PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS (PART 3 OF 5)

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Description: This series of articles provide a conceptual framework for answering the 'big questions' related to our existence. Part 3 continues with the discussion on whether our existence has a purpose.

Category: Articles Evidence Islam is Truth Logical Proofs

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Believing that we have no purpose is not only irrational, it is practically problematic because it presents an indication that a lot of the things we have achieved as humans beings most probably would not have happened as many of the people who have accomplished amazing achievements, including the discovery of penicillin, would not have had the drive to attain what they did. This is because these very people had a purpose driven approach to life, without which we would be just like animals obeying our instincts, in other words chemical robots wandering around waiting for the battery acid to dry up! The realities of a purposeless existence was also highlighted by the Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer who claimed that the world is bankrupt and there is no reason to rejoice in its existence, he even argued that it would be better if it did not exist and questioned whether suicide was a plausible solution.

So why is it irrational? Well, it is irrational because if everything complex and designed that we discover seems to have a purpose, including the insignificant moth, as well as the things we develop and create, then it logically follows that we have a purpose too. To deny this would be tantamount of believing in things without any evidence, as there is no evidence to say we have no purpose, on the contrary we have evidence to say that things have a purpose and we can infer that about ourselves too. Even scientists indicate that it is irrational to assert that our universe is impersonal and the product of blind chance. Interestingly they have explained that the physical processes in the universe have some sort of purpose, for instance the Astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle described the universe with the attributes of God, and the physicists Zeldovich and Novikov asked why did nature choose to create this universe instead of another?

Finally, we can argue that without a purpose we do not really have a deeper profound meaning to our life. For instance if we take the logical conclusion of an apathetic scientific view on our existence, we are on a sinking ship. This ship is called the universe, because according to scientists the universe is going to suffer a heat death, and one day the Sun will destroy the earth. Therefore this ship is going to sink, so I ask you, what is the point of reshuffling the deck chairs or giving a glass of milk to the old lady? As Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the Russian writer and essayist said, "Without some goal

and some effort to reach it, no one can live."

Various contentions can follow from this discussion; firstly a purposeless worldview gives us more freedom to create purpose for ourselves. To further explain, some existentialists have argued that our life is actually based on nothing, and from this nothingness we can create a new realm of possibility for our lives, and therefore create purpose for ourselves. This philosophy rests on the idea that everything is meaningless and that we should create a new language for ourselves in order to live fulfilling lives. The flaw with this approach is that it uses meaning to claim meaninglessness; it also represents a self-delusion as they deny purpose but create one for themselves. Additionally it implies that there are no objective moral values and truths because an ontological foundation is absent. This is counter-intuitive and opposes our cross-cultural consensus of our moral thinking. The philosophy of war is a good example to show this type of moral consensus. For 2,500 years there was a cross-cultural agreement that poisons should not be used in war, even if you were being defeated. Although in practice people did not always conform, but they did however agree to this rule.

Another contention includes the evolutionist's stance that our purpose is to propagate our DNA, as Richard Dawkins in his publication 'The Selfish Gene' states that our bodies have been developed to do just that. The problem with this analysis is that it relegates our existence to a random accident via a lengthy biological process, in essence the value of our life loses its meaning and morality is relegated to individual taste, as Michael Ruse a Philosopher of Science states,

"Morality is a biological adaptation no less than are hands and feet and teeth… Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction and any deeper meaning is illusory."

The evolutionary perspective creates more problems than it solves as it cannot provide an adequate explanation for consciousness and the presence of our rational faculties. Taking consciousness as an example, how can a subjective immaterial reality come from a material substance? Consciousness is not a physical thing; it is not contained in any cell or biological structure. The most unchallenged and intuitive reality is that we are all aware, but we cannot describe or explain what this awareness is. One thing that we can be sure of is that consciousness cannot be explained biologically or chemically, the main reason for this is that evolution doesn't discover consciousness; it's actually the other way round. For evolution to try and explain the truth of consciousness would be tantamount to arguing in a circle! Even scientists recognise this, the physicist Gerald Schroeder points out that there is no real difference between a heap of sand and the brain of an Einstein. If those advocating a physical explanation for consciousness, bigger questions would need answering such as 'how can certain bits of matter suddenly create a new reality that has no resemblance to matter?'

So if consciousness cannot be explained physically then the next question must be asked, 'how did it come to be?' The history of the universe indicates that consciousness just spontaneously arose and language emerged without any evolutionary forerunner.

Even the neo-atheists have failed to come to terms with the nature of consciousness or its source, because no physical explanation is coherent enough to convince. Even the neo-atheist Richard Dawkins admits defeat concerning consciousness, he states “We don’t know. We don’t understand it.”

In conclusion there are more reasons to believe that we have a deeper purpose rather than the other options of purposelessness and the cold valueless propagation of our DNA. Realising that we have a purpose is the best explanation via the inferences we make concerning the universe and the things around us. Even the Scottish Philosopher David Hume was attributed of saying “A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence”, so in this case, it would be wiser to conclude that human beings must have a purpose, and let us not forget that it nourishes us with a more significant explanation for our existence. However, the following question naturally arises: what is our purpose?