

## “To Be or Not to Be” Giving Meaning to Life

One of the best-known quotes in Western literature comes from a soliloquy from Shakespeare's, *'Hamlet'*, which begins with the words, *"to be or not to be"*. In this, Prince Hamlet is contemplating the possibility of suicide. If we read the full soliloquy, we hear him considering both the advantages and disadvantages of taking one's own life. In that context we see that the word "be" simply refers to existence. In other words, *'to be'* simply refers to living, biologically speaking. But I believe the word suggests much more than that.

In a passage from his journal, Henry David Thoreau, wrote, "Drifting in a sultry day on the sluggish pond, I almost cease to live, and begin to be." Clearly, Thoreau experiences 'being' as something that transcends the state of simply living.

When I was a junior in college, I took a course on 'Existential Ethics'. Among the books read in the course were Heidegger's 'Being and Time', and Jean-Paul Sartre's 'Being and Nothingness'. Ever since I have been intrigued by the idea of being. "What is it for a thing to be? What does it mean to say that you yourself *are*?" (Sarah Bakewell, 'At the Existentialist Cafe') Beyond that, how does 'being' transcend mere biological existence? What is at the heart of existence itself? What does it all mean? (Sorry, these are the sort of questions that get my juices flowing.)

At the end of the course the professor said, "Well, we have five minutes left in the semester. Do you have any questions?" A young freshman piped up and asked, "Can you please tell us the meaning of life?" The prof paused a moment and replied, "From an Existentialist point of view, life has no meaning. It is our responsibility to give it meaning!"

That has always stuck with me, and it goes to the heart of what it means to be. Aware of it or not, we have the freedom to choose who and what we will be. We can simply choose to live, or we can move in a more transcendent direction.

Now, from a Christian perspective, we can posit that the existence of God gives meaning to life, but we still have the task of discerning what that may mean.

The word 'life' appears in the Bible 451 times, and often in deeply spiritual ways. In the New Testament we find mentioned 'eternal life' numerous times, and it means more than just existence beyond this life. It is life awakened in God in the here and now.

Among other things, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" and "I am the way, the truth, and the life". Obviously, he was talking to people standing there breathing, and with blood coursing through their veins, indicating that he was talking about a new way of being - that in his embrace, and ours of him, we become a new creation, the possessors of New Life - a new way to **BE!**

And, so, as we engage in the project of giving meaning to life we may look to Jesus as our starting point as he is thought of as the embodiment of the fullness of humanity!

(After that I would suggest Sartre, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Camus - not Hamlet, he's too much of a downer! 😊)

Peace, grace, and love,  
David ❤️ ❤️ ❤️