**Chapter 8**

**Discussion: Comparison of the Current Approach with Other Approaches to the Problem of Life-meaning**

**Abstract:** *During the development of the Consciousness Meaning (CM) model in the present book, I have occasionally compared this model to other approaches, such as those of Camus, Nigel, Sartre, and Tolstoy. In Chapter 8, I discuss the similarities and differences between the current model and general approaches to life-meaning. The belief-in-God approach is based on belief in a deity and eternal life, and observance of religious commandments and rules of conduct. The subjective approach suggests that life-meaning is determined by the individual. The objective approach assumes that life-meaning objectively exists in the world, in a way that is similar to the properties of physical objects. The hybrid (mixed) approach suggests that life-meaning depends on both the subjective and objective approaches. Finally, the nihilistic approach assumes that life has no meaning. Comparison between these five approaches and the CM model indicates that this model is a unique type of hybrid model, based on Innate and Acquired (Ordinary and Extreme) life-meanings. The comparison highlights the advantages of the CM model, which emerge from its combination of the infrastructures of scientific methodology, the philosophy of science and consciousness, and the philosophies of existentialism and life-meaning. One important trait of the present model is its attempt to ground life-meaning in consciousness as a necessary condition. That is, without consciousness there can be neither meaning nor understanding. Since the CM model is not based on belief in God, questions arise regarding the relationship between life-meaning and religiosity, secularism, and nationalism.*

To make a comparison between the various approaches to the question of life-meaning addressed by the Consciousness Meaning (CM) model, I focus on and refine four fundamental features of this model, which I have discussed throughout the development of this model in the present book, in one form or another.

**The essence of the model:** The CM model is based on three types of meanings: Innate, Ordinary-Acquired, and Extreme-Acquired. These meanings are delegated to the various representations in a person’s mind via consciousness, which is a necessary condition for meaning and understanding. Innate Meaning serves as a kind of immune system against the loss of life-meaning. Humans cling to life so as not to lose their sense of being alive, which is an important and fundamental aspect of life-meaning. However, it is Acquired Meaning, transmitted to individuals by society, which offers guidance and direction for what people must do to be fully and beneficially integrated into the society to which they belong. Thus, society offers its members a scale by which they can evaluate their chosen lifeway as good / bad, effective / ineffective, moral / immoral. Without Acquired Meaning, people will, like the mythological Ariadne, lose the thread that orients them within the maze of life, and will not know what choices to make regarding how to live. (It is worth emphasizing that a lifeway is not judged as right / wrong, true / false, but rather according to the effectiveness of the realization of its goals, that is, as good / bad, effective / ineffective, etc.).

**Lifeway:** Life-meaning necessarily includes the lifeway, that is, the practice of one’s life, the rules of conduct, values, and norms by which individuals conduct their lives. It would be difficult to claim that Acquired Meanings are not directed at the way individuals conduct themselves within a given society, because the purpose of these meanings is to help individuals integrate into and contribute to the society to which they belong. At the same time, Innate Meaning is also connected to the ways in which people conduct themselves. For example, it is obvious that individuals’ behavior is determined by their will when they set it towards the purpose of pursuing the pleasures of the senses, that is, when Innate Meaning becomes the sole purpose of life. However, even if individuals do not actively pursue such pleasures, they are not indifferent to Innate Meaning, because every second that they are conscious, they feel alive. Therefore, in one way or another, their lifeway is greatly affected by this state of consciousness. People’s eyes are opened to the immense importance of Innate Meaning when they find themselves in situations in which this meaning is taken from them, even partially and temporarily. One can therefore conclude that if life-meaning is not expressed in a lifeway, then this concept becomes a vague and trivial concept with no connection to people’s real life or inner world.

**Generalizable template:** The CM model does not specifically declare any life-meaning as the only one or the desirable one. It does not state that life-meaning is found in (other than belief in God): individual self-fulfillment, starting a family, accumulating wealth, pursuing happiness, maintaining health, the process of following a path to the fulfillment of a goal, the fulfillment of the goal, the full experience of every moment in life, the pursuit of pleasures, solitude accompanied by reflections on self-discovery, etc. In other words, the CM model does not describe any particular condition, or say that all people who conduct themselves according to lifeway *A* will achieve significant life-meaning.

This model, therefore, does not purport to offer a specific interpretation of the question: What is life-meaning? Therefore, the question that immediately arises is, why? The answer is this: because each and every society may offer its members different life-meanings, based on reasons and justifications that arise from its culture and social, political, economic, and military status. Beginning at birth and continuing throughout life, society transmits to its members Acquired Meanings, values, rules of conduct, moral norms, etc., which individuals must fulfill, taking into account their personal inclinations. When individuals deviate from Acquired Meanings, society defends itself, within certain limits, by using rewards and punishments. (One of the heavy punishments for deviating from Acquired Meanings is the limiting of Innate Meaning by imprisoning the culprits.)

As a general example of how Acquired Meanings are dependent on society and culture, we will examine the dramatic changes that have taken place in the modern period as a result of tremendous technological developments in transportation, communication, medicine, housing, management of family life, etc. Technological developments in these arenas have completely changed the life-meanings of individuals in comparison to those of the days of ancient Greece or Rome, or the Middle Ages. For example, life expectancy has almost doubled since those days. This has provoked moral problems that did not exist in the past, such as the dilemma of using euthanasia in cases of extremely elderly people whose life has become unbearable, yet can be prolonged with advanced medical technology.

The CM model, therefore, is a generalizable template, into which different specific values and goals can be placed. This generalizability is especially true in the case of Ordinary-Acquired Meaning and Extreme-Acquired Meanings. As stated, each society may offer individuals various types of specific Acquired Meanings. As an illustration, we will look at means of transport. During the Middle Ages, learning to ride and care for a donkey or horse was an important part of a person’s way of life. Today, learning to drive a car is an important part of life for a free person in the modern world, where spatial movement is virtually unlimited. Horseback riding has become an entertaining sport in the modern world.

Even Innate Meaning is a generalizable template, albeit one that is limited to the realm of sensory stimuli, such as the five senses, sexual pleasure, pain, relaxation, etc. (Usually in everyday life, the conscious person is focused primarily on the sensation of visual and auditory stimuli.) In this respect, the generalizability of the CM model suggests that it differs from the psychoanalytic approach (see review and discussion in Thornton, 2020). The Freudian psychoanalytic approach offers a specific structure of personality, based on defined stages of development and three specific systems that struggle among themselves: the id, the ego, and the super-ego (conscience). The CM model, in contrast, can be seen as a proposal for a general structure of human personality based on life-meanings.

Consistent with this idea, I wish to point out two main differences between the CM model and the Freudian approach. The first difference is that according to the CM model, human behavior is explained via three types of life meanings. Of these, only Innate Meaning is defined by sensory stimuli, whereas Acquired Meaning is a general and broad concept that may entail various values and behaviors, depending on the culture to which the individual belongs. The Freudian approach offers a personality structure based on specific systems that have a defined interaction. For example, according to the psychoanalytic approach, the super-ego is the result of the internalization of social values that activate mechanisms to forbid, inhibit, or repress the ego’s passions and impulses (e.g., aggression and violence). According to the CM model, in order for individuals to be well-integrated into the socio-economic-political fabric, Acquired Meanings mainly include positive values and guidelines on how to behave and what to do, as well as, of course, various prohibitions telling individuals what not to do.

The second difference is that, while the psychoanalytic approach emphasizes the importance of unconscious processes in explaining human behavior, the CM model emphasizes the importance of consciousness as a necessary condition for both types of life-meaning and the individual’s ability to understand them. That is, without consciousness, life has no meaning and cannot be understood. Without consciousness, an individual has no personality and is nothing more than a vegetable.

**Life-bubble:** For any individual, the CM model applies to a lifespan that is limited within a particular temporal and spatial domain. This life-bubble, therefore, delineates the boundaries within which what a particular person does can be explained using this model. As we shall see below, other approaches to the question of life-meaning (apart from religious belief) can be seen as implicitly based on this realm of an individual’s life-bubble. It follows, therefore, that all questions about life-meaning that are not limited to the bubble of human life are nothing but questions arising from imaginary desires, not based on reality, such as eternal life bestowed by the grace of God.

**The subjective approach**. According to this approach, a meaningful life depends on individuals’ will, the fulfillment of the goals they set for themselves, and achievements that they perceive as having great importance. This approach raises significant criticism (see, e.g., Messerly, 2012; Metz, 2013; Seachris, 2019). Individuals can create or adopt a way of life and socio-political ideology based on hatred and murder of others, as for example, in the horrific example of Nazi Germany, which offered an unbearable life-meaning. I will not expand on this, but rather I will focus on comparing the CM model with Sartre’s approach. According to Sartre, only the individual determines the meaning of his or her own life. He writes: “Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism” (Sartre 2014, p. 13). He continues: “And, when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men….When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that every one of us must choose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself he chooses for all men” (p. 14).

The CM model does not claim that the entirety of life-meaning is implanted in people by external forces, or that people have no determination regarding how to conduct their lives. The argument of the CM model is that individuals do determine the meaning of their life, but not in the totality to which Sartre refers, as for example, his declaration that one individual’s choice is the choice for all human beings.

First, according to a basic trait of the CM model (see above), not all life-meanings are subject to the person’s choice, because a significant portion of these meanings is innate. Innate Meaning emerges from the conscious perception of sensory stimuli and is evoked by various representations designated by consciousness. This is the fruit of evolutionary development. This is, therefore, the meaning bestowed upon us automatically by nature. I find it difficult to see how a normal person would voluntarily try to eliminate or diminish Innate Meaning, such as by trying to blind oneself, destroy one’s sense of hearing, or abstain completely from sex. The opposite is true; after a person goes through a severe physical or mental crisis during which Innate Meaning is damaged, then returns to normal life, that person’s appreciation for this meaning increases immeasurably.

Even Ordinary-Acquired and Extreme-Acquired Meaning are not fundamentally the private creation of each person. These meanings are created by a community of human beings (tribal leaders, the nation) and transmitted to individuals, who learn them and relate to them as their lifeway. Even this process of learning and internalization, which begins at birth, is not completely given over to individuals’ free choice. In order to make a choice rationally, individuals must base their choice on prior knowledge that was learned and internalized.

I have suggested thus far that children first acquire various life-meanings as an infrastructure that shapes their social, emotional, and cognitive character and personality. However, Acquired Meanings are not always consistent with individuals’ perception of reality, or people may have difficulty in realizing these meanings. This results in a contradiction between individuals and the various meanings. Only following awareness of this contradiction, may individuals criticize certain life-meanings, try to change them, or even rebel against them. This happens, for example, when a religious person becomes secular and vice versa, or when a person moves away from a particular political or social ideology.

In summary, although the CM model in no way negates the importance of individuals in shaping their own life-meaning, the model drastically lowers the contribution of their free will in shaping life-meanings. The model attributes this contribution to automatic processes that deal with sensory stimuli (Innate Meaning), as well as to society, which transmits life-meanings from birth, so that its members can become well-integrated into the social fabric (Acquired Meaning).

**The objective approach**. According to this approach, a meaningful life is related to natural states and traits that have objective value, independent of the subjective assessment or desires of the individual. The significant, unsolved problem with this approach is the delineation of situations, actions, and traits that have objective (positive) values. To illustrate this, we will look at the following example, which opposes the objective approach to the subjective one, in which objectivity is determined on the basis of general agreement. We will compare the (normative) life of Pensioner A with the life of Chemist B. Pensioner A lives with his wife of many years. They have a pleasant, peaceful life. He was once a clerk at the bank branch in his neighborhood, and now he lives on a reasonable pension. They have two children who migrated to other countries and who occasionally call their parents to say that everything is fine and to hear that everything is fine. It may therefore be suggested that to many people, this couple seems to be living a fairly happy life, but one devoid of meaning. Despite the fact that they played their part in the evolutionary continuation of the human race, and did not in any way harm the society to which they belong, it cannot be said that they contributed anything to society, or to art, industry, science, or civic management. If they are asked if they think their lives are meaningful, they will say without hesitation: Certainly, it is good and pleasant for us now, and this has been the situation for many years.

In contrast, Chemist B is an aging bachelor who works as a director of research laboratories at a large pharmaceutical company. Dozens of patents are registered in his name for medical discoveries that have made major contributions to the treatment of many diseases. He has received awards and medals of excellence for his great contribution to the curing of diseases and the well-being of thousands of patients. It can therefore be said that, in the eyes of many, the life of Chemist B is of great significance, even though the man does not live a happy life. He is lonely, without a family or social life. He is entirely devoted to his work, which is of immense importance. If B is asked if his life is meaningful, he would say emphatically: No. My work is a job, a livelihood, but my life is worthless and miserable.

What emerges from this example is that the subjective assessment of the individual (positive in the eyes of A and negative in the eyes of B) is not always consistent with the generally accepted assessment (A has no life-meaning and B has great life-meaning). It can, of course, be argued that the general assessment of the meaningful contribution to medicine is, at its core, also a subjective assessment, because everyone understands that the discoveries made by B have saved the lives of many people. If so, the following question can be raised: Does, in the end, the general (universal-objective) value not depend on individual subjectivity?

Following are two examples to illustrate the implications of this question. The first example pertains to a kingdom, an entity with great positive value in the eyes of all. However, this was not the view of Richard III in Shakespeare’s play. Surrounded by his enemies, Richard shouted as he fell from his fleeing horse: “A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!”. A second example is a chicken pecking seeds in the yard, and whose beak hits a diamond. “Ahh,” the chicken thinks, “This yard is full of stones that may not only break my beak but also ruin my stomach and intestines. I really have to be careful here.” What is the answer to the above question of subjectivity? I have decided to leave this question open, because it seems to me that these two points of view, the general and the individual, are intertwined and woven together.

The CM model offers a unique way of defining, in an objective way, various situations and stimuli as factors that impart life-meaning. This is what I have described as Innate Meaning. To the best of my knowledge, this type of cognitive-sensory experiences has not yet been addressed in the relevant literature. At the same time, this model suggests that Ordinary-Acquired and Extreme-Acquired Meanings are the fruit of the intellectual-emotional efforts of human culture. This means that they are dependent on a specific way of life in a certain time period and geographical area (see the features of the CM model discussed above: lifeway, generalizable template, and life-bubble). It is possible, therefore, to perceive the CM model not as based on the subjective approach alone, nor on the objective approach alone, but rather to ground it in both approaches together. This brings us to the hybrid approach to life-meaning.

**Hybrid approach**. The relevant literature discusses a number of theoretical propositions based on an approach that merges a subjective and objective conception of life-meaning (e.g., Messerly, 2012; Metz, 2013; Seachris, 2019). Since this is not the place to critically review all the relevant theories on the subject, I focus on the work of Wolf (1997), who summarizes her primary idea in this way: “Roughly, I would say that meaningful lives are lives of active engagement in projects of worth” (p. 209). She goes on to state that the active engagement with a worthy, valuable project takes place in a meeting between the attraction of subjectivity and objectivity: “It occurs where subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness. To acknowledge that an activity or a project is worthwhile, however, is to acknowledge, that there is a reason for doing it … A reason for writing a book of free will is to stimulate thought in a fruitful direction. A reason to plant bulbs and weed the garden is to maintain a place of natural beauty. A reason to sew a groundhog costume for an eight-year-old girl is to make her happy” (pp. 224-225).

The problem, as Wolf writes, is that she has no theory by which to define objective value. Nevertheless, she offers a number of examples that can intuitively be divided clearly between (a) meaningful activities and (b) meaningless activities. Among (a) she enumerates: intellectual achievements, relationships with relatives and friends, aesthetic creation, cultivation of personal virtues, and management of religious life. Among (b) she enumerates: solving crossword puzzles, playing computer games, watching sitcom comedies, playing games such as electronic table games (pinball, flipper), and jumping rope.

A comparison between Wolf’s hybrid approach and the CM model is based on the following three comments.

First, Wolf bases her conception of life-meaning on two components: the motivation of the individual and the objective value of the activity itself. The CM model proposes that while Innate Meaning is automatically given to all people (and higher animals) who are in a state of consciousness, Acquired Meaning is determined primarily by the society to which individuals belong.

Second, while the concept of “objective value” is intuitively delineated by Wolf, the CM model proposes to anchor the value of life-meaning in an innate process, alongside the process of acquiring the specific lifestyles offered by society. The justification for creating different rules of behavior, norms, and values is determined by society according to its various and multiple needs: economic, social, political, and military (where society protects the life-meanings that form the basis for its existence and prosperity, through reward and punishment).

Are these justifications sufficient? Is it not possible to see them and the lifeways offered by society as illusions whose purpose is, among other things, to facilitate a small and elite social stratum controlling all other people? For example, one can see a religion or social-political ideology as nothing more than a systematic development of illusions that allow the ruling class to more easily exercise control over believers. Thus, for instance, one can understand the tendency of kings in the distant past to associate themselves with religion. Kings would spread among the masses the illusion that they had become gods. Or, less blatantly, they would receive the blessing of a supreme clergyman, who would proclaim that the king was crowned by the grace of God. I am not interested in answering these questions here, because they may take us beyond the boundaries of the present discussion, and therefore I will leave them as open questions.

Third, Wolf discusses the question of the choice between a meaningful life and a meaningless life. Although she offers no proof to support her argument on the matter, she states: “At the same time, the claim that a meaningful life is preferable (and not just brutely preferred) to a meaningless one may seem so nearly self-evident as to require no proof” (p. 222).

The CM model confirms the observation that the vast majority of human beings lead meaningful lives, for the following reasons. First, Innate Meaning is given to people in an instinctive and automatic way. Second, Acquired Meaning is transmitted to and internalized by individuals from the moment of their birth. In fact, the specific tendencies of individuals are reflected in the choices they make among the various life meanings offered by the society to which they belong (e.g., choosing between work and career pathways appropriate to the individual’s inclinations and the market supply and demand at a given time).

Here, the following issue should be added and emphasized. The choice between (a) a meaningful life and (b) a meaningless life, from the point of view of the subjective approach (and, largely, according to Wolf’s approach, which merges subjectivity with objectivity), seems paradoxical. Why? Because if the individual chooses a meaningless life (b), it follows from the subjective approach that (b) will automatically become a meaningful way of life, because the individual chose (b) out of free will, and therefore this way of life is desirable and meaningful to that person. In other words, the free choice of (b) makes it meaningful in the eyes of the one making the choice, even if in the eyes of everyone else the value of (b) is perceived as extremely negative.

This paradox does not exist for the CM model for the following reasons. First, individuals have Innate Meaning from birth. Second, with regard to Acquired Meaning, society will refrain from offering individuals a destructive way of life for obvious reasons. Namely, the leaders of a society will naturally offer lifeways that will contribute to its own survival and prosperity. (Here I have to qualify this answer because of a number of historical cases, such as the Nazis, which indicate that the customs of a society may offer a completely destructive life-meaning and lifeway, and force the people to follow it.)

**Nihilistic approach**. The source of the nihilistic approach is in the loss of faith in God. If there is no God, then all the rules of morality, social norms, and social structure founded on this belief collapse and social chaos dominates (see, e.g., Metz, 2013; Seachris, 2019). There are other approaches that link nihilism not to a lack of religious belief, but rather to the fact that the universe is immense and vast and therefore, in comparison, all human actions are nothing but a null and meaningless particle, as in the approach of Nagel (1971, 1994) (see discussion in previous chapters.) Since I am an atheist with a fundamental love of life, I am not going to discuss the various nihilistic conceptions, because I reject them completely.

Moreover, the CM model, which explains the various ways in which human life is anchored in life-meanings, is inconsistent with the nihilistic approach. On the one hand, the CM model suggests that belief in God, as a meaningful way of life, is one of the Extreme-Acquired meanings developed by society. That is, religion is one of the means by which society directs people and organizes life most effectively (especially for certain social strata). On the other hand, it is difficult to understand how religious belief has evolved, given the empirical observation that human life is limited to a life-bubble. This bubble, which does not affect other life-bubbles, and is not affected by other bubbles that do not overlap it in one way or another (physically or through the storage of information), negates the belief about the effects of events outside the life-bubble, such as eternal life or an afterlife. (Here I refrain from discussing the possibility of having a life-bubble not only for an individual but also for groups of various sizes, such as a tribe, nation, or civilization. It seems to me that expanding the concept of the individual life-bubble to include groups is also limited in time and space. While this makes it possible to significantly expand the defining concepts of the life-bubble in terms of the length of time and the size of the spatial domain, nevertheless, this expansion is not infinite.)

Table 8.1 summarizes the four approaches to life-meaning and their relationship to the CM model.

**Table 8.1 Four Approaches to Life-Meaning Compared to the CM Model**

(1) **subjective approach**: life-meaning and lifeway are individuals’ personal choice

(2) **objective approach**: life-meaning is a natural feature of the world, independent of individuals’ will or perspective

(3) **hybrid approach**: life-meaning is based on both of the above two approaches

(4) **nihilistic approach**: life has no meaning because belief in God has collapsed, the world is vast and infinite, and death is inevitable

**The CM model** can be perceived as a hybrid approach because it has an objective, universal component, Innate Meaning, alongside a subjective, social-personal component, Acquired Meaning (Ordinary, Extreme).

The CM model offers an explanation for behaviors related to the concept of life-meaning without relying on religious belief. This model removes from religious faith any treatment of the issue of life-meaning, and instead places this in the realm of innate processes and acquired processes transmitted by the society to which the individual belongs. However, as we will now see, there are a number of other approaches that propose lifeways and life-meanings that are not rooted in religious belief and originate in an atheistic point of view. I will summarize these briefly. All these proposals may be included under the framework of Acquired Meaning, as explained in the CM model.

Before I discuss these alternative suggestions, however, I feel compelled to carefully formulate a thought that began to run through my head as I wrote this book. The following question occurred to me: Apart from Innate Meaning, is it not possible that a significant portion of Acquired Meanings (Ordinary, Extreme) only exist by virtue of illusions that society (and individuals, according to their inclinations) develops and cultivates so that people can live with a reasonable degree of satisfaction and pleasure, and not feel afraid of the world into which they were born?

This is a possibility which I think contains a great deal of truth, from an historical perspective. For example, looking back with an assessment that is objective (to the extent possible) at various sinister political regimes and ideologies in Western culture, religious beliefs, religious or ideological sects, and the like, it seems to me that humans lived (and probably still live today) in an illusory bubble that allows them to follow a path that supposedly leads to the realization of a certain ideal goal, but they are unfortunately deceived. Assuming that indeed some Acquired Meanings are illusions, I ask what this means.

The answer of the CM model is that Innate Meaning offers a person protection against the anxieties that the world may evoke. Further, while some Acquired Meanings are illusory, two things can be said in response to this. First, the fact that some of these meanings turn out to be illusions, like bad dreams that fade with the morning light, suggests that humans may understand, in various ways, that they are living within a terrible illusion, and therefore make a supreme effort to tear away this illusion and look for new lifeways, as discussed in previous chapters. Second, although some Acquired Meanings are an illusion (and a terrible one, as it may turn out in retrospect) people have developed, within this illusion, spectacular cultures and have promoted, in one way or another, attempts to understand the world. For example, despite the exploitative royal regime of the pharaohs, modern people still stand in amazement at their works of art, pyramids, sphinxes, hieroglyphic writing, and so on. The same can be said about the terracotta soldiers in China, and the artistic heritage of the Greek and Roman empires. Even the Middle Ages yielded works of art (literature, music, etc.) that have had a wonderful influence to this day. While it is highly possible that Acquired Meanings are illusions, this should not be assessed using the criterion of truth / falsehood, but rather of efficiency / inefficiency in terms of the realization of goals. When people realize that a certain Acquired Meaning ceases to fulfill the purpose for which it was created, it may be replaced with a new Acquired Meaning.

Now that I have discussed the possibility that some Acquired Meanings are only illusions, and have emphasized the way the CM model treats this, I will briefly discuss a number of specific options for realizing Acquired Meanings that are not anchored in religious belief (below is only a partial list, for illustration):

1. Political ideology: This refers to major socio-political movements such as communism, fascism, and democracy. Belief in a political ideology includes the admiration of its rulers, such as Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler, Roosevelt, Churchill, de Gaulle, Ben-Gurion, etc.
2. Faith in science: Science is intended to replace religion, for scientific advancement and its discoveries to bring salvation, comfort, and a good life. This includes admiration of scientists, Newton, Darwin, Einstein, etc.
3. The individual and family: This refers to the individuals’ concentration on their own welfare and that of their family members.
4. Exclusive focus on the self: this is a reference to a primal idea that one should only be for oneself, that life is short and limited, and therefore one should pursue the pleasures of life until its end.
5. Dedication of life to one goal: The intention is that individuals, the group, and society dedicate themselves to one great goal that is important to all, such as social, scientific, industrial, cultural development, etc. for the survival and prosperity of society.

Next, I will discuss in detail two important topics related to life-meaning: (a) the attempt to explain the world and humans using the knowledge accumulated through the natural sciences (physics, chemistry, cosmology, biology, etc.), and (b) the attempt to discuss the concept of life-meaning from an evolutionary point of view alone. Before that, however, I must briefly discuss the following question, which I hinted at above: On what basis can society and individuals be sure that their chosen life-meaning is indeed the most appropriate? I must first reiterate that life-meaning and the way people conduct their life cannot be judged by criteria of true / false. It is impossible to say that way of life A is appropriate because it meets the criterion of truth, and way of life B is not inappropriate simply because according to the criteria of true / false, this way is judged to be false. What can be tested is whether an Acquired Meaning or lifeway proposed by society succeeds in realizing the goals for which it was created. That is, the question should be whether this way is perceived as effective / ineffective or beneficial / harmful to those following it.

For example, the individual (or the social community) is able to assess whether, in practice, the realization of values and life-meaning is successful and to what extent. Is it possible to improve the lifeway and make it more efficient? Does a certain way of life contradict other life-meanings? Let us consider, as an example, a situation in which the lifeway required by the religion of a certain group of people is in conflict with the lifeways of the secular population. In this case, it is not possible to judge which way of life (religious or secular) is true and which is false. It is only possible to examine how effective societal rules can be constructed so that the differences between the two groups do not intensify, but rather are moderated.

**Life-meaning according to the natural sciences**: As I explained at the beginning of the book, my worldview is atheistic. For me, belief in any religion, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, was nullified as a result of the horrors of the Holocaust. I do not feel any need to logically justify my atheism, beyond what I have said so far regarding the horrors of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, I must address a number of approaches that attempt to base life-meaning only on scientific and atheistic foundations (see Carroll, 2016; Messerly, 2012). In his book *The Big Picture*, Carroll reviews the scientific developments of the last decades. On this basis, he builds his worldview, which is completely materialistic. That is, his goal is to show that everything can be explained in a material way, and in accordance with accepted theories of the physical sciences. (Carroll is a theoretical physicist specializing in quantum theory, gravity and cosmology. His current book won the Royal Society Winton Prize for Science Books.)

In Carroll’s opinion, the world and human beings have no absolute purpose, such as the purpose suggested by religious people who believe, according to their faith, that God created and runs the world. Humans are physical entities, so any views according to which life has meaning or there is (spiritual) life after death are inconsistent with scientific knowledge. Like Sartre, Carroll suggests that meaning lies within the person, not outside, in the world or in God. As Carroll writes: “Purpose and meaning of life arise through fundamentally human acts of creation, rather than being derived from anything outside ourselves.” (2016, p. 11). To explain the various phenomena in the world, there is no need to believe in a creator, because science provides excellent and completely satisfactory explanations. For example, Carroll suggests that the universe was created as a result of quantum oscillations in space, and that consciousness is a product of the brain, which is made up of atoms that behave according to physical theories. However, Carroll admits that we still do not understand how the universe began, how life began, or how consciousness arose or what is its source. Therefore, he writes: “As with the origin of life and the origin of the universe, we can’t claim to have a full understanding of the nature of consciousness. The study of how we think and feel, not to mention how to think about who we are, is in its relative infancy” (ibid., p. 349).

It is specifically on these issues and problems, for which Carroll admits that science has no answers (along with other questions in evolution and cosmology, such as the concept of dark matter, which addresses gravity and the amount of matter in space, or dark energy, which addresses space acceleration) that Hartnett (2017a) attacks Carroll’s book, *The Big Picture*. Hartnett’s purpose is to show that the big picture can be entirely explained through the Christian faith. (Hartnett is a physicist, expert in cosmology, and a believer in the Christian religion and creationism.) According to Hartnett, if science (the painter of the big picture according to Carroll) has no answers to the fundamental questions related to the creation of the world (the Big Bang Theory), the beginning of life, evolution, and consciousness, and if all Carroll’s book has to offer is speculation, stories, and guesswork without any empirical foundation, then the book failed in its aim of giving an answer, explanation, and big picture of the basic questions and the meaning of life. Moreover, as a person who believes in the Christian religion and creationism, Hartnett criticizes Carroll’s failure to relate to the figure of Jesus Christ, what he represents, and his enormous influence (a detailed review and critique of Carroll can be found in Hartnett, 2017b).

As can be understood from what I have said so far, I am not interested in discussing the scientific-religious debate between these two physicists, one who is an atheist and the other a faithful Christian, for the following reasons. (I cannot avoid this somewhat naive remark: it seems to me that Hartnett’s critique of Carroll’s position can be easily directed against belief in God, since there is no logical or empirical proof of God’s existence, which is based on faith alone. Moreover, it is possible to raise this question: If God is beyond human perception and understanding, as many people claim, then how do they allow themselves to talk about the attributes of God, or even claim that God is beyond human understanding?)

First, I am not a professional physicist and my knowledge of physics is very basic. Some of the knowledge that Carroll writes about in his book was familiar to me from other sources, and some was new information that I was happy to learn. I have no doubt that my level of knowledge of physics is insufficient to enter into the interesting debate I have briefly reviewed here.

Second, I am not interested in discussing these issues rationally, because as I remarked earlier, my atheism was not born of a rational conviction in the non-existence of God, but rather from emotional shock at of the horrors of the Holocaust. To tell the truth, I have so far found no rational or empirical justification that has convinced me either for or against the existence of God. In fact, I am convinced that this question cannot be rationally resolved, simply because the basis of religious persuasion is faith itself. Rather, I state that my atheism is personal and emotional and is based on foundations which, to my great sorrow, are real: the abomination and terror of the Holocaust, which in fact did occur in Europe. I reiterate that I identify with the values held by most secular people who accept the scientific approach: rationality, the rejection of miracles, skepticism, a pluralistic viewpoint, placing central importance on the study of the meaning of human life, and equality among all human beings. These are values that, in some cases, are inconsistent with the religious approach. However, to be honest, I must point out that I know some scientists who are religious. To my understanding, these people resolve the theoretical conflict between the religious world and the world of science in two possible ways. Some attribute the discoveries of science to God as one who created and runs the world. In this way, science is perceived as offering a successful description of the actions of the creator (despite the classic saying that the ways of God are hidden). Others live in two different and separate worlds, and have no difficulty in moving between these worlds, even multiple times on the same day.

Third, I see science as a rational method of understanding nature. The knowledge produced by this method is provisional and may change as a result of further scientific research. I have no problem in continuing to live my life in a world with this uncertainty. That is, I live my life during certain intervals in which knowledge remains more or less constant, until the next time interval, in which previous knowledge is replaced or greatly changed. I have learned to live with these changes, without a need for constant belief disturbing my peace. On the contrary, I am curious to know when scientific research had discovered new and interesting things. In this respect, I have not replaced religious faith with a faith in science, simply because religious faith is based on absolute and permanent answers and, in my view, science will never meet a requirement for permanent and perfect knowledge. As stated, by its very nature, science is based on a methodology that has the symbol of skepticism engraved on its banner.

Despite all this, I feel a personal duty to explain, to the best of my ability, how it is possible for an atheist to feel a sense of belonging and loyalty to Israel and the Jewish people (aside from the solution that a scientist can live simultaneously with science and religion). While an American can feel a sense of belonging and loyalty to the American nation, whether his religion is Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or Buddhism (or if he is an atheist), the Jewish people define themselves according to their religion, according to their belief that they are God’s chosen people. Is it possible, then, for a person to belong to and be faithful to the Jewish people, even though he does not believe in God? I believe the answer is affirmative, for the following reasons, which are grounded in the fact that the definition of the Jewish people is multidimensional, and in my opinion, does not stem from one fundamental and absolute factor of belief in the God of the Jews and observance of religious precepts. (Here I must reiterate that my answer is completely personal and is not anchored in any of the various factions of Judaism that constantly quarrel among themselves.) I identify, feel, consider myself and am considered by others to be a member of the Jewish-Israeli people, even though I am an atheist, for the following reasons.

First, I am the son of a Jewish mother and father, so I understand that for this reason I am considered by others and consider myself to belong to the Jewish people. Second, I was born in Israel, my mother tongue is Hebrew, and I received an education that connects me to the Jewish people and its history. I am an Israeli citizen and served in the Israeli army, both as a regular soldier and as a soldier in the reserves. Third, I developed a strong sense of identification with and belonging to the Jewish people, in Israel and elsewhere in the world, despite disagreements between my atheistic approach and the religious worldview in all its forms. Because of this deep identification, the atrocities of the Holocaust erased from my heart all belief in the Jewish God or in any other religious deity. Finally, I am aware that atheism stands in contrast to the particular conception of Judaism according to which a Jew is considered as such because of a religious belief in Judaism. Without this belief, the perception of being a member of the Jewish people living in Israel is not fundamentally different from that of the American people, whose religion does not determine their affiliation with the people residing in the United States.

**Life-meaning and evolution**: As I mentioned in previous chapters, the CM model is based, among other things, on the idea that certain processes have led to the evolution of consciousness in humans (and higher animals). Consciousness is a necessary condition for layering various meanings (Innate and Acquired) onto representations in the conscious mind. To expand and substantiate this idea to some extent, I propose the following argument.

(A) the evolution of humans and animals can be explained by evolutionary processes that are part of what is happening in the universe

(B) a person possesses consciousness, which provides understanding and life-meanings.

The plausible conclusion that emerges from (A) and (B) is that consciousness, which instills understanding and life-meaning, is a product of evolutionary processes. The idea that evolutionary processes underlie life-meaning is familiar to many researchers. For example, Ruse (2019) suggests that while life-meaning is created by individuals, this meaning corresponds to the nature of humans, which evolved. He writes: “… I can give you a good Darwinian account of meaning in terms of our evolved human nature,” (p. 169).

Similarly, Messerly (2012) discusses the clear connection between evolution and life-meaning: “Meaning has emerged in the evolutionary process,” (p. 297). In his book, Messerly (2012) addresses life-meaning from many points of view, among which is the possibility of the evolution of fully meaningful cosmos, as he writes (in bold letters): “…we ask if the idea of evolution supports the claim that life is meaningful, or becoming meaningful, or is becoming increasingly meaningful,” (p. 270). The discussion in Messerly’s book summarizes the views of scholars who believe that evolution leads towards ever-greater meaning, alongside a summary of the views of a number of scholars who reject this possibility. As Messerly writes: “…a study of cosmic evolution supports the claim that life has become increasingly meaningful, a claim buttressed primarily by the emergence of beings with conscious purposes and meanings,” (p. 296).

Later he raises the following question: Does evolution carry positive developments on its wings? Observation of the past indicates that evolution also creates difficult and painful occurrences and events such as wars, genocide, slavery, hatred, despair, and suicide. In the end, the discussion leads him to the following conclusion: “We can say that there has been some progress in evolution and that meaning has emerged in the process, but we cannot say these trends will continue or that they were good. …We are moving, but we might be moving toward our own extinction, toward universal death, or toward eternal hell,” (p. 300).

Now, the following question arises: Can the CM model proposed in this book deal with the horrors of the Second World War? This question occurred to me while reading Roberts’ excellent book (2011) *The* *Storm of War*. How can one explain the cruel, horrific things the Nazis did to the armies and occupied peoples of Europe, and the horrific acts done by the Japanese who conquered East Asia? At first, I thought this could be explained (narrowly, I feel) by addressing the Extreme Acquired Meaning adopted by the Germans and Japanese, according to which they acted. However, I subsequently read the seventh chapter in Roberts’ book on the terrible and monstrous extermination of the Jews in Europe. It was clear to me that such horrible events say something profound but devilish about humanity itself. (And here I must say, with all sincerity, that the writing of this passage is not devoid of the difficult emotions that were aroused in me by Roberts’ horrific descriptions. After all, my father’s entire family was annihilated in the Warsaw Ghetto!)

At first, I thought that an Extreme Acquired Meaning might explain the devilish madness that took place at that time. But what I read was so emotionally painful and terrible to me, that I decided that even an Extreme Acquired Meaning is too weak a concept to explain the horrors that took place. There is something despicable, reviled, cruel, and evil in the essence of humanity itself, and I suddenly felt ashamed that I belong to this species. Having written this passage, as they say, with the blood of my heart, let us return to a more academic discussion.

In light of what has been said so far about evolution and life-meaning, the following question arises: What predictions about the future can the CM model offer on this matter? My answer is that this model is not a theory for predicting the future. It is not able to envision what will happen in such-and-such number of years. For example, in 250 years, will humans find greater life-meaning? Or will everyone realize that life is meaningless and subject to such massive and ongoing suffering that even Innate Meaning cannot provide enough comfort to continue living? The CM model is unable to answer such questions because, as a theoretical-empirical (i.e., scientific) structure, the model is only able to offer an explanation for events that have already occurred. It could only offer an explanation for future events if the model is applied to an accurate description of specific, real-life conditions (the independent variable) that are completely relevant to the model’s concepts.

In other words, a behavior can be explained or predicted when the following relationship occurs: behavior is a function of the theory (model) and the actual situation is such that Behavior = f(Theory, Actual-Situation) (e.g., Rakover, 2018). Even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that the CM model may offer predictions for the future, this model will not be able to offer a prediction if there are no precise details about the actual future situation to which it is being applied. Therefore, the question arises: How will the theory succeed in offering a prediction if it is not possible to know what the actual situation will be in the future? Will our theory succeed in predicting the actual future situation? On this basis, will it also predict what will occur in the future? That is, can it predict future behaviors?

It seems to me that the logical conclusion that emerges is that this presents an infinite regression, from which there is no way out. Therefore, there is no possibility of predicting historical developments. In other words, a theory is capable of predicting behavior in an actual future situation A (the independent variable). But what happens if the future situation A is unknown? Can we use a theory to predict A?

The answer is no. We cannot predict A if we do not know what the real situation B is, which we will use to predict A ... and so on to infinity. (All this assumes, of course, that the theory is able to predict such situations, in addition to predicting behaviors). To illustrate this point, we will consider the following hypothetical example, “the prediction of Aurelius Marcellus.” Let us suppose that after Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon, established his rule in Rome, and the political situation calmed down, some Roman intellectuals gathered at the house of Marcus Tullius Cicero, the famous consul, lawyer, orator, and philosopher, to drink, eat and discuss a new idea of veteran senator Aurelius Marcellus, who was about to announce that he had discovered the secret of the meaning of life! After eating, drinking, gossiping about Caesar, Pompey, Antonius, and a number of married women whose names cannot be mentioned here for obvious reasons, Cicero addressed those present and said, “Dear Marcellus, we are all eager to hear of your great new discovery. What is the meaning of life?” Cicero paused, to make an impression, sipped a little wine, and continued, “Perhaps you will begin the lecture on your discovery with the answer to the most basic question imaginable: What do you think will be the meaning of human life in, say, in two thousand years? What do you say, dear Marcellus?”

Aurelius Marcellus sank into deep contemplation and finally said, “My esteemed friends, given the very probable assumption that Rome will indeed maintain absolute rule in all the provinces of Gaul and Britain, our Roman culture will be accepted by all the barbarians living in these provinces. Therefore, I would say that for all those who live in Rome, Italy, and the provinces of Gaul and Britain, their life-meaning will be anchored in the foundations of our culture, the culture of the Republic of Rome, under the supervision of the immortal Jupiter.” He raised his glass of drink and everyone toasted this answer, of which they greatly approved. Only Cicero asked in a half-joking tone, “And what will be the life-meaning outside the provinces of Rome, in the rest of the world?” And Marcellus immediately replied, “The same thing.”

It is clear from this hypothetical example that Marcellus’ prediction of the meaning of life was completely wrong! The future situation described by Marcellus has nothing to do with the actual historical situation. The period to which Cicero referred, two thousand years after his time, coincides with the Second World War. Moreover, Marcellus, at the banquet at Cicero’s house, could not possibly know about the events that would take place in Rome and change the face of history, such as the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, the murders of Caesar, Pompey, and Cicero, the destruction of the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, and the First and Second World Wars. One could suggest, of course, that Marcellus’ theory of the meaning of life was simply wrong - maybe yes, maybe no, I have no idea. But this is not the point of interest. What matters is the following: we do not know what the actual situation will be in the future, and therefore any prediction about the future is useless. In this respect, I completely agree with the thesis of Karl Popper (1957/2002) which he explained in his book *The Poverty of Historicism*. The basic idea behind this book is that it is impossible to make any prediction about the future based on a theory that attempts to predict historical developments. Popper does not argue that it is impossible to predict a certain social occurrence under certain conditions, such as predictions that stem from theories in social psychology or behavioral economics. His argument is against a futuristic theory that attempts to predict a historical development, a prediction about the future that is similar to the one that Aurelius Marcellus offered: what will life-meaning be in two thousand years?

I am not going to summarize the many and interesting arguments that Popper offers in this book, but will focus on one main argument. It may be reasonably assumed that historical developments are materially affected by the accumulation of knowledge. Further, we may equally reasonably assume that it is impossible to know how human knowledge will develop because, among other things, scientific knowledge is provisional and discoveries are unexpected. This leads to the conclusion that it is impossible to predict historical developments.

We assume that it is impossible to know what the actual conditions will be in the future. Additionally, no theory is perfect. In fact, we can only apply a theory that is understandable to us and defined within certain boundaries, within a world that has infinite influences and interactions. This situation inevitably means that any theory will be incomplete and will eventually be disproven. Therefore, it is clear that any attempt to predict historical developments is doomed to failure from the start. However, it is worth reiterating that a theory may be capable of predicting certain future events under well-defined conditions, even if it is an incomplete theory. For example, the Newtonian theory makes successful predictions, when limited to terrestrial speeds.

Several conclusions emerge from this discussion. First, the attempt to perceive the theory of evolution as capable of predicting historical developments, for example a prediction that the world will evolve toward a broader and better concept of life-meaning, seems to me an inevitably unsuccessful endeavor. As I understand this scientific theory, I do not think its purpose is to predict the future. If, for example, development is dictated by the interaction between the environment (physical, social, etc.) and living creatures, then it seems impossible to predict how a creature will develop, when there is no possibility of knowing what its living environment will be like in the future.

Second, the CM model, as described in this book, does not intend to predict the future or what life-meanings will be in two thousand years (to borrow the number from the hypothetical example of Cicero). Even if we accept that Innate Meaning is evoked by the awareness of sensory representations and mental states (MSs) in humans (and higher animals), it is still impossible to be sure of the stability of this mechanism. Completely unexpected processes can occur, such as major climate changes or significant mutations, which may alter cognitive mechanisms and processes of designating meanings. Even if we assume, with high probability, that Innate Meaning will continue to exist for thousands of years because it is anchored in robust and stable genetic processes, this is not the case with Acquired Meaning. By its very nature, this type of meaning is culture-dependent. Just as the prediction of Aurelius Marcellus was fundamentally flawed, it is highly likely that any predictions regarding what life-meanings will be in two thousand years will also be fundamentally flawed.