

Externalism, internalism, and meaningful lives

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Abstract

This paper argues that participants in the subjectivism/objectivism/hybridism debate, a central issue in recent meaning in life research, conflate two different distinctions marked by the terms *objective* and *subjective*, one having to do with the question of whether life's meaningfulness depends on factors internal or external to the agent, the other having to do with the question of whether there is any 'absolute' as opposed to 'relative' truth about the first question. The paper then argues that a distinctive type of hybridism with respect to the first sense is true. To vindicate this type of hybridism, the paper identifies, by using examples and counterexamples, internal and external necessary conditions for having meaningful lives. In this type of hybridism, internal states that are not directed at external factors, such as autonomy, serenity and contentment, are also taken account of, and, more generally, internal and external factors need not relate to each other at all. Further, although the more a combination of internal and external factors is valuable the more meaningful a life is, not any increase in the value of any relevant internal or external factor enhances meaning.

KEYWORDS

externalism, internalism, meaning in life, meaning of life, objectivism, subjectivism

1 | INTRODUCTION

The subjectivism/objectivism/hybridism debate in meaning in life research has drawn much attention in the last two decades (some out of many examples are Audi, 2005, p. 344; Bramble, 2015; Evers & van Smeden, 2016; Frankfurt, 2002; Hooker, 2008, pp. 184–196; Metz, 2013, chaps. 9–11; Mintoff, 2008, pp. 69–71; Smuts, 2013;

Trisel, 2002, pp. 67, 78–80; Wolf, 1997, pp. 209–211, 2002, 2010). I argue that part of the debate conflates two senses of ‘subjectivism’ and ‘objectivism’. After distinguishing between the two senses, I focus on the one I argue to be more appropriate. Following Wielenberg (2005, p. 15) and Brogaard and Smith (2005, pp. 444–445), I use here (although somewhat differently from them) the terms *internalism* and *externalism* to discuss issues commonly treated in the subjectivism/objectivism/hybridism debate.¹ Once internalism/externalism is distinguished from subjectivism/objectivism, I examine the former distinction under objectivist suppositions and show that there are no sets of factors in the external sphere alone or in the internal sphere alone that are sufficient for having a meaningful life: both internal factors and external factors are necessary. Thus, I argue in this paper, under objectivist suppositions, for a distinctive kind of internalist-externalist hybridism. This hybridism focuses not only on internal states such as desire, engagement, and love, which relate to some external factors, but also on internal states such as autonomy, serenity, and contentment that do not relate at all to external factors. To the best of my knowledge, internalism, externalism, and hybridism (in the sense discussed in this paper) about meaning in life have not been considered before systematically and in depth as done here.

2 | SUBJECTIVISM/OBJECTIVISM OR INTERNALISM/EXTERNALISM?

Although the terms *subjectivism* and *objectivism* are very commonly used in discussions about meaning in life, they each have more than one meaning. The different meanings of these terms are sometimes equivocated in ways that have infelicitously affected the debate.

Subjectivism about meaning in life is sometimes employed to connote a certain type of *relativism* about meaning in life, the view, roughly, that the truth of claims about meaning in life is relative to the individual standpoints of the claimers. Subjectivism in this sense is not very different from, say, cultural relativism, except that cultural relativism takes the truth of claims to be relative to a cultural standpoint that the claimer may share with other members of her culture, whereas subjectivism takes the truth of claims to be relative to an individual standpoint that may be specific to the claimer. A subjectivist about meaning in life may hold, for example, that if a person genuinely holds that filling his home with towels makes his life meaningful, it does. Just as some hold, then, that beauty is in the eye of the (individual) beholder, a subjectivist about meaning in life will hold that meaning is in the eye of the (individual) beholder. Thus Thomas (2019, p. 1566), for example, writes that ‘whether (a) life is ultimately perceived to have various meanings or not will be relative to different people and is determined by their knowledge, beliefs, and cognitive capacities’. Likewise, Goldman (2018, p. 125) claims: ‘Nothing is meaningful in itself: x means y to z... For an event to mean something in someone’s life, it must mean something to a subject who experiences it in some way’.

Objectivism about meaning in life is, roughly, the view that the truth of claims about one’s meaning in life is independent of claimers’ standpoints; it rejects all types of relativism (including subjectivism). An objectivist about meaning in life will agree that a person’s cultural or personal standpoint may lead her to hold that certain claims about her or others’ meaning in life are true, but will hold that these claims may well be wrong. For example, it may be true that, according to the sensations, feelings, or views of a certain individual, filling one’s home with towels makes life meaningful, but that claim is still mistaken. Thus Kauppinen, for example, writes:

We are not *infallible* about meaning... the difference in the meaningfulness of Nelson Mandela’s life and your life isn’t a matter of your subjective attitudes ... [but] a result of the difference between what Mandela has done and what you’ve done. (2013, p. 164; emphasis in original)

¹For some other employments of ‘internalism’ and ‘externalism’ regarding meaning in life (see Dahl, 1987, p. 5; Heyd & Miller, 2010, pp. 29–30; Kekes, 1986; Trisel, 2002, p. 67). The internalism/externalism distinction also follows Cottingham’s (2003, p. 12) distinction between ‘endogenous’ and ‘exogenous’ sources of meaning in life and Wolf’s distinction between the fulfillment view and the larger-than-oneself view of meaning in life (2010, pp. 10–11, 18–25).

Similarly, Smuts describes his account as

an objectivist theory of the meaning of life. It identifies the meaningfulness of one's life in the objective good that one causes. This view is distinct from subjectivist accounts... meaningfulness is not constituted by the reactions of the one living the life. (2013, p. 537)

These are very general and imprecise portrayals of subjectivism and objectivism; many qualifications and specifications should be added. But since, in this paper, I am not interested in *these* senses of subjectivism and objectivism, I will leave them here at that and move on to the other senses of these terms.

Another sense of *subjectivism* is what might be called *internalism*, the view that what makes life meaningful has to do with what we commonly see as the internal sphere—that is, one's sensations, feelings, emotions, intentions, thoughts, views, decisions, etc. And another sense of *objectivism* is what might be called *externalism*, the view that what makes life meaningful is what we do in the external sphere (including other people's internal sphere)—that is, how we impact (or fail to impact) other people or things.²

We can see that the subjectivism/objectivism distinction and the internalism/externalism distinction differ because they cut across each other. An example of an *objectivist externalist* is a person who holds that only people who save the lives of many other people have meaningful lives, and that the truth of this claim is independent of people's personal and cultural standpoints; it is the same everywhere and for everyone. Because of their personal or cultural backgrounds some people may see things differently, but they are objectively wrong.

However, one can also be an *objectivist internalist*. This would be, for example, a person who holds that only people who have experienced a satori (Zen mystical enlightenment) have meaningful lives, and that the truth of this claim, as above, does not depend on people's cultural or personal standpoints or backgrounds; it is true everywhere and for everyone, and those who do not see this just do not understand what meaningful lives are.

One can also be a *subjectivist externalist*. This would be, for example, a person who holds that *she* believes, because of *her* standpoint, that only people who save the lives of many other people have meaningful lives, but that this claim is true only for her, because of her own individual standpoint or background. Other people have other standpoints, backgrounds, and claims about what makes life meaningful (e.g., they may hold that killing many people is what makes life meaningful), and their views are true for them; to each her own, and there is no independent, objective criterion that holds for all people.

And one can, of course, also be a *subjectivist internalist*. This would be, for example, a person who notes that *he* holds, from *his* standpoint, that only people who have experienced satoris have meaningful lives, but meaning is in the eye of the beholder, since there is no independent, objective criterion for what is meaningful.

Thus, subjectivism and internalism differ, as do objectivism and externalism. One can be an internalist without being a subjectivist and vice versa, and one can be an externalist without being an objectivist and vice versa. In ethical theory, normative claims (e.g., murdering is bad; feeding the hungry is good) belong to the subfield of normative ethics. Claims on ethical relativism and ethical objectivism belong to the subfield of meta-ethics: they discuss the status or nature of claims in normative ethics. These are two distinct levels of discussion. In meaning in life research, too, internalist/externalist claims and subjectivist/objectivist claims belong to two distinct levels of discussion. In this paper I discuss only the internalism/externalism debate about meaning in life, and within it I limit myself to discussing only objectivist externalism, objectivist internalism, and objectivist hybridism (henceforth often simply 'externalism', 'internalism', and 'hybridism'). I do not discuss in this paper the subjectivism/objectivism (or relativism/objectivism) debate about meaning in life, mentioning it only in order to distinguish it from the internalism/externalism debate.

Many discussants of subjectivism and objectivism about meaning in life conflate subjectivism with internalism and objectivism with externalism. Klemke, for example, writes that 'objective meaning ... would be an outer ... thing, rather

²Note that *externalism* refers in this paper to the view that what makes life meaningful are our external actions, not the view that what makes life meaningful are external circumstances.

than an inner, dynamic achievement' (2000, p. 195). Goldman (2018, p. 145) writes that it is easier to sustain valuable than heinous projects, 'although value here is given an internal or subjective instead of external or objective interpretation'. Wolf claims that 'a life that fully satisfies the subjective condition may be one we are hesitant to describe as meaningful, if objectively the life is unconnected to anything or anyone whose value lies outside of the person whose life it is' (2016, p. 260) and refers to 'subjective matter—from the inside' (2016, p. 259). Wielenberg discusses subjectivism as the view that 'the internal meaning of a life depends entirely on whether the agent is doing what he wants to do' (2005, p. 22), Dahl refers to it as 'the internalist condition' (1987, p. 12), and Kekes calls it the view that 'meaning comes from the inside' (1986, p. 80). Many others, such as Metz (2013), although not explicitly using the terms *internal* and *inside* when discussing subjectivism, or *external* and *outside* when discussing objectivism, present only examples from the internal sphere when discussing subjectivism and only examples from the external sphere when discussing objectivism. It is especially easy to conflate objectivist internalism (which holds that it is objectively true that what makes life meaningful happens in the internal sphere) with subjectivism (which is a form of relativism), because some types of objectivist internalism lead to the same attributions of meaning in life as does subjectivism. Consider an objectivist internalist who holds that having a feeling or a view that one's life is meaningful is what makes life meaningful. *This* objectivist internalist will endorse the same attributions of meaning in life as would a subjectivist about meaning in life, since subjectivism, too, holds that people's feeling or viewing their lives as meaningful makes their lives meaningful. But notwithstanding the extensional similarity between subjectivism and *this* type of objectivist internalism, the positions differ intensionally. Moreover, for other types of objectivist internalism (such as the one that takes only satoris, or compassion, or deep knowledge to make life meaningful), objectivist internalism and subjectivism differ not only intensionally but also extensionally.

It is important not to conflate subjectivism with (objectivist) internalism, lest one's anti-subjectivism (or, more generally, anti-relativism) leads one to forgo internalism, even though the latter is not guilty of what might be the faults of the former. This, indeed, is what happens to many participants in the subjectivism/objectivism/hybridism debate. They forgo examining under objectivist suppositions whether meaningfulness can inhere only in the internal sphere because they identify internalism with subjectivism, which they reject on the basis of the common anti-subjectivist argument that subjectivism has counterintuitive implications. Thus Wolf (2016, p. 264), for example, criticises subjectivism because it implies that meaningfulness could be found in 'ardent defense of an unscrupulous corporate client'; Cottingham (2003, p. 21) rejects subjectivism because it implies that meaningfulness could be found in 'lining up balls of torn up newspaper in neat rows'; Wielenberg (2005, pp. 22–23) claims that subjectivism implies that life could be made meaningful by eating excrement; and Dahl (1987, p. 12) argues that according to subjectivism 'interference with the chosen ways of life of others' could make life meaningful. After presenting some of these and many other examples of subjectivism's counterintuitive implications, Metz (2013, pp. 175–179) too accepts this move. The argument is that to avoid such counterintuitive results, we need to accept that meaningfulness should be considered (at least also) under objectivist suppositions, but then only examples from the external sphere are considered, as if objectivist internalism is impossible. Thus, with objectivism or objectivist-subjectivist hybridism, either externalism or externalist-internalist hybridism is adopted. I suggest, however, that the correctness of internalism, externalism, and internalist-externalist hybridism about meaning in life should be examined without relation to the subjectivism/objectivism question. This is what I aim to do in the rest of this paper.³

³It might be objected that these examples do not show that their authors conflate (relativist) subjectivism with objectivist internalism; it could be that when the authors cited point at the counterintuitive implications of what they call 'subjectivism', they are just arguing against a narrow form of objectivist internalism, according to which one's life is meaningful if and only if one is engaged in activities that bring one pleasure or satisfy one's desires. However, most likely these authors are not arguing against a narrow form of objectivist internalism, since they present what they call 'subjectivism' as the opposite of objectivism. Further, their discussions suggest that they are thinking of (relativist) subjectivism rather than objectivist internalism: Cottingham (2003, p. 20), for example, explains subjectivism as related to seeing value 'as a matter of subjective preference' that has to do with 'no more than your arbitrary personal preference'. Metz (2013, p. 164) explains that 'the subjectivist in general maintains that there is no standard independent of people's propositional attitudes to determine which states of affairs are meaningful'. And Wolf (2016, p. 264) argues against subjectivism by emphasizing that people may be wrong in their views (which relativist subjectivism is often taken to deny) and that 'we must accept the legitimacy of a kind of value judgment that is subject-independent' and states further (p. 265) that 'something other than a radically subjective account of value must be assumed'. Note, moreover, that even if authors such as those cited were just arguing against a narrow form of objectivist internalism, they would still be in error—the error of construing objectivist internalism too narrowly. The present paper should then be seen as rectifying this *other* error by considering the correctness of objectivist internalism at large rather than just that of narrow objectivist internalism.

3 | INTERNALISM AND EXTERNALISM

Before continuing, however, various points of clarification should be made. When discussing meaningful lives in this paper, I focus on whole lives or parts of lives as bearers of meaning. I will not discuss here other possible bearers of meaning such as artworks, organizations, or actions, unless they relate to meaningful lives or parts of lives.

I will examine here whether the meaningfulness of meaningful lives resides in the external sphere, the internal sphere, or both together. This question should be distinguished from asking whether we can find *some* meaning in life in the external sphere, the internal sphere, or both together. I discuss here only lives that are meaningful, not lives in which there is just some meaning. Non-meaningful lives are often not bereft of any meaning; there is almost always some meaning in them (e.g., just a little compassion to others, just a bit of knowledge), but not enough to make them meaningful lives, just as a scene that we would not consider beautiful often does not lack any beauty—it just does not have sufficient beauty to be considered beautiful. But when discussing meaningful lives vis-à-vis the external and internal spheres, I will not be asking whether *some* meaning in life may reside in the external sphere, the internal sphere, or both together. It seems to me trivially true that it may. I will be examining, rather, whether the meaningfulness of lives that we take to be meaningful can reside only in the external sphere, the internal sphere, or both together.

The internal/external distinction allows for some grey areas. For example, it is not completely clear whether one's own body should be seen as part of the internal or external sphere. What we do regarding our bodies impacts ourselves and need not impact others. Yet, many do not see the body as part of the internal sphere. Feelings or sensations that are partly physical, such as fatigue, weakness, fear, pain, energy, and happiness also complicate things. But since many distinctions allow some grey areas, and since these grey areas do not jeopardise my claims ahead, I will not discuss them further here.

When examining whether meaningfulness of lives resides in the external sphere, internal sphere, or both together, I will rely on a common understanding of meaningful lives as having a sufficiently high degree of positive value. However, as Metz (2019) emphasises, although this is a very prevalent understanding of meaningful lives (see, e.g., Brogaard & Smith, 2005, p. 443; Cottingham, 2003, p. 31; Frankfurt, 1992, p. 8; Hepburn, 2000, p. 262; Kauppinen, 2015; Landau, 2017, pp. 6–16; Metz, 2013, pp. 219–248; Nielsen, 2000, pp. 237, 242–250; Wolf, 2010), it is not the only one. For example, some understand meaningfulness of life as having to do with intelligibility (see, e.g., Repp, 2018; Seachris, 2019; Thomas, 2019). In what follows, I presuppose the prevalent understanding of meaningful lives as bearing a high degree of positive value (for a defence of this view, see Metz, 2019.)

4 | CAN MEANINGFULNESS OF LIVES RESIDE ONLY IN THE EXTERNAL SPHERE?

Let us examine, first, whether a life can be made meaningful only by factors in the external sphere, no matter what factors in the internal sphere are. Take, for example, saving the lives of a million people. We may want to add some provisos, such as that the people saved do not afterwards suffer immensely for several years and then die, that they do not afterwards become aggressive and perpetrate a genocide of millions of people, etc., but barring such scenarios, saving the lives of a million people seems to be an external factor that might by itself make a life meaningful.

But are there no internal factors that must also hold in order that we consider such a life meaningful? Wolf maintains that in order to have a meaningful life, one has to have some sense of fulfilment (2010, p. 20) and to love what one is doing, that is, to be 'gripped, excited, interested, engaged, ... as opposed to being bored by or alienated' (2010, p. 9; see also pp. 14, 111–112). However, following Metz's (2013, p. 135) example of a bored Mother Teresa, I suggest that if meaningfulness is indeed based on reaching a sufficiently high degree of value in life, saving so many lives can make a life meaningful because of its immensely valuable impact on the world. Such acts are

valuable enough to make a life meaningful even if the agent is bored or depressed but, for example, acting out of duty. The savior may not feel her life to be meaningful because the depression and boredom she is experiencing occlude this fact from her. Moreover, depression and boredom are aspects of negative value and, thus, diminish to an extent the overall value in her life. But all in all, the value reached in her life is so high that we can rightly see it as meaningful. Some people may even take the life of a bored Mother Teresa to be more meaningful than the life of a happy Mother Teresa who likes her life and what she is doing, since bored Mother Teresa has to act even more unselfishly, and invest more effort and determination, than does happy Mother Teresa. I agree, then, with Metz that pleasure and interest in what one does are not necessary conditions for having a meaningful life, at least when the external factor is saving the lives of a million people.

However, other internal factors do seem necessary for considering as meaningful a life in which one saves a million other lives. For example, if Mother Teresa acted under complete hypnosis (to which she had not consented), obeying automatically and mechanically as a robot would the orders of the hypnotist who fully controlled her, her life would not be meaningful even if she saved a million lives. (In this example, as in several of the following ones, we slip into the realm of bad action movies.) Thus, at least a certain degree of autonomy seems a necessary internal condition for Mother Teresa's life to be meaningful. Similarly, if this imagined Mother Teresa planned to poison a million sick people or to enslave them by addicting all of them to drugs, but, because of some lucky mistake, her vile plan ended in just saving their lives, again hers would not be a meaningful life. Thus, positive intention also seems a necessary internal condition for Mother Teresa's life to be meaningful. Considering just the external factors in her life is insufficient for classifying her life as meaningful. Similarly, suppose that the discovery of penicillin was a complete fluke of a malevolent person working hard to create a substance that would kill millions of people in order to make a great deal of money or to subjugate as many people as possible. Suppose that because of some computation error he made, it came about, to his chagrin, that he sent to some examiners' committee not a new, violent cholera agent (as he wished) but antibiotics. This would not make his life meaningful. It is easy to think of similar examples: if someone at the last minute saved the world from a nuclear holocaust *not* because he was working hard to prevent the catastrophe but, rather, because he was one of the villains who just clumsily slipped, thereby inadvertently moving the wrong lever and thus saving the world, that would not make his life meaningful. Autonomy and positive intention, then, again emerge as necessary conditions for a life to be meaningful. But this, of course, does not show that other internal factors, such as being happy, liking, being interested, being enthusiastic, sensing fulfilment, or finding one's life meaningful are necessary for a life to be meaningful. And showing that these latter internal factors are not necessary for having a meaningful life does not imply that autonomy and positive intention are not necessary for having a meaningful life.

Of course, if some internal factors are necessary conditions for having a meaningful life, factors limited to the external sphere are insufficient to do so by themselves. Meaningfulness of lives, then, does not reside in the external sphere alone.

5 | CAN MEANINGFULNESS OF LIVES RESIDE ONLY IN THE INTERNAL SPHERE?

Can internal factors alone make life meaningful no matter what the external factors are? Similar to what we did above when considering the external sphere, we can try to think of internal factors that may make life meaningful by themselves and then look for external factors whose existence or absence may cancel this meaningfulness.

Are the two internal factors that are necessary conditions for any life to be meaningful, namely autonomy and positive intention, also sufficient conditions for meaningfulness? The reply seems to be negative: there should be more in a meaningful life than just good intention and autonomy. A life marked only by these qualities but that does not include any internal or external achievements (because of laziness, for example) will not be meaningful.

But perhaps other internal factors can be added to these two so that we would have a set of purely internal factors that is sufficient to make a life meaningful.

Adams (2010) presents Claus von Stauffenberg's failed effort to assassinate Hitler during World War II as making Stauffenberg's life meaningful. Stauffenberg did not succeed in the external sphere: the plot failed and he was executed. Nevertheless, his case might be presented as an example in which internal factors alone suffice to make a life meaningful. However, the example does not support such a conclusion. If we take Stauffenberg's life to be meaningful, we do so (as does Adams) not only because of internal factors such as Stauffenberg's dislike of Hitler, his wish that Hitler would die, or his thoughts on how to kill Hitler. Many other German army officers at that time also disliked Hitler, wished he would die, or even had thoughts on how to kill him, but we do not see this as sufficient to make their lives meaningful. Unlike them, Stauffenberg took action in the external world to try to assassinate Hitler: he organised coconspirators, planted a bomb (that was unfortunately ineffective) in Hitler's headquarters, etc.⁴ Thus, if Stauffenberg's life, or part of it, merits being seen as meaningful, it is not because of internal factors alone.

Haidt (2010, pp. 94–95) talks of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *flow* (vital engagement or complete immersion in an activity one finds challenging yet is able to perform) as a factor that may be sufficient for making life meaningful. However, although flow is indeed internal, engaging in it may not be sufficient for having a meaningful life. For example, it may well be that during the Rwandan genocide of 1994, some Hutu generals experienced vital engagement in murdering so many Tutsi people and practiced flow when planning and executing the genocide.

The examples reviewed thus far, then, do not show that meaningfulness of lives can reside in the internal sphere alone. But there may be another example that suggests that, at least in some cases, internal factors alone are sufficient to make a life meaningful. Consider (following discussions in Breitbart & Poppito, 2014) a person who is terminally ill with advanced cancer, knows that she will die very soon, cannot move any part of her body anymore except her neck and head, and is in pain. However, she shows courage, dignity, serenity, and resoluteness in the face of very difficult circumstances. Many, including probably Frankl (1985, p. 89), would see her as having achieved valuable inner accomplishments that make the latter part of her life meaningful even though she has no positive impact on the external world.

It may seem, then, that the internal factors described above are sufficient to make a life meaningful, so that meaningfulness can reside in the internal sphere alone. Dignity, courage, serenity, and resoluteness in the face of great difficulties, along with autonomy and positive intention, seem sufficient to make a life meaningful. However, this is incorrect. Consider a politician who shows all of these attributes but initiates political and economic policies that prove to be disastrous and ruin the lives of many. Following the supposition discussed in Section 2 above that a meaningful life must have a sufficiently high degree of positive value, such a life is not meaningful. In meaningful lives, an external negative condition must also be fulfilled—that one does not inflict on others great harm that one is responsible for.⁵

⁴Admittedly, Stauffenberg's external actions did not achieve the results they aimed for. But they had a fair chance of doing so. Following Metz (2013, p. 189), if an action has no chance of achieving the positive results it aims for, it does not add meaning to life. However, if it has some plausible chance of achieving the results but fails, it does add meaning. Yet note that sometimes actions that seem to have no chance of achieving their results in fact have aims other than we assume them to have. For example, participants in the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising knew well that they did not have a chance of defeating the Nazi war machine in the long run and that the Nazis would eventually murder the ghetto's population. However, their aims were to take an active stand against evil even when the odds were insurmountable and to die in active resistance rather than in passive compliance (Gutman, 1994, pp. xi–xx).

⁵Harming others without being responsible for the harm (e.g., if one is hypnotised or involved in an accident that one could not have in any way avoided) seems to me not to undermine the meaningfulness of one's life.

6 | INTERNAL-EXTERNAL HYBRIDISM

All combinations of purely external factors and of purely internal factors that I have examined in this paper were insufficient by themselves to make life meaningful. In all cases, both some internal and some external conditions had to be fulfilled. Of course, I have not examined all possible combinations of purely external or purely internal factors. But I have discussed many combinations that were strong candidates for making life meaningful on their own. Until shown differently, then, it seems that we should reject both internalism and externalism about meaning in life, adopting instead hybridism. To have a meaningful life, both internal and external necessary conditions have to be fulfilled. All combinations of factors that make lives meaningful must include positive intention, autonomy, and lack of infliction on others of great harm that one is responsible for.

These necessary internal and external conditions, however, do not add up together to a sufficient condition: just showing autonomy, positive intention, and lack of infliction on others of great harm one is responsible for is not sufficient to make a life meaningful. Other internal or external conditions, such as experiencing satori or helping many other people, need to be added. (Of course, all these combinations will be hybrid as well.)⁶

What determines which combinations of internal and external factors are sufficient to make a life meaningful is the degree of value in them. The more a combination of factors is valuable, the more the life would be meaningful. If some factors are lower in value, the others must be of higher value. Consider as an example, again, Metz's claim that the bored Mother Teresa has a meaningful life (2013, p. 135). He seems to have picked this example because, although it includes very low (or negative) value in the internal sphere (boredom), the external sphere is very high in value because Mother Teresa saved so many lives. Metz would not have suggested an example of a bored teacher as having a meaningful life. But if, in the latter example, we enhance value in the internal sphere so that the teacher is enthusiastic and happy, we are more likely to see his life as meaningful and yet even more so if, in the external sphere, he also positively affects a large number of students. Likewise, the terminally ill person described in Section 4 has absolutely no positive external impact on anyone or anything outside herself; there are no external factors of positive value in her life. Hence, if her life is to be considered meaningful, internal factors have to be seen as of very much value indeed. Had we described a life with similar external factors but less internal value—for example, a life in which the patient was despondent and just watched television once in a while or just had shallow feelings about some things—we would have probably not considered it meaningful. There are also many other possible combinations of internal and external factors that may reach a certain threshold of overall value, and thus meaningfulness, in a life.

Note, however, that although the more the combination of internal and external factors is valuable the more meaningful the life is, it is not the case that any increase in any relevant internal or external factor enhances meaning. This is because factors sometimes interact with each other dialectically. For example, it is sometimes the *absence* of factors of external value that allows courage and resoluteness to appear to their greatest extent and make life so meaningful. (This is true also of many other cases in which value relates to rising to challenges.) Likewise, a moderate, appropriate degree of pride over a moderate external achievement makes a life more meaningful than no pride over that achievement, but a very high degree of pride over a quite moderate external achievement makes a life less meaningful because it renders the internal factor inappropriate and indicates pompousness and lack of judgment.

⁶I have examined in this paper whether meaningfulness resides in the internal sphere, the external sphere, or both spheres together. But some might also be interested in whether meaningfulness resides in the mental sphere, the physical sphere, or both together. Although much of what is mental is internal and much of what is physical is external, the internal/external distinction and the mental/physical distinction cut across each other. Consider a counsellor who helps terminally ill cancer patients by talking with them about their forthcoming death, thus helping them emotionally and allowing them to die more peacefully. What makes the counsellor's life more meaningful is external rather than internal—namely, his impact on other people's lives. Nevertheless, the impact is mental rather than physical. However, notwithstanding such examples, the mental and internal spheres, like the external and physical spheres, often coincide. Examining the examples in the discussions above suggests that what is said in this paper of internalism, externalism, and hybridism also holds, respectively, for what might be called mentalism, physicalism, and hybridism (of the mental and the physical spheres) as regards a meaningful life.

Note also that in the type of hybridism described here, unlike Wolf's, one may, but need not, love, be fulfilled by, be engaged in, be attracted to, or be excited about an external valuable action. One can (following Metz) have a meaningful life even if one is bored with or hates the valuable action one is doing yet performs it intentionally and consciously because she understands its value. One can even have a meaningful life by doing an externally valuable thing out of *hatred* of some evil or injustice (Metz, 2013, p. 183).⁷ The hybridism presented here also allows that one can fail in one's external deeds while showing courage, resoluteness, or self-sacrificial nobility.

The hybridism defended here also allows that the internal and external factors that combine for sufficient value not be related at all. For example, one can have a meaningful life because one externally does some good medical work that one does not enjoy *and* internally has many pleasurable aesthetic experiences when one is not working. Further, Wolf (2010, pp. 110, 114) seems to hold that internal factors that make life meaningful have to relate to some action. Indeed, most discussions in the traditional subjectivism/objectivism debate focus on internal factors (e.g., enjoying, loving, being interested, being fulfilled) that relate to some actions (e.g., feeding the hungry, counting bathroom tiles). Then the debate is whether life is meaningful just because the actions are enjoyed, loved, etc., or—unrelated to these attitudes—because of the actions' either positive consequences or intrinsic worth. But internal factors that enhance life's meaningfulness need not relate at all to actions or other things. Just as negative internal states such as depression, boredom, anxiety, and dread need not have specific objects, so positive and valuable internal states that add to life's meaningfulness, such as a general sense of security, serenity, energy, contentment, or happiness, need not have specific objects and may, together with unrelated external factors, make a life meaningful. There are many types of value in the internal sphere, hence also many types of combinations of internal and external factors that can make a life meaningful.

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⁷It might be objected that one cannot hate evil or injustice without also loving goodness or justice. However, a person fighting against an evil regime that murdered his family may feel numbness towards those he loved, and mostly hatred towards the oppressive, murderous regime. More generally, we can distinguish between, on the one hand, loving something and, on the other hand, recognising in an alienated way its value. Thus, one can hate injustice while not loving justice but only recognising in an alienated way its value and importance.

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