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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Type Nihilism, Token Realism

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Abstract

This dialogue introduces *type nihilism* and *token realism* about the meaning of life.

Plato: Forms, essences, are those without which things would not exist as they are (see, e.g., Plato, 387-377/1998).

Aristotle: Ends are a kind of essences. Artifacts derive their ends from creators, whereas natural things do not get their ends from anything external to them (Aristotle, 348-330/2004).

Descartes: God is conceived of as a supremely perfect being, holding all perfections, therefore God cannot but exist (Descartes, 1641/2017).

Pascal: Even if reason cannot determine the existence of God, there is nothing to lose by betting on the existence of God, and rather, the meaning of life increases (Pascal, 1670/1995).

Nietzsche: God is dead. Our existence (action, suffering, willing, feeling) has no meaning (Nietzsche, 1882/1974, 1901/1967).

Heidegger: We humans, unlike many other things, are the only beings that determine the meaning of existence. While we determine the meaning of other things' existence, what then determines the meaning of our own existence? The meaning of our existence can only be determined by ourselves (Heidegger, 1927/2010).

Sartre: We are condemned to be free, since we have no essence before our existence because there is no Creator. We can act without being determined by anything but ourselves (Sartre, 1946/2007).

Kiritani: We are not condemned to be free. We are supposed to survive and reproduce. The heart is supposed to pump blood, since it has been selected for doing so by natural selection. Likewise, we are supposed to survive and reproduce, since our survival and reproduction have led to our perpetuation. Thus, the meaning of life is survival and reproduction. Even if we do not or cannot reproduce, the meaning of life can be survival (Kiritani, 2012).¹

Wittgenstein: Is the riddle of life solved by the fact that we survive forever? Is this eternal life not as much of a riddle as our present life? The solution of the riddle of life in space and time lies *outside* space and time (Wittgenstein, 1922/1998).

Kiritani: The solution of the riddle of life lies *inside* space and time. Let us distinguish between *types* (abstract concepts) and *tokens* (individual instances). From the point of view of type, there is no meaning of life. We eat or have sex for survival or reproduction. But for what do we survive or reproduce? Life has no meaning from the viewpoint of type. However, from the point of view of token, there is a meaning of life. We survive now for our survival in the future. We reproduce for our children's reproduction. Life has a meaning from the viewpoint of token. The former is *type nihilism*, while the latter is *token realism* about the meaning of life.

Notes

¹ According to the teleological notion of function in philosophy of biology (cf. Allen and Neal, 2020), the function of a thing is what it is supposed to do. *X* is supposed to do *F* if and only if *X*'s doing *F* contributed to *Y*'s existence, which in turn contributed to *X*'s existence. The heart is supposed to pump blood, since its pumping blood contributed to our survival, which in turn contributed to the heart's existence. By appeal to the teleological notion of function, we can explain what we are supposed to do. We are supposed to survive and reproduce, since our survival or reproduction contributed to the replication of a gene, which in turn contributed to our survival or reproduction. Thus, the meaning of life is survival and reproduction.

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