

Finding meaning

The process of sorting had taken somewhat more than an hour. All reports, essays, articles and other documents and files had been carefully sorted into a hierarchically very well thought out structure of folders. This amazing archive of knowledge and entertainment had furthermore been copied to an external server and been burned onto a DVD. This process had also been executed with the extensive libraries of images, sounds, and video stored on the computer. These libraries contained personally captured films and sound clips as well as purchased ones. Most comprehensive, however, was the personal photo library, containing several hundreds or thousands of high-resolution photos. Overall, twelve DVDs were produced during the back up process, which later were carefully sorted into a special filing cabinet. Moreover, all the documents that possibly could be interesting to a general public had been published on an equally perfectionist web site. Hence, the digital structure of life was irreproachably put in order.

Satisfied with his accomplished perfection, the physicist went over to his study of space technology; this study was nothing but relaxing to him. He sank leisurely into his chair, put one leg over the other, and began to think. After one and a half hour of thoughts and calculations, he made some notes on his PDA, after which he archived them and cleaned his desk. The working day had finally reached its end. However, despite his successful work, he sensed an emotion of anxiety difficult to define: it was the *anguish of transience*. In a very short period of time, say 100 years, everything he had ever done, would have been lost and forgotten. The thorough sorting he had performed this day might very well be completely pointless. He began questioning the meaning of the work he had performed today, as well as all work and all actions he had ever performed. Did it really matter, what he was doing?

He lay down in his bed, but did not get very much rest before observing a young woman entering the room. The woman was his very best friend; it could not have been mistaken for an exaggeration to say, that she also was his *only* friend. She really cared for him and gave him comfort, security, and intimacy, someone to be with, talk to, and have fun with. Therefore, she meant almost everything to him. The woman bent down and, fumbling in the darkness, put the contact of a new lamp into the socket. They had bought the lamp together earlier that day. Now, they both waited with excitement to see how the new lamp would light up the room. "Now, we'll see", she said amiably. But the lamp did not light. Instead, about a second later, a terrible bump was heard from the floor. The physicist went explosively up from the bed and was terrified forced to realise that his only and all-meaning friend was lying still – and, which he soon had to realise – dead on the floor. In devastating horror, he began running around in the building and did not know how he now could bear to live. In true despair, he fell over and could no longer move.

Then he woke up. It took him about an hour to calm himself down from his nightmare. In real life, he did not have any close friend, though he really would have needed one. Sometimes, the world can be almost humorously unfair. "The only good thing about her not existing", he thought as he chuckled, "is that I cannot lose her." On the new day, he continued to think about the meaning of life. "There is none", he suspected.

Two hours later, he found himself in his office at the university, preparing his next lecture. This was good for him, as he always became enthusiastic about his work, no matter if it was about physics or pure mathematics. However, he could not help continuing his inner philosophical monologue. Now it had a slightly different direction; his improved frame of mind made the discussion more positive. Now he just had to wait half an hour for the clock to beat eight and the lecture to begin. He leant back in his chair and relaxed. He drank some of the mineral water standing on his table, once more going through the pedagogical aspects of his lecture. He was always very well prepared and could therefore be sure of the lecture's becoming successful – as successful as always.

After the lecture, the physicist received many positive comments about it, which further improved his state of mind. His inner monologue concerning meaning became consequently even more positive. The physicist noted that the direction of the monologue in fact was a function of his state of mind, which he did not really like. Mathematicians like truths, you see, and truths do not depend on the state of mind. Nonetheless, he did know that the meaning of life was something you had to *define* rather than to deduce, and that any “true” meaning therefore did not exist, although most people would indeed define *well-being* as a fundamental goal of all actions. After a thorough discussion, he found that the more positive direction of his monologue, that he had this morning, indeed was more correct than the more negative one. This conclusion profoundly delighted and calmed him.

As he went home that day, during the sunset, the sun shone through the thin layer of clouds, colouring the horizon red. He walked on an asphalted pavement path surrounded by green groves. Three roe deer stood quietly by a tree, looking at him. Fifteen minutes later, a pair of hares crossed the path. The twittering of the birds together with the sound of the light breeze constituted the very own background sound of the nature.

Later that night, the stars and the moon of the sky could easily be seen. The physicist went outdoors and looked right up in the sky. This observation really made him feel the fact, that the earth is a natural satellite orbiting a spectral type G star. The physicist thought about his life, which was simple and well disciplined, and that it appealed to him much more than the lives of many of his contemporaries. Their lives were constituted of pub-crawls and partying, with immature discussions and gabbling, and with a consumption of ethanol that caused vomiting. “They do not know better”, he thought. He did never do things like that; instead he lived calmly and quietly in balance and with thoroughly thought-out habits; as a physicist he was also a *seeker of truth*, and his philosophical monologues made him a *seeker of meaning* as well.

Hence, the meaning of life was well-being. He felt good working with science, and therefore did reach the goal quite well, he realised. Indeed, he wanted a close friend, though he then would get the worry of losing her as well. However, all the good things with such a relationship would probably be more significant than the worry. Moreover, if he some day really would lose her, then he would still have the memories left. Would he then ever regret that he met her in the first place? Perhaps one can have more than one friend? “Well, that is not my concern,” he concluded, “as I do not have a friend.”

The *anguish of transience* had vanished as well. He did feel well working with science, and many people did benefit from it as he lectured and published documents

on his web site. During every meeting he had with other people, he distributed knowledge that would live for a long time. His work was not done in vain. Moreover, he realised, he was not unique; there were many people like him researching and spreading knowledge, and it will probably always be like that, as long as intelligent life exists in the universe. Not even death is anything to be worried about, as organisms with consciousness are created and disappear all the time – everything goes in cycles. Indeed, science does not yet have an explanation of the consciousness, but this conclusion is the most probable one can deduce, he thought. Pleased with the meaning and the calmness he had found, he went to bed.

That night he slept calmly, dreaming of roe deer and hares.