. David sees a red anemone flower. His conscious perception of the beauty of the flower gives him a sense of being alive. It is difficult to offer a purposeful explanation for why seeing the flower and perceiving its beauty makes David feel alive. This is because (among other reasons) a large number of people are preoccupied with daily life and are unaware of the flower’s beauty. They do not concentrate on the life-meaning designated to their consciousness when they see a flower.

The professional literature that discusses models of objective (teleological) explanations does not address the component of consciousness, which, in my view, is the primary factor in understanding human behavior (and that of higher animals). Teleological models address the methodological difficulty in understanding how a future event can affect an event in the present time. It is clear that World War II did not in any way affect the assassination of Julius Caesar or the conquests of Alexander the Great or the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar’s army. The fundamental question of interest to philosophers, such as Nagel (1961), is how to transform a teleological explanation into a methodologically acceptable causal explanation. For example, the objective (teleological) question, “What is the heart’s function?” should be replaced with the causal question “Why is this specific component, the heart, part of the circulatory system of the blood?” An objective answer would be: “The heart’s role in the circulatory system is to pump blood through the arteries (which carry oxygen-rich blood from the heart to the body’s tissues) and the veins (which carry blood back to the heart).” This explanation can be translated into a causal explanation: “The action of the heart is a necessary condition for blood flow in the circulatory system, and therefore the heart exists in all creatures with a circulatory system. However, the heart is not a necessary condition, because the blood can be circulated by other means, such as an artificial heart or an out-of-body machine that pumps blood through the circulatory system.”

This attempt to translate a teleological explanation into a causal explanation that answers the question of Why has failed. Instead, the following approach suggests translating a teleological explanation into a causal one by addressing the question of How: How does a specific component contribute to the proper functioning of the system as a whole?

The philosopher Cummins (1975, 1983) suggested answering this question with what he called “functional analysis.” Functional analysis examines how the various components organized in a given system operate, so that as a whole the system functions as needed, and produces its proper outcomes. An industrial production line, computer software, and physiological processes in the animal body can all be functionally analyzed. Each of the system’s components can be broken down into sub-components. This process ultimately yields the simplest, most basic component, which cannot be further broken down. This idea of analysis of a complex system as an organized collection of basic components has also been applied to cognitive processes. Dennett (1979) suggested that a cognitive process can be broken down into its various components, and these components into sub-components, until one reaches the most basic and simple neurophysiological component in the brain, in the same way that it is possible to disassemble a computer’s infrastructure into its most basic components. A computer has components that function as binary units (zero and one) connected to an electrical system in such a way that zero indicates there is no current and one indicates there is a current.

Can this process of breaking a system down into its component parts provide an explanation describing how a cognitive or mental process is anchored in the neurophysiology of the brain? The answer is negative (see Chapter 4). One of the problems with this approach as a neurophysiological explanation for cognitive processes is that this decomposition process does not always follow a path from the complicated to the simple (as seems to be the case in a computer, for example). On the contrary, this decomposition process leads from the complicated to the more complicated. Even the dissembling of a computer into increasingly simple components eventually leads to the subatomic world, and the enormous complexity associated with the miniaturization of electronic components such as the transistor and the complicated theory underlying its creation (in 1956, Bardeen, Brattain, and Shockley received the Nobel Prize for inventing the transistor).

Inspired by the ideas of Cummins (1975, 1983) and Dennett (1979), a number of contemporary researchers have developed a mechanistic explanatory model primarily designed to treat physiological processes. It has also been applied to cognitive functions (see e.g., Bechtel, 2008, 2009; Rakover, 2018). The basic idea underlying this mechanistic explanatory model is that the behavior of a particular system can be understood by breaking it down into its components, each of which have distinct functions, and which are organized so that their combined activity produces the behavior that is being explained. I previously described (Rakover, 2018) a simple example of such an explanation: the operation of a flashlight. This system can be disassembled into its components (battery, light bulb, etc.), each of which has certain functions. The interaction between these components enables the behavior in question: the production of light.

Application of this explanatory model to cognitive psychology is based on a fundamental difference between a mechanistic explanation of a physiological activity and an explanation of a cognitive activity. The explanatory model in psychology is an information-processing mechanism. For example, the mechanism for explaining a physiological process in the brain describes activities related to chemical and electrical transformations. The cognitive mechanism of memory describes transformations related to information processing (e.g., translation from visual to verbal information, storage in short-term or long-term memory, and information retrieval processes).

Can an information-processing mechanism address behavior that is saturated with consciousness, meaning, and understanding? As I explained earlier, the answer is negative, because a mechanistic explanatory model for the processing of information is not based on components related to an individual’s will, beliefs, intentions, and consciousness. This model is analogously based on the activity of a computer, that is, on physical and chemical processes. Therefore, this explanatory model, by its very nature, is not suitable for dealing with consciousness-interwoven behaviors.

It can be suggested that human behavior is based on two types of processes: mechanistic and mentalistic. Mechanistic processes are automatic and not consciously controlled by the individual, such as the activity of the nervous system, digestive system, or neurophysiological activity in the brain. Mentalistic processes are based on consciousness, meaning, understanding, desire, and belief; that is, the inner world of the individual. For this reason, it is difficult to claim that a complete explanation of human behavior can be obtained only using explanatory models borrowed from the natural sciences; that is, explanations related to mechanistic processes. In order to offer a full explanation, it is necessary for scientists to use mentalistic explanations that are related to processes of consciousness. This conclusion leads straight to a discussion of the MD and MEF model.

**Brief description of the MD and MEF model**

**Methodological Dualism (MD).** The basic idea behind MD is that in order for a mentalistic explanation, using concepts relating to the individual’s private world (desires, beliefs, and consciousness), to be accepted by the scientific community, it must meet the methodological requirements of a scientific explanation. I assert that this model of objective explanation and the procedure for providing a teleological explanation, with the help of the mentalistic concepts of will and belief, does in fact meet the methodological requirements of the sciences. We can examine this procedure, which will be indicated as: [Will/Belief].

If X wants G and believes that behavior B will realize his or her [Will/Belief], then X will perform B.

As an illustration, let us consider the following example. How do we explain the fact that David drove his car from Haifa to Tel Aviv? The explanation offered according to [Will / Belief] is: David wanted to meet with Ruth who lives in Tel Aviv. He believed that traveling in his car from Haifa to Tel Aviv would fulfill his wish. Therefore, David drove from Haifa to Tel Aviv. However, this explanation raises a problem, since the explanatory concepts are related to David’s inner world, his consciousness, will, belief, and intention. Thus, the question arises of whether this type of explanation meets the methodological demands of science. I have proposed that the answer is affirmative (Rakover, 1997, 2007, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2018). The [Will / Belief] model includes the following features of a scientific explanation: (a) the model is a general procedure; (b) it emphasizes the rationale or reasons for the behavior; (c) it is based on practical, rational considerations; (d) the model allows for empirical examination of the specific explanation (did David travel to Tel Aviv or not?); (e), the model’s procedure for explanation is not affected whether the specific explanation (the prediction: David will travel to Tel Aviv) fits or does not conform to reality (that is, the empirical examination is related to a scientific theory and not to the explanatory procedure itself).

This last point is of great importance, since the explanatory procedure (and the procedure intended for conducting an empirical test) cannot be empirically examined! What can be empirically examined is only the specific objective theory, which is judged according to the empirical correctness of its prediction. It follows that it will be difficult to treat [Will / Belief] as a psychological law that can be empirically confirmed or refuted, as suggested by a number of researchers (see discussion in Rakover, 2018).

Here I must make an important remark regarding the explanation of [Will / Belief]. This explanation has long been used in the philosophy of mind. It also has great importance in creating models in the fields of social psychology and decision making (see, for example, Coombs, Dawes & Tversky, 1970 on decisions and subjective probability; and Fishbein & Ajen’s 1975 Theory of Reasoned Action [TRA]).

My approach to this matter differs from these empirical models. This can be summed up in two contributions in the philosophical-methodological field. First, I have shown that [Will / Belief], as an explanatory model, meets the accepted methodological requirements of science. Second, I propose a new approach to constructing a psychological theory based on two types of explanatory models: mechanistic (explanations that are accepted in the natural sciences) and mentalistic (explanations based on the inner world of the individual, such as Will / Belief). In contrast, the psychological approach is focused not on the philosophical aspect, but rather on constructing empirical explanatory models for predicting behavior based on the individual’s concepts of [Will / Belief].

As an example, we will briefly examine the TRA model. This model was designed to improve the prediction of behavior on the basis of the individual’s viewpoint. The TRA attempts to predict an individual’s behavior based on several subjective explanatory factors: beliefs, attitudes, norms, and intentions. Behavior depends on the individual’s intention to perform the required behavior. This intention is dependent on two other factors: (a) individuals’ attitude toward the behavior, as expressed in the strength of their belief in the behavioral outcomes, and (b) the subjective norm associated with the behavior in question, which is expressed in the individual’s perception of the socio-normative pressure regarding whether or not to perform the behavior in question.

Although this model has received empirical support, it has drawbacks. For example, its application to new areas of research requires many adjustments and changes. Any intention to accomplish a particular goal stands on uncertain ground. Not all behaviors are determined by previous intentions. A large portion of people’s behavior becomes automatic over time and is not the result of logical considerations.

**Multi-explanation Framework (MEF).** The basic idea behind the MEF is that a full explanation of an individual’s behavior requires both a mechanistic explanatory model and a mentalistic explanatory model. The MEF provides a way of constructing a specific theory to explain a specific behavior based on both mechanistic and mentalistic processes. For example, David decided to pour himself a cup of hot tea. The chain of behaviors, in which he goes to the kitchen to brew the cup of hot tea, includes mentalistic elements: a desire to drink tea, a decision to go to the kitchen, etc. It also includes mechanistic elements: retrieving relevant information from his memory, activating his leg muscles to walk to the kitchen, performing the task of infusing the tea in hot water, etc. The MEF provides a procedure for constructing a specific theory that offers an explanation for the behavior under investigation, based on the use of these mechanistic and mentalistic models of explanation. This procedure is based on correspondence between the type of explanatory model (mechanistic, mentalistic) and the type of behavior being studied (matching explanation and behavior). The [Will / Belief] model is suitable to explain the belief that infusing tea in water will fulfill one’s desire to drink tea. A mechanistic model based on a specific neurophysiological mechanism is necessary to explain the extraction of information from memory and the operation of the muscular system to walk to the kitchen and prepare the cup of tea.

The MEF offers a number of guides and indicators for how to prepare or adapt an explanation of a behavior (see, Rakover, 2018). One of these indicators is called the principle of explanation-behavior matching. This describes how a behavior can be broken down into several components. For example, the general behavior A can be broken down into its behavioral components a1, a2, a3. The principle suggests that if behavior A is explained by a mechanistic explanatory model, then its components a1, a2, a3 must also be explained using a mechanistic model.

The MEF further explains how a specific theory based on two different models of explanation can be empirically examined. Additionally, it offers a general theoretical framework for organizing the specific theories underlying the two types of explanation discussed above. In most cases, a general broad behavior is explained using a mentalistic model. A general behavior can be broken down into mechanistic or mentalistic behavioral units (see Rakover, 2018).

**The relationship between the MD & MEF explanatory model and life-meaning**

The basic idea of present section is that the MD & MEF model provides a framework for explaining Innate and Acquired (Ordinary, Extreme) life-meanings, and also for understanding how these meanings are crucial and necessary aspects of explanations for a person’s behavior. In both aspects of this premise, the concept of consciousness is of immense importance as an explanatory concept. To the best of my knowledge, the only explanatory model that is essentially based on consciousness, and that gives consciousness a crucial place as an explanatory factor of behavior, is the MD & MEF model.

**Innate Meaning**. The present model incorporates mechanistic and mentalistic processes. Therefore, the following ideas can be proposed as factors for the creation of this meaning, and its appearance in people’s consciousness. The MD & MEF explanatory model is based, in part, on the cognitive-neurophysiological process necessary to treat the appearance of an MS in consciousness. At the same time, in addition to a mechanistic explanatory process, a mentalistic process can be proposed, based on the fact that consciousness is a primary explanatory concept for the designation of meaning and understanding to an MS. This Innate Meaning is based on the assumption of the evolutionary development of consciousness (evolution is explained mechanistically) and the assumption that consciousness is a primary explanatory concept. That is, consciousness designates a sense of meaning (of being alive) that is interwoven into the perception of sensory stimuli among higher animals. As can be seen from this outline of the creation of Innate Meaning, a number of processes are involved in its formation, some of which can be classified into the category of a mechanistic explanation and some into the category of a mentalistic explanation. In my view, a purely mechanistic explanation cannot offer a full explanation for the relationship between the onset of an MS as a representation of a stimulus, the processing of the information of this MS, and the interaction between the MS and consciousness as a necessary condition for creating meaning and understanding. (It is worth reiterating that a mechanistic model includes both a neurophysiological model and a cognitive explanatory model, because this latter model is based on the theory underlying the activity of a computer activity. See Rakover, 2018.)

Since previous chapters of the book addressed at length how behavior can be explained by Innate Meaning, I will now only briefly summarize the main points. Innate Meaning is expressed in the awareness of the content of the sensory stimulus (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, sex, etc.) intertwined with an individual’s feeling of being alive. For example, I see the blue sky, and through the fact of this sight, I know I am alive, and the feeling of being alive is wonderful. However, people are not conscious of these feelings during every second of exposure to sensory stimuli, but rather tend to be focused on other things that preoccupy them. In fact, people become aware of how precious these normal feelings are only when they realize that they are about to be diminished or lost. Innate Meaning serves as a kind of immune system protecting against negative emotions such as disappointment and depression. It allows people to transition from one way of life to another. Innate Meaning, then, provides a satisfactory explanation for the general phenomenon that the vast majority of people cling to life with all their might and do not wish, in any way, to end it. The primary, basic, and profound reason for this is that people do not want to lose everything related to the awareness of sensory stimuli. People wish to perpetuate the enjoyable perception of stimuli, and the sense of aliveness intertwined with this perception, which is, in fact, the most incredible of all. A mechanistic explanation model cannot adequately address this, because it is clear that consciousness plays a necessary role, and Innate Meaning is based on conscious sensations, which require use of a mentalistic explanatory model as well. To illustrate this kind of mentalistic explanation, we may consider the following simple explanatory argument, which shows the protective role Innate Meaning plays in helping David get through a life crisis:

Premises:

(1) Innate Meaning developed in humans through evolutionary processes;

(2) Innate Meaning helps people overcome disappointments and depression;

(3) David underwent a severe disappointment because his chosen beloved abandoned him

Conclusions:

(1) David is endowed with Innate Meaning;

(2) the Innate Meaning bestowed on David helps him overcome his severe disappointment;

Observation and prediction (based on conclusions)

1. Eventually, David will return to the normal course of his life and begin dating other women.

It seems to me that this kind of explanation, which does not refer to mechanistic (cognitive, neurophysiological) processes but rather to mentalistic processes, that is, Innate Meaning based on sensations arising from conscious perception of sensory stimuli, is the most appropriate explanation for David’s behavior. He overcame depression that resulted from being abandoned by his beloved.

It is worth emphasizing here that one of the things that close friends can do for a depressed friend is to visit frequently to talk, to get the person out of isolation, out of the house, to restaurants, movies, etc. The interpretation I attribute to these good deeds is that friends can expose the depressed person to Innate Meaning. They expose him to life, while being with him all the time and thus providing him with protection. It is as if they are saying, “We will protect you from the evil spirit that has taken hold of you. Together we will go to the beach to enjoy the sky and blue water.”

**Acquired Meaning (Ordinary, Extreme).** Acquired Meanings are transmitted to the individual from birth by educators, parents, teachers, friends, partners, spouses, and so on. The basic premise is that newborn babies need to acquire a large and varied number of meanings, lifestyles, values, and so on, which they internalize according to their abilities, so that they can integrate into the society to which they belong. These meanings pass (a) from the consciousness of educators (b) via diverse means of communication (speech, reading, visual presentation, etc.) (c) to learners, who acquire abstract ideas that help them adapt to, contribute to, and improve the world in which they live. They acquire these ideas through various ways of learning (by watching and imitating, instruction accompanied by rewards and punishments, etc.) and refer to them accordingly, based on their inclinations and abilities. Individuals try to manifest, with varying degrees of success, whatever they are learning, with the supervision and encouragement of their educators.

As can be seen from this short summary of Acquired Meaning, the corresponding explanatory model is fundamentally based on processes at the mentalistic level. Therefore, it can be suggested that the appropriate explanatory model is the [Will / Belief] model. The educator is interested in teaching the student and believes this goal can be achieved with the help of a particular teaching tool, and therefore, the educator utilizes this tool. This model may also be used in the case of explaining behavior via the concept of Acquired Meaning.

As an illustration, we will analyze the following simple example. David is the father of Jonathan, who has reached adolescence. David wants his son to learn how to drive a car. He believes that the way to fulfill this desire is by enrolling his son in a driving course at the highly regarded “Safe Driving” school. Jonathan, for his part, ardently wishes to learn to drive. He also believes that the way to fulfill his desire is to enroll in the “Safe Driving” school. Both of them wish to realize an Ordinary Acquired Meaning that is prevalent in their society: in order to integrate into modern society, the adolescent should, at the appropriate age, learn to drive a car. The success of the son in this task is of great significance to the father and certainly to the son.

It is worth noting that this seemingly simple goal-based explanation, which is in line with the life-meaning and way of life that is accepted in the society in which David and Jonathan live, is based on previous teachings and skills (such as motor skills, vision, hearing, information-processing analogous to computer processes, and so on), most of which can be explained using a mechanistic model. All explanations of the components of the behavior in question, whether they require a mentalistic explanation (for example, learning the rules of the road and the skills of driving) or a mechanistic explanation, are well-organized (and hierarchically complicated) and can be explained with the help of the teleological mentalistic explanation, the [Will / Belief] model.

Once Jonathan has successfully passed the driving test in accordance with the laws of their country, it will be easy to explain his subsequent behavior, driving his father’s car so he can take his girlfriend Ruth to the movies and a restaurant, by citing Ordinary Acquired Meaning and with the support of the [Will / Belief] model. We can explain Jonathan’s behavior in this way: Jonathan wanted to celebrate getting his driver’s license together with his girlfriend Ruth. He believed that inviting her to a movie and a restaurant would fulfill his wish. Therefore, Jonathan implemented the norms of his society, and drove his father’s car to take Ruth to the cinema and restaurant. Is it possible to explain this normal behavior with the help of a mechanistic explanation alone? The answer is negative. Jonathan’s behavior is based on elements that require a mentalistic explanation.

Table 7.1 summarizes the MD & MEF explanatory model and its relationship to life-meaning and ways of explaining individuals’ behavior.

**Table 7.1: MD & MEF Model**

1. **Methodological Dualism (MD)** essentially proposes that a mentalistic explanation model, that is, the objective (teleological) explanation model, meets the methodological requirements for a scientific explanation.
2. **Multi-Explanation Framework (MEF)** offers means of developing a specific theory to explain a particular behavior, based on two types of explanatory models: mechanistic (accepted in science and psychology) and mentalistic (based on the inner world of the individual).

**The relationship of the MD & MEF model to life-meaning**: Since the current model of explanation is on both mechanistic and mentalistic explanatory models, the following principle can be proposed:

1. Innate Meaning can be explained using mechanistic explanations related to mechanisms of sensory perception, along with the help of a mentalistic process of consciousness, which is saturated with meaning and understanding;
2. Acquired Meaning can be explained by referring to the mentalistic, objective (teleological) model;
3. The connection between consciousness and life-meaning can be explained by using both of these types of explanatory models;
4. How the various types of life-meanings address individuals’ behavior, which is largely intertwined and saturated with consciousness, can be explained by using the MD & MEF model.