

THE MEANINGFUL AND THE WORTHWHILE: CLARIFYING THE RELATIONSHIPS*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Among the terms that we use to positively characterize people's lives are "meaningful" and "worthwhile." The question I seek to answer in this article is what the relationship is between these two words, by drawing on texts from both the Anglo-American and the European philosophical literature on value theory. Topics of meaningfulness and worthwhileness have been one of the few areas of philosophy where 21st and 20th century thinkers in the analytic and Continental traditions have consistently read one another's work. Several, including the likes of Albert Camus and Ludwig Wittgenstein, have maintained that the two words mean the same thing, in that they either have the same referents or even the same sense. My primary aim is to refute such a position, and instead to provide conclusive reason to believe that while a meaningful life shares many properties with a worthwhile one, they are not one and the same thing.

I begin by bringing out facets of the meaningful and the worthwhile, as widely accepted by at least contemporary professional philosophers in the West who have spent substantial time reflecting on the nature of a good life (II). After having fixed these concepts, I spell out why many have reasonably held that a meaningful life is one and the same thing as a worthwhile life, perhaps by definition of these terms

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(III). Next, I consider ideas in the extant literature, from philosophers such as Kurt Baier, Robert Nozick, and Richard Wollheim, that one might invoke to question this identity, but maintain that ultimately they are unconvincing because they rest on implausible definitions of terms (IV). In the following section, I provide counterexamples to the claims that if a life is meaningful, then it is worthwhile and that if a life is worthwhile, then it is meaningful, as well as provide more principled reasons to doubt that they are one and the same property (V). After having contended that the two terms pick out different properties, I suggest that it is useful to deem them to have different senses, and conclude by proffering definitions of “meaningful” and “worthwhile” that indicate clearly how they are distinct, and by reflecting on the bearing these two values have on a good life (VI).

II. UNCONTESTED FACETS OF THE MEANINGFUL AND THE WORTHWHILE

Some maintain that a meaningful life is identical to a worthwhile life, and even maintain that this is an analytic truth, that is, true by definition, whereas my aim is to reject such a position. In order to clarify the nature of this debate, I need to spell out some relatively uncontroversial facets of the two concepts. What do I and my philosophical opponents have in mind when we disagree about the relationship between the meaningful and the worthwhile? What is the common subject matter about which we hold differing views?

I presume that a synonym of “meaningful” is “significant,” and that “insignificant” has the exact same sense as “meaningless.” We often invoke such terms when thinking about ourselves from a deathbed perspective, considering whether our lives (will have) amounted to something.¹ Similarly, we tend to use these categories when making a eulogy about another person’s life. Many of us also have them in mind when considering how to make major life choices, such as whom to marry, whether to rear children, how to spend one’s time on the Sabbath, and which sort of career or projects to pursue.

Most who have reflected carefully on life’s meaning accept that it comes from what is classically called “the good, the true, and the beautiful;”² it is fairly uncontroversial to maintain that meaning in an individual’s life can come from making moral achievements such as advancing justice or acting beneficently,

¹ Notice that enquiry into the meaning in an individual’s life, on which I focus, differs from questioning why the human species as a whole exists or why there is a universe instead of nothing, much more “holistic” or “cosmic” issues.

² For a critical analysis of key recent theories of meaning in life and their focus on the classic triad, see Thaddeus Metz, “The Good, the True and the Beautiful: Toward a Unified Account of Great Meaning in Life,” *Religious Studies* 47 (2011): 389–409.

reflecting carefully on matters that are properly the object of intellectual curiosity, and creating art objects by painting, composing, writing, decorating, and the like. Nearly all in the field agree that Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Pablo Picasso had substantial meaning in their lives. To deny that these are good candidates for meaning in life is to misuse the term “meaning,” or to elect to use it in a way that differs radically from the way most present-day philosophers and other thinkers do in the Euro-American literature.³

There is also widespread agreement about the nature of meaningless lives, with hypothetical examples routinely invoked to illustrate them. For example, three incontrovertible cases of meaninglessness include: Sisyphus, the mythical figure doomed to the toil of rolling a heavy rock up a hill forever;⁴ a life spent in an experience machine, where one has the sensations of engaging in interesting and challenging activities, or of exhibiting excellence, but where one is not in fact doing or being in these ways and is merely plugged into a machine that is stimulating one’s brain;⁵ and a farmer who grows more corn to feed more hogs to buy more land to grow more corn to feed more hogs to buy more land to grow more corn, and so on.⁶ More real-world cases of meaningless are: being taken in by charlatans who make one feel special, for example, falsely believing in the fidelity of one’s beloved or in the divine status of a charismatic leader;⁷ “The blob,” someone who spends his life drinking beer while watching sitcoms alone;⁸ and a period of engaging in prostitution in order to feed a drug addiction.⁹ Again, nearly all in the field would say that if one thought that such behaviour is, or even conceptually could be, meaningful, then one would be misusing the term, failing to participate in scholarly debate.

³ Torbjörn Tännsjö in conversation has contended that we use the phrase “meaningful life” in different ways, and that there is not a single sense that philosophers invoke. Supposing that is true, then the reader may take me to be spelling out one major swathe of talk about “meaning in life.”

⁴ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, tr. Justin O’Brian (London: H. Hamilton, 1955); and Richard Taylor, “The Meaning of Life,” in his *Good and Evil* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1970) 319–34.

⁵ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974) 42–45.

⁶ David Wiggins, “Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life,” rev. edn. *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 127–65, 137.

⁷ Susan Wolf, “Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14 (1997): 207–25, 211 and 218.

⁸ Susan Wolf, “The Meanings of Lives,” (2003) <<http://www.law.nyu.edu/clppt/program2003/readings/wolf.pdf>>.

⁹ Thaddeus Metz, “Happiness and Meaningfulness: Some Key Differences,” *Philosophy and Happiness*, ed. Lisa Bortolotti (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 3–20, 9 <<http://www.palgrave.com/PDFs/9780230224292.Pdf>>.

Having provided some specificity about what is essentially involved in calling someone's life "meaningful" or "meaningless," I now turn to "worthwhile" or "worthless." A synonym of a "worthwhile" life is a life "worth living," while a life that is "not worth living" has the same sense as a "worthless" life. Many appeal to these categories in certain medical contexts. For example, we do so when thinking about the conditions under which euthanasia might be permissible, or when it would be right to provide a "do not resuscitate" order, or when it no longer makes sense to spend scarce resources on a critically ill patient, and to instead direct her toward hospice care. Just as judgments that life is or is not worth living routinely lead to certain decisions about whether to keep others alive, so they are at the core of debates about the prudence or morality of suicide, where it is largely taken for granted that killing oneself would be reasonable, at least to a substantial degree, if one's life were not worth living.¹⁰

Furthermore, we often invoke the value of a life worth living, and its companion disvalue, when thinking about the ethics of population and procreation. When deciding whether to have a child or not, one naturally attends to whether its life would be worth living, with nearly all agreeing that it would be wrong to create a child whom one knew would suffer from a disease that would lead to a certain, early death after a life exhausted by extreme debilitation and pain. And when considering more large-scale issues, such as how many people should be on the planet and what institutions should do to influence that, it is again common for social philosophers and ethicists to think about the extent to which future people would have lives worth living.

Having articulated some core features of meaningful and worthwhile lives, at least as (predominantly) understood by contemporary Western value theorists, one begins to see why some have taken the two to be identical. Surely, someone who has excelled at the good, the true, or the beautiful, exemplars of meaningfulness, would have a life worth living. It appears equally true that the meaningless life of Sisyphus is not one that is worth living, and that few would willingly live on for a life of merely vegetating in an experience machine or being a "crack ho." Conversely, one might reasonably think that lives are worth starting and continuing, perhaps with expensive medical resources, insofar as they will be meaningful, and that lives are not worth starting and are not worth continuing insofar as they will not. In the following section, I do more to make the *prima facie* case for thinking that the meaningful is one and the same thing as the worthwhile.

¹⁰ Camus (1955); Richard Wollheim, *The Thread of Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984) 244–45; Kurt Baier, *Problems of Life and Death* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1997) 67–70; and Brooke Alan Trisel, "Judging Life and Its Value," *Sorites* 18 (2007): 60–75, 61–63.

III. *PRIMA FACIE* EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY

Prominent thinkers who have held that the meaningful is identical to the worthwhile include Albert Camus and Ludwig Wittgenstein, and, more recently, Robert Solomon and Julian Baggini.¹¹ Susan Haack and Wai-hung Wong also indicate sympathy toward such a perspective.¹² Few of these philosophers argue for an identity between the two, but rather write as though it is obvious. In this section, I explain what could reasonably motivate such a view, viz., why it is worth taking seriously, even though I will ultimately argue against it.

First off, both meaningfulness and worthwhileness are evaluative categories, that is, are fundamentally ways of appraising the value of a person's life, judging it to be good or bad in certain respects. Such judgments differ from those that at bottom indicate the presence of a reason for an agent to perform one act rather than another. In this respect, the meaningful and the worthwhile differ from the prudential and the just, where in the latter cases, one basically makes a normative judgment about how an agent ought to make a decision, either for reasons of self-interest or other-regard. Of course, judgments about meaningfulness and worthwhileness could and should inform decisions about how to act; my point is that such judgments are not in themselves about how to act. To nail down the point, consider that someone utterly prevented from acting, say, by being held in a tight cage or forced into a coma, could be fairly described as being in a meaningless condition or one that is not worthwhile; such states do not imply that one has made a poor choice or could have made a better one.

Second, the meaningful and the worthwhile admit of variable and gradient appraisals. Judgments of them are variable in the sense that some people's lives may exhibit these features while others may not; it is perfectly coherent to say that some persons' lives are worthwhile whereas others are not, and similarly that some lives are meaningful and others are not.¹³ Furthermore, these values can be exhibited to a certain degree. Einstein's life was no doubt more meaningful than mine will ever be, and although talk of a life "worth living" suggests that a minimal threshold has been crossed, upon reflection, one notices that some lives can be *more* worth living than others. Hence, the meaningful and the worthwhile differ from the category of dignity, which is thought to be invariant among at least

¹¹ Camus (1955): 11; Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics," *The Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 3–12, 5 (first composed in 1929); Robert Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993) 27–43; Julian Baggini, *What's it All About?: Philosophy and the Meaning of Life* (London: Granta Books, 2004) 149, 166–70.

¹² Susan Haack, "Worthwhile Lives," *Free Inquiry* 22 (2002): 50–51; Wai-hung Wong, "Meaningfulness and Identities," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 11 (2008): 123–48, 126–34.

¹³ Such a judgment of course does not imply that their lives lack intrinsic value or moral status.

persons, and to be equal among those who have it. Similar remarks might go for the category of moral status, which some ethicists interpret to be invariant among persons, or perhaps sentient beings, and not to come in degrees.

A third reason for suspecting that the meaningful is no different from the worthwhile is that there is substantial co-variance between them, as I indicated at the end of the previous section. Many cases of meaningful lives are worthwhile ones, and vice versa, and many cases of meaningless lives are not worthwhile ones, and vice versa. Related to this is a fourth consideration, namely that there is substantial constitution between them, by which I mean that many features in virtue of which lives are meaningful are those in virtue of which they are worthwhile, and vice versa. Is it not merely the case that where a life is meaningful, there it is worthwhile, but also that what makes the life meaningful, for example, its creativity or virtue, is what makes it worthwhile.¹⁴

Despite these good reasons for believing that meaningfulness and worthwhile-ness are the same, I will argue that in fact, they are not. Before doing so, however, I demonstrate that the field needs this project to be undertaken, since other strategies for differentiating between them, which are suggested in the literature, cannot do the job.

IV. IMPLAUSIBLE STRATEGIES FOR DIFFERENTIATING

The primary ways that the extant literature suggests for separating the meaningful from the worthwhile all involve proposing certain definitions of terms that are clearly distinct. However, in this section, I argue that these definitions are not accurate analyses of the relevant concepts in that they are all overly narrow; differentiation comes at the cost of misrepresentation.

First off, there are some who maintain that a worthwhile life, by definition, is one that is expected to have more pleasure/satisfaction than pain/dissatisfaction in it, or at least promises to have an amount of well-being that is substantially larger than the amount of woe.¹⁵ If this analysis were correct, then it would be clear that talk of “meaningfulness” is different, since it is a commonplace that meaning is logically possible in spite of poor probabilities. Hollywood movies abound in which the hero struggles against all odds to make something of his life, and

¹⁴ A fifth consideration, about which I am less sure, is the apparent absence of causal relationships between the meaningful and the worthwhile. If worthwhileness and meaningfulness were distinct, then one would expect causal relationships between them to obtain, in the way that meaning in one’s life can cause one to be more happy. However, it is rarely suggested that meaning in one’s life has the *effect* of making it worthwhile, or vice versa.

¹⁵ Wollheim (1984): 244; Baier (1997): 69.

succeeds. Perhaps a good case is making a daring rescue that was unlikely to pan out and instead was likely to cost the hero his life.

However, I submit that a worthwhile life is not, by definition, one with a (sufficiently high) expected net value of well-being minus woe, since two lives can have the same expected utility and yet differ in terms of whether they are worthwhile, depending on the actual outcomes. A life may be a good gamble and yet turn out not to be worth living, perhaps an embezzler who has every reason to think he will get away with it, but instead winds up in jail. Conversely, a life may be a foolish bet, but turn out to be worth living, say, someone who overcomes serious physical or mental handicaps in ways physicians did not think were possible. Helen Keller's life is probably illustrative, here, of one worth living that was not expected to be happy.

Perhaps, then, a worthwhile life, by definition, is one that has (much) more actual, and not merely expected, well-being than woe in it. If so, then it would also be clear that talk of "meaningfulness" is different, since it is a commonplace that meaning can logically come not only from factors other than well-being, for example, having children clearly reduces happiness but is routinely judged to increase meaning,¹⁶ but also from sacrificing one's well-being for the sake of others.

I maintain, though, that a worthwhile life is not, by definition, one with a certain (finite) sum of welfare, since that would by definition rule out intuitively competing accounts of a worthwhile life. For example, some have held that a worthwhile life must be eternal,¹⁷ while others have claimed that it must not repeat.¹⁸ Even if one thinks that these claims are false, they do not appear to be false *by definition*, which would be the case if the present analysis of "worthwhile" talk were true.

The thinker who has done the most so far to try explicitly to differentiate between the meaningful and the worthwhile is Brooke Alan Trisel. He argues that a meaningful life, by definition, is one that realizes certain goals, which, as he points out, means that talk of "worthwhileness" is different, since it is uncontroversial that a life could be worth living in virtue of features other than purposive activity (even if, as is plausible, the latter were *necessary* for a life worth living).¹⁹

¹⁶ Jennifer Senior, "All Joy and No Fun: Why Parents Hate Parenting," *New York Magazine* (July 4, 2010) <<http://www.nymag.com/print/?/news/features/67024/>>.

¹⁷ Leo Tolstoy, *Confession*, tr. Louise Maude and Aylmer Maude (Classical Library, 2001) <<http://www.classicallibrary.org/tolstoy/confession/4.htm>> (originally published 1884); and Thomas Morris, *Making Sense of it All: Pascal and the Meaning of Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992) 26.

¹⁸ David Blumenfeld, "Living Life Over Again," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 79 (2009): 357–86.

¹⁹ Trisel (2007): 60–62.

For instance, experiencing pleasure could make life worth living, at least to some extent, even if it were not a product of one's goal-directed action.

Contra Trisel, I claim that a meaningful life is not, by definition, merely one that realizes certain goals, for meaning logically could also come from certain non-purposive conditions.²⁰ People have often believed that their lives are meaningful, at least to some degree, for being part of a certain bloodline (an aristocratic view), or being one of God's "chosen people" (e.g., Judaism), or having an immortal soul (e.g., Hinduism), or being loved or admired, or leaving (even unintended) traces after one's death. And if meaningful conditions are not inherently purposive, then it remains an open question as to whether the meaningful is equivalent to the worthwhile.

Finally, consider a suggestion that is usefully grounded in the work of Robert Nozick, according to which meaningful conditions essentially involve a connection with some good that is external to one's person.²¹ Nozick famously contends that meaning in a person's life is a function of transcending her limits, connecting with something intrinsically valuable beyond herself. "Children, relationships with other persons, helping others, advancing justice, continuing and transmitting a tradition, pursuing truth, beauty, world betterment—these and the rest link you to something wider than yourself."²² On the supposition that meaning is strictly "relational," a contrast with the worthwhile comes quickly, for it is plausibly something "intrinsic" to a person's life.

As will become clear below, I do think that there is a kernel of truth in this account of the difference between the meaningful and the worthwhile. However, as presently expressed, it is too stark. If the meaningful were just relational, and if the worthwhile were merely intrinsic, then there would be no overlap between these two properties of a sort that clearly obtains, as per the analysis in section III. Any plausible account of how the two conditions are different must also capture the respects in which they are similar, and it is frequently the case that a property making one's life meaningful is also something making it worthwhile, for example, doing good philosophy. But that judgment cannot be captured by the suggestion that the meaningful essentially involves a relationship with something beyond oneself, whereas the worthwhile does not.

²⁰ As I have argued in Thaddeus Metz, "The Concept of a Meaningful Life," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (2001): 137–53, 141–42.

²¹ Douglas Lackey suggested this kind of move to me, which I expound in the context of Nozick's influential discussion in *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) 594–619.

²² Nozick (1981): 595.

V. A NEW STRATEGY TO DIFFERENTIATE

In the previous section, I argued against attempts to differentiate between meaningfulness and worthwhileness that involve first specifying contrasting definitions of these terms and subsequently concluding that the properties are also different. I now begin to undertake the reverse sort of strategy, in light of the idea that if two words clearly refer to different properties, then it is apt to deem the words to have different senses. Therefore, in this section, I show that talk of life as being “meaningful” and “worthwhile” pick out different properties, which would provide not only good reason to consider them not to be synonymous but also guidance about which definitions to construct for these terms, something I do in the concluding section. Here, I articulate cases of worthwhile lives that are not meaningful as well as examples of meaningful lives that are not worthwhile, after which I proffer some theoretical explanations for the differences.

Counterexamples

First off, consider lives that intuitively are worth living, but are not meaningful, or at the very least radically differ in the degree to which they are. The clearest case, in my view, is that of the hedonist, the individual who seeks above all to maximize his own pleasure and to minimize his own pain. The life of a successful hedonist, one who has achieved his aim, appears worth living; it would be reasonable not to commit suicide in the face of such an existence. Surely, eating chocolate and ice cream make life (somewhat) more worth living, but fail to make one’s existence at all significant. A second case is that of a “health nut” such as a marathon runner. Supposing that the “runner’s high” is not so great and long-lasting as to count this individual as a hedonist, it appears that simply taking care of one’s body and developing it to achieve challenging physical goals is worth doing. For a third case, think of those who are rich and powerful, or, more specifically, those who use their great wealth and control to have a large-scale influence on humanity. Even in the case where the influence is not positive, many have the intuition that simply having a great impact can be something that is worth doing and hence contributes to one’s life being worthwhile.

I turn now to cases of lives that appear to be meaningful, but not worthwhile, or, again, at the very least to differ radically in the degree to which they are. I am tempted to suggest that such a case is one in which a person’s life would be more meaningful if she underwent a life not worth living so that others would not have to undergo that. If such a thought experiment is coherent, then the meaningful and the worthwhile are clearly distinct! However, someone who believes they are identical will probably reject the thought experiment as begging the question, and so I also proffer some less controversial cases.

In other contexts, I have discussed the case of an individual who suffers or is bored so that others will not suffer or be bored.²³ Consider, say, someone who volunteers to be head of department, taking on administrative burdens and attending dull meetings so that his colleagues can avoid doing so. Or, less glibly, think about those in the caring professions, such as nurses who elect to face stench, filth, distress, and the like so that such conditions are lessened for others. It is natural to say that such actions make these people's lives more meaningful, albeit not, or at least to a much lesser degree, worthwhile.²⁴ Next, reflect on individuals who commit suicide for a good cause, such as protecting innocents. Take a classic lifeboat scenario where there are not enough seats for all those who need them, and where you volunteer to give yours to someone else—a meaningful action, albeit not one that would make one's life worth continuing.

Having provided several exceptions to the putative rule that the meaningful and the worthwhile are extensionally equivalent, I now draw out some more theoretical lessons to be learned about the differences between them. There are four that strike me as salient.

Inherent Consideration of a Negative Dimension

When thinking about the worthwhile, we are thereby considering a negative dimension with regard to it, that is, we also have some disvalue in mind. The question of whether life is worth living essentially connotes the idea that some parts of a life are undesirable, and it asks whether there are desirable facets that are “worth the trouble” of undergoing that.²⁵ The question of whether life is meaningful differs, logically implying nothing about the presence of a negative dimension. Although some do posit the existence of “anti-matter,” by which I mean a property that reduces the amount of meaning in life,²⁶ it is controversial as to whether it exists, and is not analytically part of the question of life's meaning, which appears to enquire simply into whether a certain positive good is present.

²³ Thaddeus Metz, “The Meaning of Life,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Zalta (2007) <<http://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/life-meaning/>>.

²⁴ For a more recent, related point, see Timothy Mawson, “Sources of Dissatisfaction with Answers to the Question of the Meaning of Life,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2 (2010): 19–41, 41.

²⁵ Camus (1955): 13; see also Baier (1997): 68–69; and Trisel (2007): 62. For an interestingly different view from Baier in an early text, see his “Threats of Futility: Is Life Worth Living?” *Free Inquiry* 8 (1988): 47–52, 49.

²⁶ For discussion, see Thaddeus Metz, “Recent Work on the Meaning of Life,” *Ethics* 112 (2002): 781–814, 805–07.

The Inaptness of Death

Surely something that makes life worth continuing cannot be something that makes life worth ending. That is why suicide is invariably discussed in the context of the question of whether life is worth living, with the widespread assumption being that a sufficient condition for not committing suicide is that one's life would be worthwhile continuing. In contrast, although it is often said of meaningfulness that it is something worth living for, it can also be something worth dying for (as Joseph Heller has famously suggested in *Catch-22*). Some meaningful conditions are naturally understood to be able to provide reasons to commit suicide or to let oneself die, since dying might impart certain narrative qualities to one's life or produce good consequences for others' lives.

The Relevance of Sensation

The question of whether life is worth living is plausibly answered, in part, by appeal to hedonic considerations. That is one point. A second is that, at least for many non-utilitarians these days, the way that pleasure is relevant is not merely a function of a net balance of it minus pain. Instead, the question of whether life is worthwhile, for most, would be rightly answered in the negative if one were to face a sufficiently intense period of pain, say, one year of daily torture, regardless of the amount of pleasure to come elsewhere.²⁷ In contrast, the question of whether life is meaningful is not plausibly answered by appeal to bare facts about the pleasure in a life—and probably analytically so; recall the examples of the eating of chocolate or ice cream. Furthermore, although an intense period of pain can be utterly meaningless, and perhaps even detract from meaning in one's life, it cannot, in itself, disqualify one's life as a potential bearer of meaning on balance.²⁸ Again, recall the case of suffering so that others do not, or consider ministering to torture victims in a particularly sensitive way after having been tortured oneself.

A Focus on Internal Facets of a Life

The question of whether life is worth living is, I suspect by definition, rightly answered by appeal to facts that obtain in some sense “inside” the life, by which I mean not only a person's sensory experiences but also her aims, activities, states, relationships, and their pattern of distribution over a lifetime. So, for example, while exhibiting the virtues of generosity and wisdom in interaction with other persons is something that could make one's life worthwhile, it appears conceptually inappropriate to suggest that someone's life is worthwhile because of, say,

²⁷ Blumenfeld (2009): 382–86.

²⁸ Cf. Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, rev. edn. (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1984).

consequences she had on others' lives that she neither intended nor became aware of. In contrast, contemporary theorists of meaning in life maintain that part of what differentiates it from other values, such as pleasure or happiness, is that it can sometimes (at least logically) be constituted by more "external" factors. For instance, it is plausible to think that Vincent Van Gogh's life was made more meaningful by posthumous recognition and appreciation, but that the latter did not make his tormented life any more worthwhile.²⁹

In this section, I have provided what I take to be enough reason to deny the claim that a meaningful life just is a worthwhile one. Although there is substantial correspondence between the two properties that I do not deny (as per section III), I have brought out important differences between the two. If I were to represent the meaningful and the worthwhile as circles in a Venn diagram, they would partially, even largely, overlap, but would not be co-extensive. What remains is to ascribe senses to the terms "meaningful" and "worthwhile" that would be of use in enabling theorists to keep the properties distinct when evaluating the goodness of a life.

VI. CONCLUSION

I hope those who initially deemed the meaningful and the worthwhile to be more similar in content than I have argued, and perhaps even synonymous, are now inclined to change their minds. Given the several value-theoretic differences between the two properties advanced in the previous section, "meaningfulness" and "worthwhileness" are two terms with which it would be useful to track them. I bring this discussion to a close by suggesting definitions of these terms that are supported by the argumentation made in the previous section and by considering how the meaningful and the worthwhile factor into a desirable life.

Recall that I argued above that it is too narrow to define "worthwhileness" in terms of expected or actual well-being (section IV). Here, then, is a more promising definition: for one's life to be worthwhile (or worth living) is analytically for it, largely in virtue of sensation and other facts internal to the life, to have great enough value and sufficiently little disvalue to make it reasonable to exhibit pro-attitudes toward it such as appreciating it, desiring it, being glad about it and being pleased about it.

Such an analysis of the concept of a life worth living should ring true in light of the arguments in this article. In addition, note some *prima facie* respects in which it is an improvement on competing analyses that one finds in the literature. Baier has said that to deem one's life to be worthwhile by definition is just to be eager

²⁹ Metz (2009): 10–13, 15.

to relive the same life.³⁰ However, such an analysis would imply that it is logically contradictory to hold the view that one's life would be less worthwhile, perhaps even worthless, if one were to relive it, a view that David Blumenfeld has argued for with care.³¹

Blumenfeld instead suggests that talk of a "worthwhile life" by definition connotes that it is better to exist than not to exist.³² However, "better" is vague and might suggest a narrow notion of well-being, whereas I think that virtue or self-realization, for just two examples, can at least logically be good candidates for worthwhileness, something permitted by talk of facts "internal" to a life in the analysis I have put forth.

Finally, Trisel's work suggests the view that to judge one's life to be worthwhile is just to have the inclination to choose to have been born, supposing one had that ability.³³ However, few of us have that odd thought experiment at the centre of our thoughts when thinking about, say, whether life is worth continuing in the context of euthanasia, and, in any event, a broader range of pro-attitudes than merely this one seems apt to invoke.

I have done much elsewhere to analyze the concept of a meaningful life, and so I will be briefer about it here.³⁴ My favoured analysis is this: for one's life to be meaningful (or for one to have a significant existence) is by definition for it, largely in virtue of one's actions and their causes and consequences, to warrant great pride or admiration or to exhibit superlative final goods beyond one's animal self. Such an analysis of meaningfulness is clearly different from the one I have proposed for worthwhileness, and does a good job of capturing the sundry cases discussed in this article, for example, relating to sacrificing one's life or livelihood for others.

In sum, I have contended that there is a contingent relationship between the properties of meaningfulness and worthwhileness, such that the former can be the latter but need not be, and the latter can be the former but need not be. Supposing, now, that their distinctness has been established, I can point out that both are probably necessary in order to live the best life for human beings, or even a life that is satisfactory. Few would want to live a worthwhile but meaningless life, for example, the life of the hedonist in an experience machine, and few would want to live a meaningful life but one that is not worthwhile, for example, one chock full of sacrifice for the sake of others. Instead, the most attractive sort of life, it

³⁰ Baier (1988): 49.

³¹ Blumenfeld (2009).

³² Blumenfeld (2009): 379; see also David Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been* (New York: Oxford UP, 2006).

³³ Trisel (2007): 67–68, 75.

³⁴ Metz (2001).

appears, is at least one that is both substantially worthwhile and meaningful, viz., one that includes lots of conditions in which these two properties overlap. Having pulled the meaningful and the worthwhile apart in principle, I submit that the field now has a clearer and richer understanding of which sort of life would be good, namely, one in which the meaningful and the worthwhile are together in practice.

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