

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING: HOPEFUL OR HOPELESS?

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A HOPELESS QUEST?

The question of meaning seems to be one of those impractical questions reserved for philosophers and religious thinkers that have nothing more important or more urgent to do. To ask “Is life worth living? [is] ...a rather obvious, overserious, blunt, sophomoric Victorian sort of thing [but] ...Victorian sophomoric questions usually turn out, however, to have been vital ones, and to have a post-Victorian life.”¹ And the question really will not go away. In times of crises, dangers, failures everyone is bound to ask the question of “the meaning of it all”. Even all the history of philosophy and history of religion can be viewed as the great quest to find meaning of human life or meaning of existence in general. At the same time, obviously we are no closer to finding it than Plato was, if we are not farther from it, now. The question is – what meaning can we find in this failure to find meaning? Or are we simply to dismiss the question as a mistaken “language game”? That this is hardly possible is confirmed by the numbers of new publications on the topic² despite the “final” negative pronouncements of some philosophers on the topic.³

THE MEANING OF MEANING IN THIS ESSAY

It is obvious that we can use the word meaning in several ways. First, we can use the word *meaning* in a relative way (eg. as “meaning of a sentence”). This the area of the field of linguistics about which we can “...take it for granted that words, phrases, and sentences have meaning, that for each meaningful expression there are correct answers to the question “What does it mean?”⁴ This does not mean that this is an “easy” thing to define. There are philosophical difficulties even with the everyday idea of meaning, and philosopher Quine says: “The notion of meaning is stubborn. It does not submit readily to satisfactory scientific formulation, and yet it is deeply rooted in everyday discourse and not easily dispensed with.”⁵

Although the title of this article suggests the understanding of meaning that is not confined to linguistics it will be useful to get some taste of the complications related to the definition of the word. Within the linguistic boundaries we can find different uses for meaning of language. It has been suggested to divide the functions of language “...into two groups, the *symbolic* and the *emotive*. Many notorious controversies in the sciences it is believed can be shown to derive from confusion between these functions, the same words being used at once to make *statements* and to excite *attitudes*. [italics added]”⁶. The first confusion related to the search for meaning can be traced to this simple distinction.

¹ LEVINE, G. *Realism, Ethics and Secularism*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 53

² In 1997 Routledge (*Routledge History of Philosophy, Vol. X*) published a history of twentieth century philosophy under the title “Philosophy of Meaning, Knowledge and Value in the Twentieth Century”. (CANFIELD, J. V. (ed.), London : Routledge, 1997.)

³ Eg. Albert Camus is quite sure that the search for ultimate meaning is meaningless and existence is absurd. (“I want everything to be explained to me or nothing. And the reason is impotent when it hears this cry from the heart. The mind aroused by this insistence seeks and finds nothing but contradictions and nonsense.” CAMUS, A. *The Myth of Sisyphus*,)

⁴ SOAMES, S. *What is Meaning?*, Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 1.

⁵ QUINE, W. V. *Use and its Place in Meaning*. In: MARGALIT, A. *Meaning and Use*, Jerusalem : The Magnes Press, 1976, p. 1

⁶ OGDEN, C. K. – RICHARDS, I. A. *The Meaning of Meaning*, New York : Harcourt, Brace & World, 1946, p. viii.

When searching for meaning – are we to look for a *statement* or do we want to excite an *attitude* – or both?⁷

But then, we can use the word *meaning* in a non-linguistic way. We can talk about the meaning of a work of art, eg. a painting or a musical composition. In this sense “...meaning is not the preserve of the philosophy of language – not, at any rate, unless the term “language” is used in a peculiarly extended way so as to allow for “the language of food”, “the language of dress” and the like.”⁸

Our focus in this article is the *meaning* taken in the ultimate way. In this sense we can talk about the meaning of life, the meaning of existence, meaning of history or “meaning of it all” etc.

If we divide the notion of *meaning* into the following fields:⁹ (1) Affectivity, (2) Intersubjectivity, (3) Narrativity, (4) Beauty, (5) Theory, our area of discussion will be mainly in the fifth “field”, ie. *theory*. Additionally, maybe it is useful to point out, that this talk about *ultimate meaning* is not so much about meaning in the sense of information (although it has to be based on it) but about meaning in the sense of *significance*, or *importance*. In this article, then, we will talk about the “big” meaning – here we are not concerned about the meanings of sentences or particular events in history. We talk about “the meaning of it all”, the meaning of existence or the meaning of human life.

BUILDERS AND DEBUNKERS

Roughly, philosophers can be divided into two categories – the philosophers that build big all-encompassing systems and try to argue for the meaning of existence, human life, human history etc. and the philosophers who debunk the very possibility of finding any coherent system behind the phenomena.

Philosophers who believed in the possibility of finding the ultimate meaning of existence were usually builders of big philosophical systems because it is the relatedness of things that gives them meaning and significance. On the top of such a system usually there was a divinity, humans possessed eternal soul and the life on earth was somehow rewarded or punished in some sort of afterlife. Platonism, German idealism or Process philosophy could serve as examples of this sort of systematic thinking.

Philosophers who denied the possibility of finding meaning or purpose in human life or in the existence of the world usually spoke negatively about reliability of human knowledge were doubtful or agnostic about existence of God/gods and expected no life after death. Their philosophy consisted mainly in pointing out inconsistencies in the philosophical systems and sometimes in ethical and survival advice. Here we can point to the Sophists, nihilism or pragmatism.

Great expectations were being placed in the possibilities of science to discover/give meaning and significance to human life but it looks as if the exact opposite has happened: While in medieval times it was “...thought that nature was full of special signs revealing divine purpose, for us to guide our earthly lives by; the natural world was full of hidden meanings; ...science took away this ultimate meaning of existence. Today, in the age of science ...there are no special signs, just inert matter.”¹⁰ Materialism for some thinkers is the only logical conclusion from the findings of science¹¹. The Darwinian theory of evolution is probably the main reason that contemporary materialists deny the existence of transcendent meaning, and to the word “meaning” they ascribe only limited meaning: “The theory of evolution might truly be said to drain the world of transcendent or ultimate meaning, but it does so only if meaning is equated with, or required to rest on, intelligent design or the activities

⁷ To complicate things further, we could go on to differentiate further: “It is plain that most human utterances and nearly all articulate speech can be profitably regarded from four points of view. Four aspects can be easily distinguished. Let us call them Sense, Feeling, Tone, and Intention.” (RICHARDS, I. A. *Practical Criticism*, London : Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1930, p. 181).

⁸ COOPER, D. *Meaning*, Chesham : Acume, 2003, p. 2.

⁹ HAUGHT, J.F. *Is Nature Enough?* Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 41-49.

¹⁰ THOMSON, G. *On the Meaning of Life*, Atlanta : Thomson, Wadsworth, 2003, p. 3.

¹¹ “The prevailing wisdom, variously expressed and argued for, is materialism: there is only one sort of stuff, namely matter — the physical stuff of physics, chemistry, and physiology — and the mind is somehow nothing but a physical phenomenon. In short, the mind is the brain.” (DENNETT, D. *Consciousness Explained*, New York : Back Bay Books, 1991, p. 33.)

of a God. Evolution says there is no need for a creator God who stands outside the universe, organizing it, endowing it with meaning and purpose, and perhaps also planning for our heavenly afterlife – once, that is, we've shed our nonessential animal part."¹² Just a few lines before these words, the same author calls the above-mentioned opinion "a common mistake". But the meaning and purpose he talks about is not the ultimate or transcendent meaning that we are after.

In his book *The Meaning of Life* Terry Eagleton in a Wittgensteinian way suggests that the question 'What is the meaning of life' is a pseudo-question, the same way as the question 'How come Being?' is. Just to say "Wow!" would be more appropriate to the attitude expressed by the question.¹³ For some philosophers "...semantic terms like "meaning", remain "unintelligible" or thoroughly "opaque" unless reduced to or replaced by non-semantic ones congenial to natural science."¹⁴

Here we find how the problem of meaning is closely related to the problem of ontology. If we reduce all reality to one kind of being (monism), the relation of the universe (everything) to anything other is unimaginable, so the question of meaning becomes a pseudo-question. But I agree with Thomas Nagel who says that we easily succumb to what he calls "...reductionist euphoria" and that "...philosophers share the general human weakness for explanations of what is incomprehensible in terms suited for what is familiar and well understood, though entirely different."¹⁵

Some scientists and thinkers express sadness about this loss of meaning in the universe,¹⁶ but they are firmly persuaded of the truth of their position.¹⁷ In postmodernism this idea of meaning is even more under attack, but what we have said should suffice to make the point.

We have to mention here that the answer of some philosophers to this predicament is that we must *create* our own meaning. The well-known answers in this sense are for example those of Heidegger and Sartre. In Heidegger we find meaning of Being in what he calls "authentic being towards death"¹⁸; in Sartre it is my absolute freedom,¹⁹ that gives me possibility/necessity of creating my own meaning for my life.²⁰

Philosophers who search for meaning that would transcend personal satisfaction, or Freudian unconscious purposes (unknown to the person to whom they belong), look for ways to get beyond the limits of time, space or human capacity for knowledge and relate the finite to infinity. It is as Robert Nozick said: "The problem of meaning is created by limits, by being just this, by being merely this."²¹ This step seems quite logical. If we accept the hierarchy of things that involves such general principles as, eg., "a more permanent thing is of greater importance than a transient thing", "knowledge that contains more information is more meaningful than less informed knowledge" or "an entity that sustains greater number of other entities is more significant than an entity that sustains a

¹² FLANAGAN, O. *The Problem of the Soul*, New York : Basic Books, 2002, p. 12.

¹³ EAGLETON, T. *The Meaning of Life*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 3.

¹⁴ COOPER, D. *Meaning*, Chesham : Acume, 2003, p. 4.

¹⁵ NAGEL, Th. *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?* In: *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 4. (Oct., 1974), pp. 435.

¹⁶ "It would be wonderful to find in the laws of nature a plan prepared by a concerned creator in which human beings played some special role. I find sadness in doubting that we will. There are some among my scientific colleagues who say that the contemplation of nature gives them all the spiritual satisfaction that others have found in a belief in an interested God. Some of them may even feel that way. I do not." (WEINBERG, S. *Dreams of a Final Theory*, New York : Pantheon Books, 1992, p. 256.)

¹⁷ "All the labors of all the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of Man's genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins." (RUSSELL, B. *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*, London : George Allen & Unwin, 1959, p. 47).

¹⁸ "When, by anticipation, one becomes free for one's own death, one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one; and one is liberated in such a way that for the first time one can authentically understand and choose among the factual possibilities lying ahead of that possibility which is not to be outstripped." (HEIDEGGER, M. *Being and Time*, Oxford : Blackwell, 2001, p. 308).

¹⁹ "I am condemned to be free." (SARTRE, J.-P. *Being and Nothingness*, London : Methuen, 1957 p. 439).

²⁰ "Value is beyond being. ...human reality is that by which value arrives in the world. But the meaning of being for value is that it is that toward which a being surpasses its being..." (SARTRE, J.-P. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 93).

²¹ NOZICK, R. *Philosophical Explanations*, Cambridge : The Bellknapp Press, 1981, p. 595.

lower number of other beings”, this will necessarily lead us to the notions of “eternal duration”, “infinite knowledge” and “the encompassing being”. These notions of “eternity”, “infinite knowledge”, “encompassing being” are some of the boundary ideas between philosophy and religion. Christian theology based on propositional revelation speaks here of “eschatology”, “omniscience” and “God”.

Some philosophers tried to access the infinite not through reason, but through art:²² “...it is self-evident that art is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and is original identity with the conscious.”²³ It is true that it is possible to find meaning of life in art.²⁴ Such devotion to art that transcends reason and words of language has unmistakable religious connotations like “mystique”, “transcendence”, “ecstasy” and the like.

Religious ideas have been a part of philosophy right from the beginning. Pythagoras founded a religious community, Socrates claimed he had a daimonion that warned him (although his knowledge was not from it) and Plato’s highest good was divine. In modern times Hegel, Whitehead or physicist Capra also use religious terms as key ideas in their thought. W. Weischedel in his book *The God of the Philosophers* scanned the history of philosophy to show that god/God is the central idea of all philosophies. In some sense this is in agreement with the opinion even of some atheistic thinkers: “Not a few studies have argued, after all, that religion can indeed satisfy the desire for pleasure (Freud), consolation (Marx), revenge (Nietzsche) or meaning (Frankl, Berger, Shermer).”²⁵ This sort of religious thinking need not be “religious” in the commonly accepted sense of the word that includes worship rituals, community of believers, sacred writings or a code of ethics.

The use of religious ideas in the philosophical search for meaning may be applied if meaning is understood as a relation: a “meaning for”.²⁶ The obvious religious use of this understanding of meaning is the idea of deriving meaning of life from the existence of God:²⁷ the meaning of my life is hidden the meaning of God who created it.

For Kierkegaard the truth is in subjectivity. “...the passion of the infinite is precisely subjectivity, and in this way subjectivity is truth. ...It is the passion of the infinite and not its content that is decisive...”²⁸

Karl Jaspers has (philosophical) *faith* for the central idea of his philosophy. He speaks about “cyphers of transcendence” that communicate meaning without use of words.²⁹ It is obvious though the he relates what he calls *das Umgreifende* (the Encompassing) to the old notion of God.

²² “Art more than reason, remarked Schelling “brings . . . man to . . . knowledge of the Highest”.” (COOPER, D. *Meaning*, p. 108.)

²³ SCHELLING, F. W. J. *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Charlottesville : University Press of Virginia, 1978, p. 231.

²⁴ Well known is Beethoven’s devotion to Art. We can read about it in his letter to his brothers Carl and Johann (Heiligenstadt, October 1802): “...when others heard a shepherd singing, and I still heard nothing! Such things brought me to the verge of desperation, and wellnigh caused me to put an end to my life. Art! art alone, deterred me. Ah! how could I possibly quit the world before bringing forth all that I felt it was my vocation to produce? And thus I spared this miserable life--so utterly miserable that any sudden change may reduce me at any moment from my best condition into the worst.” (WALLACE, L (trans). *Beethoven’s Letters*, London : Longmans, Green and Co., 1866, p. 49).

²⁵ HAUGHT, J. F. *Is Nature Enough?*, p. 40.

²⁶ “...if meaning itself is not a thing but a relationship then something can have meaning by standing in that relationship, even to something which itself does not stand further in that relationship.”(NOZICK, R. *Philosophical Explanations*, p. 599).

²⁷ “The idea that the existence of God is necessary for life to have meaning has a long history in western philosophy. St. Augustine (354430), one of the founders of medieval theology, claims that only God can give life ultimate meaning.” (THOMSON, G. *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 15).

²⁸ KIERKEGAARD, S. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 171.

²⁹ “...all communication must be thought of as canceled in Transcendence, ... The shipwrecking of all thinking about truth can shake one in his depths, but can not provide a tenable thought.” (JASPERS, K. *Reason and Existenz*, New York : The Noonday Press, 1957, p. 105).

I think we need not to give more examples of “religion in philosophy” – I think it is safe to say that “religious” reasoning is used often enough in the search for meaning by philosophers.

To summarize what has been said above: Some philosophers insist we do not need to search or even should not expect meaning from the outside of our own personality. Owen Flanagan, for instance, says that “...we have to find and make our meanings and not have them created and given to us by a supernatural being or force.”³⁰ Even a theologian can say: “Religion is not necessary to give meaning to life ...A human life can have meaning without an objective purpose, value or pattern. We can construct our own values in a morally patternless world.”³¹

Other philosophers/theologians require or at least make use of “religious” ideas to find meaning: “To experience meaning in life, after all, requires the humble submission of our minds and lives to a value that pulls us out of ourselves and gives us something noble to live for.”³² For Einstein “...to answer this question at all implies a religion.”³³ Even Freud, an atheist, said: “...only religion can answer the question of the purpose of life. One can hardly be wrong in concluding that the idea of life having a purpose stands and fails with the religious system.”³⁴

The discussion ends in stalemate.

MEANING BEYOND PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

In one sense the stalemate is here to stay, because the changes required to get beyond it are too radical. But there are steps we can take to improve understanding between the "camps of meaning".

First of all it is important to make greater allowances for what the word “meaning” signifies. Even the most precise definition may evoke quite different attitudes that are deep down at variance with each other. “Meaning” as “fulfillment” must depend on personal likings, values or worldview. In this sense “meaning” really cannot come from outside, or be imposed on the individual.

Another important step is to recognize the dignity of the individual. I think V. Frankl is right when he says: “...it is impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way. Questions about the meaning of life can never be answered by sweeping statements.”³⁵ An individual human being is “co-creating” himself/herself by choice he/she makes. These choices necessarily include the choice of the meaning of life.

On the other hand, the commonly accepted religious search for ultimate meaning is often encumbered by faulty definitions of theological terms. The same can be said about the arguments that reject religious descriptions of the ultimate meaning. Take for example the following reasoning:

“We should not identify the meaning of a person's life with purposes or goals, whether they are God's or those of the person herself. Neither the goals of a finite or an infinite being can constitute the meaning of a life. ... I shall argue that fulfilling either cosmological or our own parochial goals cannot be the meaning of life, because identifying meaning with a goal turns the valuable into a mere instrument.”³⁶

At first sight this argument looks very plausible. We really should not make of humans just instruments of some “higher” goal. The problem is how we can live without goals. It is an analogical problem with self-awareness and intentionality. All mental states are object-directed, and in an analogical way all meaning in life is derived from goals (“intentions”). Another problem here is

³⁰ FLANAGAN, O. *The Problem of the Soul*, p. 12

³¹ WARD, K. in RUNZO, J. – MARTIN, N. *The Meaning of Life in the World's Religions*. Quoted in: THOMSON, G. *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 19-20.

³² HAUGHT, J. F. *Is Nature Enough?*, p. 102.

³³ EINSTEIN, A. *The World as I See It*, New York : Covici Friede, 1934, p. 5.
Cited: 7 Einstein 1934b: 210n, 215n.

³⁴ FREUD, S. *Civilization and its Discontents*, New York : W. W. Norton & Co., 1962, p. 23.

³⁵ FRANKL, V. *Man's Search for Meaning*, New York : Washington Square Press, 1985, p. 98.

³⁶ THOMSON, G. *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 49.

putting the purposes of God in the same category as are to purposes/goals of humans. If God's purposes are infinite and motivated by sacrificial love toward mankind, to derive meaning from his goals leads to our highest fulfillment, because *his* goals are *us*.

Christian theology teaches that "God is love" and that this love is expressed on the cross of Jesus Christ. If Christ found the meaning of his human life in self-sacrificial love to humankind why should love to God and living for God be less than the ultimate meaning of human life? It seems to me, that the very notion of religion is almost thoughtlessly considered a human creation.³⁷ If we return to the understanding of the word "God", we must carefully avoid the mistake of making God an "inert object" of our thought. If "God is God", any truthful thought about him is dependent on his activity and guidance. If the existence of the world, human life, and our thinking is independent on his upkeeping word and Spirit we are not considering the living God, but a pagan deity that is dependent on matter and shows itself when invoked or worshiped.

Another example from the author quoted above³⁸ is a commentary to philosopher Nozick's statement: "The value of a person's life attaches to it within its limits, while the meaning of his life attaches to it as centered in the wider value context beyond its limits."³⁹

The commentary says this:

"Is this true? This automatically rules out the claim that the meaning of life is in the living of it. It also rules out the idea that meaning might be a special kind of intrinsic value. These could be two reasons for being suspicious of this way of drawing the distinction."⁴⁰

But again, is this really so? If the meaning of life is received from God who supremely cares about our wellbeing and is the infinite source of all meaning and all values – surely it is not logically impossible that such life has both intrinsic value in itself and wider meaning in being related to the purposes of God.

This is why we have to begin with ontology and with understanding of God as God, even if we do not believe in him. Often God is attacked as the proverbial "straw man" – we do not care to really get hold of what it means that God carries everything by the power of his word. This means that ontology comes before ethics and we have to work with correct definitions before we can talk about the ultimate meaning of things that is based on them.⁴¹

In a similar way the authority of God is misunderstood: "However, the problem with the idea of basing the meaning of life on God's commands because of His authority is that values are not based on authority. Statements about what is valuable are not true or false by the decisions of some authority, because we can logically assess the decisions of an authority as being good or bad and true or false."⁴² Yes, values are not based on authority by which we mean some finite authority. But Christian theology teaches that God's attributes cannot be treated separately. *Simplicitas dei* is a controversial doctrine, but should be at least considered, before we dismiss God's authority as one of the (finite) authorities.

³⁷ "This account, however, may suggest that religion is purely a matter of human development and discovery. What has happened to the idea of revelation, which Aquinas saw primarily as the communication of information by God in Scripture and Church teaching?" (WARD, K. *Religion and Revelation*, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 15).

³⁸ The arguments of this author represent commonly accepted ways of contemporary thinking about religion.

³⁹ NOZICK, R. *Philosophical Explanations*, p. 611.

⁴⁰ THOMSON, G. *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 25.

⁴¹ "Philosophy cannot enter upon practical tasks without knowledge of being as such. For the tasks themselves grow out of a total datum of existing realities, and these must be understood and penetrated to the root before man can venture to shape them according to his goals." (HARTMANN, N. *New Ways of Ontology*, Chicago : Henry Regnery Company, 1953, s. 4). Of course, there are philosophers, especially of the analytic tradition, who vigorously oppose this, notably Hilary PUTNAM, who gave a series of lectures with the title *Ethics without Ontology*. (PUTNAM, H. *Ethics without Ontology*, Cambridge, Massachusetts : Harvard University Press, 2004.)

⁴² THOMSON, G. *On the Meaning of Life*, p. 17.

Does all of this mean, that we can “find ultimate meaning” for all? Far from it!

If we “let God be God” we cannot sit in his place and reveal meaning that would be valid for everybody. The very word “God” evokes very different responses from different people, how much more his address! If it is true that he has dealings with all men, how can we project our understanding of him on others without his cooperation? Not only that, if “God is God”, he must always be first and take initiative in any realistic, not just imagined, relationship and the other side of the relationship can only respond to him. In this way meaning comes from the “irrupting God”, like the surprise of a lifetime. The people that have received this communication from God can speak about it to others as one speaks about “epistemically private states”.⁴³ Michael Dummett insists that communication of private meanings is impossible. And this is exactly the situation of those who say (of course they may be mistaken) they received communication from God.

The communicability problem is further complicated by the fact, that not only the insight of the ultimate meaning depends on God' taking initiative, but for humans to be able to accept a radical epistemological change is required. Jesus calls this change *μετάνοια*, “change of mind” and *παλιγγενεσία* “regeneration” or “new birth”. The reaction of modern man is in principle expressed by the words of Rousseau: “If the eternal truths which my mind conceives could be impaired, there would no longer be any kind of certainty for me, and far from being sure that you speak to me on behalf of God, I would not even be sure that He exists.”⁴⁴ Although our “certainties”⁴⁵ are quite different from those of Rousseau, the logic is the same – if the “godspeak” used by people claiming they have “heard” or “met” or “had communication” from God is not in agreement with these certainties, it is dismissed as “god” of some Jungian psychological projection or Freudian anomaly. We can see an example of such rejection in Sartre. As theologian Keith Ward says about Sartre: “When Sartre rejects God, it is that perverted vision of God that he rejects.”⁴⁶

In conclusion:

For several reasons given above we can say that the search for *one* ultimate meaning is hopeless. If by “meaning” we mean “personal fulfillment”, individual differences lead different people to very different pursuits in their life that give them meaning.

If by “meaning” we mean finding the overall plan of the universe and fitting our life into it, this presupposes in-depth changes not only in worldview but in the epistemological abilities. These changes cannot be realized by giving scientific information or devising a scientific method. If “...it must be admitted that we can never *prove* the existence of things other than ourselves and our experiences,”⁴⁷ how can we expect to show to others what the meaning of it all is?

Is it then hopeless? Christian answer is paradoxical – right in the place where we admit hopelessness of our searching, we can expect to find hopefulness, because in our hopelessness God is addressing us giving us hope in his meaning for existence.

⁴³ “The epistemically private is defined as whatever can in principle be known to one person only. The words ‘in principle’ are intended to exclude all cases in which something is in fact known to only one person, though it could be known to more.” (CRAIG, E. *Private States and Language*. In: *Routledge Encycloedia of Philosophy*, New York : Routledge, 1998, CD-ROM).

⁴⁴ ROUSSEAU, J.-J. *Emile*, New York : Basic Books, 1979, p. 301.

⁴⁵ It is notoriously difficult to say what is certain for everybody: “There is not a single philosophical proposition which, except for relatively short periods of time in particular circles in particular countries, has won universal acceptance. This is equally true of propositions *about* philosophy – about its subject-matter, its methods, its objectives. Are these two facts, constantly invoked by internal or external critics of philosophy, of any real consequence?” (PASSMORE, J. *Contemporary Concepts of Philosophy*. In: FLOISTAD, G. *Philosophical Problems Today, Vol.2*, New York : Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2005, p. 11).

⁴⁶ WARD, K. *Christianity, a Beginner's Guide*, Oxford : Oneworld Publications, 2007, p. 37.

⁴⁷ RUSSELL, B. *The Problems of Philosophy*, New York : Henry Holt and Company, not dated, p. 34.