

The "meaning crisis" trend. How do you answer it as an Epicurean philosopher?

Post by "Eoghan Gardiner" of September 21, 2024 at 11:14 AM

What is the meaning crisis?

Figures on social media platforms, such as John Vervaeke, Jordan Peterson and others have been claiming there is a meaning crisis in society. Religion has been dethroned and people look for meaning in new age, their jobs or relationships.

How would you as an Epicurean answer this meaning crisis? Do you even accept the terms of things needing "meaning"? I have my own thoughts which I'll add later.

Post by "Cassius" of September 21, 2024 at 12:04 PM

[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

Do you even accept the terms of things needing "meaning"?

Right, I would first question the terms of the debate. "Meaning" to whom? Jordan Peterson and others of either an explicitly religious or a "humanist" bent look for standards of moral worthiness in gods or idealism. Epicurus taught that nature gives us only pleasure and pain by which to determine what to choose and what to avoid. Therefore we don't look to supernatural gods or rationalistic ideals; instead we each individually have to look to the guidance that we feel inside as to physical and mental pain and pleasure for the ultimate answers to all questions of how to live.

I don't doubt that there is a "meaning crisis," but it is a crisis of the creation of the people you listed and their predecessor schools. They won't get past it until they abandon their search for answers in divine revelation and rationalistic idealism. The people you listed are highly unlikely to make that change, so they will just keep at their task of wringing their hands over their self-created angst.

And since I think it's an important part of this discussion I will restate it: the "secular humanists" are just as guilty of this problem as are those preaching supernatural religion. The secular humanists talk like they offer an alternative to revealed religion, but then they turn right around and adopt the central core of the morality of the people they claim to oppose. I think Epicurus would say that all attempts to replace the guidance of nature (through pleasure and pain) with some other standard is doomed to ultimately being unsatisfying.

I started to type "doomed to failure" in that last sentence, but I suppose since the people I am criticizing have been the viewpoint of a large majority of people for 2000+ years, it's hard to say that they have "failed" in their goal. The problem is that their goal is manipulation and suppression of people holding viewpoints not to their liking, and in that respect unfortunately they have largely been successful.

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of September 21, 2024 at 12:36 PM

My thoughts are

1. who gets to decide who's "meaning" solution is correct? Each religion says they are right.
2. It's endless mental masturbation, no one has ever solved a meaning crisis by thinking.
3. It causes more anxiety, the Christian will think why is the Buddhist so tranquil and so on so forth.
4. It's a distrust of our own faculties, that when our bodies give us the signal that something is pleasurable we want to examine it and say "is this giving my life meaning"
5. It starts with a conclusion, that there is some objective platonic or universal meaning somewhere and we just need the correct ideology to reach it.
- 6.

Post by “Martin” of September 21, 2024 at 12:40 PM

If someone wants a meaning for one's life, they are free to create it.

I thought about meaning of life during adolescence and the subsequent years because I read and heard from others about it but never felt that need for a meaning of life, so for me personally, there is no such crisis. However, as Nietzsche anticipated, the meaning crisis might be relevant for many people.

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of September 21, 2024 at 12:47 PM

I think my main issue with the meaning crisis is mostly the claim of objectivity, if you want subjective meaning such as Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de beauvoir talk about that's honestly fine.

How these meaning crisis promoters, don't want simple existentialism subjectivity but rather theistic like objectivity!

Also it's subverts our naturally faculties by asking "wow, is your body telling you something is pleasurable *really* enough for you?"

At least that's how it seems to me.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 21, 2024 at 1:07 PM

[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

Figures on social media platforms, such as john vervaeke

I had to look him up because I don't know anything about him. I found this [summary](#) of some of his ideas.

The idea that the loss of religion is causing a "meaning crisis"...my first reaction is this: "correlation does not equal causation".

Perhaps (and this just an idea) the "meaning crisis" is that people neither feel a sense of belonging with people within their immediate surroundings AND the people all around them have such vastly differing worldviews (and political views)...which makes the development of a sense of belonging very difficult. So I am thinking it is not so much *what* exactly people believe but that *everyone is believing differently from one another*. (And even family members can hold vastly differing views). Add in to that, that there are so many varying hobbies and interests in life, so that finding someone to talk to with who has the same interests (and who has time to talk) can be difficult.

Feeling a sense of isolation can create a crisis for human beings, as we have evolved within family and community.

[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

How would you as an Epicurean answer this meaning crisis? Do you even accept the terms of things needing "meaning"? I have my own thoughts which I'll add later.

I think I started a thread on meaning not too long ago (will need to see if I can dig it up). And there are other threads and places that meaning is discussed.

"Things needing meaning"?

-- the meaning of life? (I'd say this question comes from "religious salesmen")

-- feeling like what you do is meaningful? (worthwhile, pleasurable, gives good results in the long-term, brings happiness)

-- making meaning for yourself? (having a method for choosing the things that you do)

-- that your life matters? (feeling a sense of connection with others, and that they care about you and you care about them)

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 21, 2024 at 1:47 PM

Here is the thread that I created on meaning:

Thread

[Meaning and Satisfaction for Epicureans](#)

There are a few other threads and posts that bring up the topic of "meaning", but just this morning I was thinking about it again.

It seems to me that "meaning" and "meaningful" - as in "my life has meaning" or "my life is meaningful"...for an Epicurean could be translated to this:

--- I am feeling satisfied with how my life is going ---

We really can't put the "meaning"-genie back in the bottle, and so we need to reframe it in Epicurean terms.

To start, perhaps the idea "meaning of life" comes to...



<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4060-the-meaning-crisis-trend-how-do-you-answer-it-as-an-epicurean-philosopher/>

Kalosyni

August 21, 2024 at 4:20 PM

Post by “TauPhi” of September 21, 2024 at 2:01 PM

All these "meaning crisis" people strike me as "gummy bear prophets". They try to find people who never had gummy bears in their lives, convince these poor folks that their lives suck and it's absolutely crucial to eat gummy bears to make their lives better. When the bait is taken, "gummy bear prophets" will conveniently reveal themselves as "gummy bear suppliers" and will stuff their victims with gummy bears until obesity takes its toll.

When ungrateful victims prove themselves to be incompetent enough to find a way to consume more gummy bears from six feet under, "gummy bear prophets" will announce to the world that another crisis is due but luckily for only \$21.99 they are willing to share a solution. You'll get 50% discount if you share, like and subscribe and further 25% if you use their promo code: gummybearsrulez within the next two hours.

Post by “Eoghan Gardiner” of September 21, 2024 at 2:44 PM

[Quote from TauPhi](#)

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Lmao yeah they all selling something alright. It's all a money racket just like religion.

Post by “SillyApe” of September 27, 2024 at 9:49 AM

I am a bit late to the discussion, but I have to say I agree with Cassius: if you try to deviate from the indications given to us by nature(pleasure and pain), you may end up in endless speculations that bring nothing but more questions and no help to anyone.

I would also like to share something I heard from a philosophy professor once. He said that if you had to walk on a path that was surrounded by beautiful flowers, had soft ground, smelled good, and was filled with all other sorts of pleasure, you would not ask "Why am I walking on this path?", as just the pleasure of walking on it would justify your walk. Now, if the path was surrounded by rotting, dead animals and was covered by nails and broken glass, then you'd ask "Why am I walking on this path?", as you'd need to have a justification for the pain.

A pleasurable life doesn't need "meaning", as pleasure justifies itself.

Post by “Joshua” of September 27, 2024 at 10:03 AM

Well said!

Post by “Patrikios” of September 28, 2024 at 5:46 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

Vatican Saying 48:

"While you are on the road, try to make the later part better than the earlier part; and be equally happy when you reach the end."

Seems like an Epicurean would evaluate and then take action to make their life better (perhaps based on natural and necessary for happiness).

I appreciate the sentiments expressed by [Kalosyni](#) to keep a focus on nature. While I am still

learning about [#Epicurus](#) teachings, I find his focus on Nature as the ruler on what is “real”. My understanding of Nature is that everything is in motion and creating (growing/aging still involves creation of new cells). So, I try to find “meaning” in my life by prioritizing on finding new solutions to issues that arise in different facets of our lives (home, work, community, personal self, etc.).

Post by “Adrastus” of July 13, 2025 at 4:18 PM

The "meaning crisis" for me, has always been a bit of an affront to basic human activity that is so obvious once one embraces natural human relationships. The Epicurean Canon: my sensations, my prolepsis, my emotions; indicates to me all the meaning I could ever want or need to navigate life "meaningfully"; proffering all manner of solution to social and material disturbances. Living pleasantly with friends, returning to an ataraxic mind and katastematic and kenetic pleasure renders life deeply enjoyable and well worth living onward. When I feel like cultivating and tending to the garden of the inner life of the soul and outwardly with friends and family isn't enough, then I choose to pursue something in the public sphere that I reason is good for the "polis", or renders reciprocal justice to kind souls who have helped me and people I care about, or benefit events for organizations that legitimately do good work and calming restless souls who simply have not pursued the Doctrine and Philosophy of Epicurus. I try to make my public workings comport to two or more of those criteria. I'm not sure what else anyone could get up to beyond directly taking the reigns of power in politics or business.

Post by “DistantLaughter” of July 13, 2025 at 6:32 PM

Professor Rivka Weinberg argues that human life, as a totality, is metaphysically incapable of possessing Ultimate Meaning. Meaning, in the relevant sense, is a "point"—a justifying, valued end external to the activity or enterprise it renders purposeful. While particular actions and projects within a life may have such points (what she terms "Everyday Meaning"), the life as a whole cannot, because there exists nothing external to one's life to serve as its end. Any value we might pursue—like justice, love, truth, or legacy—takes place *within* the span of our life. But because our life *includes* those pursuits, those values can't be *outside* of our life and therefore can't serve as the kind of external justification (or "point") that Ultimate Meaning requires. Thus, life's structure precludes the possibility of Ultimate Meaning.

Weinberg distinguishes this from value skepticism: it is not that life lacks value, but that the overarching effort of living lacks a final justifying reason. Appeals to God, the afterlife, cosmic purpose, or narrative unity merely defer or obscure the problem, since these too are subsumed within life or else render justification circular. Even lofty, unattainable goals fail as solutions; their inaccessibility may prevent confrontation with pointlessness, but not resolve it. Despite the meaningfulness of our individual pursuits, we remain metaphysically blocked from answering the question of why we lead lives at all. Weinberg concludes that this structural pointlessness is a genuine and tragic feature of the human condition—and that sadness is a fitting and rational response to this fact, one that aligns both with our agential nature and our values as purposeful beings.

An Epicurean would contest both the metaphysical framing and the affective conclusion. Epicurus denies the need for life to have a telos beyond itself; the good life consists in the experience of pleasure and the elimination of distress, not in securing a transcendent justification. The desire for Ultimate Meaning is, on Epicurean terms, an empty and unnatural craving, akin to the longing for immortality or divine purpose. Once we understand that death is the end of all sensation and not an evil, and that pleasure is self-justifying, the supposed tragedy of life's pointlessness dissolves. Rather than lament the absence of a final end, the Epicurean would recommend cultivating immanent goods—friendship, thought, moderation—as fully sufficient for a life worth choosing.

Weinberg is a philosophy professor working in the analytic tradition and is a Kantian contractualist. Her article, *Ultimate Meaning: We Don't Have It, We Can't Get It, and We Should Be Very, Very Sad*, was published in the *Journal of Controversial Ideas*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2021), article 4, and is freely available online as an open access publication: <https://doi.org/10.35995/jci01010004>.

Post by “DaveT” of July 14, 2025 at 11:15 AM

And if I can add, paraphrasing Brian Greene; I come from the stuff of stars and to that state I shall return, and I'm happy with that.

Post by “Sam_Qwerty” of July 23, 2025 at 6:47 PM

Quote from [DistantLaughter](#)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4060-the-meaning-crisis-trend-how-do-you-answer-it-as-an-epicurean-philosopher/>

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I like this idea. The way I see it is if you have ever looked at a stream of water moving across rocks, sometimes the water forms temporary eddies. They exist for a while, then they dissipate back into the rest of the water. These eddies are born and they die, but as long as the conditions are right for them to form, there will always be eddies in that part of the stream. Just not the same particular eddies.