

The Purpose of Life.

Attendees put forward varied views:

Do we, as individuals, need a purpose?

Our purpose of life changes with life's experiences.

Looking at past achievements guides the setting of a purpose.

To achieve one's idea of 'happiness' - by whatever means are supportive.

To make the journey from birth to death interesting.

Life? It's just one damn thing after another!

Suicide is a way out for persons deciding life has no purpose for them.

Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

The above are all 'subjective' responses, the internal viewpoint of the individual, which may or may not be shared or accepted by others. The question of whether there is an external, fundamental, 'set in concrete' purpose, determined perhaps by a god, for the existence of life on earth and for human life in particular, was mentioned but not discussed; something for us to ponder upon and maybe raise again later.

In nature there is a fundamental purpose for each species – it is SURVIVAL.

Aquinas' 'Five Ways to prove the existence of God' was the seed for much discussion. The question of what constitutes 'motion' arose – for example, whether a car is thought to be in motion depends upon whose viewpoint is taken; for an occupant the car could be considered to be at rest and the outside scenery to be moving, whereas a bystander would take an opposite view. It is all relevant.

It should be remembered that Aquinas firstly believed in God and secondly constructed his proofs in support of that belief – we should satisfy ourselves whether this 'cart-before-the-horse' process is a good way to find a 'proof'.

YouTube Has several videos on the 'Five Ways' - one by Fr. James Bent explains them, whilst another criticises Richard Dawkins' refutation of the 'Five Ways' in his book "The God Delusion". (The biologist, Richard Dawkins (1941-), is an active atheist who denies the existence of spiritual beings and asserts that science, not religion, explains the world.)

Where do 'beliefs' originate?

This was briefly discussed and will be considered more deeply in a future session.

The need was identified to distinguish between indoctrination and misinformation as agents in forming beliefs. Indoctrination is the active, deliberate process of teaching a person or group to uncritically accept a religious, political, or other type of belief; misinformation is incorrect information obtained in the course of everyday life activities.

It is important to question our beliefs and the nature of their origins as unquestioned acceptance is a barrier to evolving as a separate thinking entity.

(In an introduction to Samuel Butler's book "The Way of All Flesh" is this passage - "Until I read Butler's semi-autobiographical novel I was embedded in the matrix of my environment, accepting it unquestioningly as a static and unalterable universe. In it I was as quiescent as a fossil in a rock" This is an example of where exposure to the ideas and experience of one person changed, for the better, those of another person.)

Hugh Mackay's book - 'What Makes Us Tick' - has a chapter on 'The desire for something to believe in'. It gives a more in-depth treatment of life's 'purpose' and people's beliefs. A copy is available for loan but you might find having a personal copy worthwhile.

Session 2 wind-up:

Attendees indicated particular interest in exploring these subjects:-

Ethics and moral beliefs.

Time and Space.

Logic.

Session 3 date is Tuesday, March 22.

Convener: Keith Ashfold.