

# Evolutionary Perspective on Meaning of Life

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**Abstract** The paper compares various meanings of life and proposes the evolutionary perspective as a rigorous scientific understanding of the meaning of life. But evolution produces only a lower goal of perpetuation of genes. Higher goal does not exist. This article compares various philosophical perspectives and examples of survival and reproductive advantage.

**Keywords:** *Natural selection, Evolution, Occam's Razor, illusion of qualia, Hyper-active Agency Detection Device, Meaning of life, Philosophical perspectives on purpose of life, qualia, survival without purpose*

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## 1. Introduction

*Humans have always wondered about the meaning of life...life has no higher purpose than to perpetuate the survival of DNA...life has no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.*<sup>1</sup> -- Richard Dawkins [1]

Living creatures "differ from one another, and those variations arise at random, without a plan or purpose." This suggests that life has no inherent purpose [2]. Natural selection and random mutations create an illusion of intelligent designer.

All our physical and mental attributes improve the survival value and reproductive success thus keeping the personal genes alive. Perpetuation of genes is the lower goal/ meaning/ purpose of life according to evolutionary theory. However, this lower goal requires 'struggle for survival' with the return favour of illusion of happiness, which is a *quale*. All *qualia* are illusions. There is no higher goal and like any other machine, death is the inevitable consequence of biological machine (lifeforms) too. This is due to second law of thermodynamics.

Universe as a whole does not seem to have any intrinsic purpose either. Using Occam's Razor, it is speculated that, universe arose from 'nothing'.

### Various objections to theory of evolution

- 1). **Fine Tuned Universe** – Life evolved to survive in a given environment. Different constants would have produced different lifeforms.
- 2). **Irreducible Complexity** – It is claimed that eye would not work until all parts of an eye come together harmoniously to assist vision. This requires many required mutations to occur simultaneously. This is a fallacious argument as each part of an eye served an evolutionary purpose.
- 3). **Specified Complexity** – Natural selection, creationist claim, is a random process and a random

process cannot create complexity. The counter-argument is that natural selection is not a random process but mutations are random. Natural selection is driven by given environment.

- 4). **Incomplete Fossil Record** – Every time a fossil is found chronologically between 2 fossil records 2 new gaps are created. Creationist want to find more fossils in the 2 gaps.
- 5). **Consciousness** – Consciousness, both Self and *qualia* can be a spandrel which piggybacked some other genes having evolutionary advantage. Temperature, taste, smell, touch, pressure, emotions may have evolved for de/motivation. Visual and auditory *qualia* for efficiency.
- 6). **Second Law of thermodynamics** – Creationists claim that entropy should always increase as per second law of thermodynamics. The claims have been incorrectly criticized for ignoring that the second law only applies to isolated systems. Organisms are open systems as they constantly exchange energy and matter with their environment [3]. However, the fact that no exception to the law of increasing entropy has ever been observed does not prove such a thing never happened.

If evolution is true, the claim that lower goal of perpetuation of one's own genes is validated however evolution does not offer any higher goal- meaning or purpose.

## 2. Various Meanings of Life

The search for meaning of life has produced many religious, philosophical, scientific or ontological speculations. Chasing dreams [4], expanding one's potential in life [5], seeking happiness [6] – Happiness and survival are 2 sides of the same coin and happiness is not a reason or consequence of/ for survival. We feel happy when our survival value goes up and sad when the survival value goes down (motivation). Example –

Endorphins are secreted during workout or gymnasium making us feel happy but it is just the survival value (health) going up during workout, survive [7] – It is argued that survival itself is the goal or meaning of life and inquiring about the goal of survival leads to infinite regress. However, a lifeform has to struggle for survival to create an illusion of happiness (happiness such as that created by nucleus accumbens (reward centre of the brain) is an illusion [8] (there is nothing there! The paper “origins of *qualia* by Roger Orpwood [9] explains how re-entrant architecture or attention creates an attractor state to create *qualia*. Integrated Information Theory and Global Workspace try to explain how brain creates *qualia* while opponent process theory explains why we see after image [10]) just like any other *quale*). Also, mere survival is a lower form of meaning unlike higher forms such as experiencing God or attaining highest wisdom, reproduce [11], seek wisdom [12], to make the world a better place [7], creating and innovating [13], seeking peace [14], experiencing God and reach highest heaven [14,15], no meaning [16] etc.

### 3. Philosophical Perspectives

#### Western Philosophical Perspectives:

Platonism – Attaining highest form of knowledge from which all good things derive value [17].

Cynicism – Living a life of virtue in agreement with nature [17].

Epicureanism – Moderate pleasures, freedom from fear, friendship, virtuous living etc [17].

Stoicism – Freedom from suffering through objectivity [17].

Enlightenment Philosophy – Focusing on relationship between individuals and society [17].

Utilitarianism – Greatest happiness to greatest number of people [17].

Nihilism – Life is without objective meaning [17].

Pragmatism – Meaning of life is discoverable only through experience [17].

Existentialism – Each person creates life meaning or essence [17].

#### Eastern Philosophical Perspectives:

Advaita Vedanta – Atman is ultimately indistinguishable from Brahman, and the goal of life is to know or realize that one's Atman (soul) is identical to Brahman [18]. Dualism is criticized because of the inability to explain how intangible mind interacts with physical brain/ body. Also, not all brain is conscious. People are born without cerebellum or cerebellum is surgically removed without losing consciousness. Damage to specific brain areas causes loss of ability of that brain area. E.g. Damage to V4 area may produce problems in seeing colours. Soul and creator soul are a direct creation of hyper-active Agency Detection Device (HADD). Illusion of agency is seen here [19].

### 4. Survival and Reproductive Advantage (few examples)

**Money** – money facilitated increased cooperation and

saving in large hunter gather groups as opposed to biological relatives.

**Power** – power gives an individual advantage to influence others and access to resources before less powerful individuals.

**Altruism** [20]– 1) Reciprocal altruism – Help that is returned to the original donor 2) Kin Selection

**Music** [19] – Facilitated social bonding and cohesion among prehistoric humans.

**Art/ Paintings** [19] – Communication such as hunting techniques, social bonding.

**Opposable thumb** – opposable thumb allows gripping of objects such as branches of trees.

**Pheromones** – chemical signals which indicate mating or danger signal to another individual/ s

**Endorphins** – hormones released by pituitary gland in response to pain and pleasure such as during gymnasium/ workout.

### 5. Conclusion

All our physical and mental attributes improve the survival value and reproductive success thus keeping the personal genes alive. Perpetuation of genes is the lower goal- meaning- purpose of life according to evolutionary theory. However, this lower goal requires ‘struggle for survival’ with the return favour of illusion of happiness, which is a *quale*. All *qualia* are illusions. Happiness is not a goal/ meaning/ purpose of survival but happiness and survival are 2 sides of the same coin. There is no higher goal and like any other machine, death is the inevitable consequence of biological machine (lifeforms) too. This is due to second law of thermodynamics.

Universe as a whole does not seem to have any intrinsic purpose either. Using Occam’s Razor, it is speculated that, universe arose from ‘nothing’.

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