

My life is on fire: A possible meaning of life

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Author's note

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Bad essay. Bad. I realise my actual position is a negative description of the meaning of life, i.e. don't care about grades, which sucks because we want positive descriptions. Also, I don't think the video essay of this will turn out well. But okay. Fine. I haven't published anything in days (months). So be it.

Also yay, I snuck in Kant (Hi Prof. Andrew).

I suppose my current format is one video essay with one written essay, which is accessible through my website. But video essays are standalone works, nonetheless. References are all contained within the written essay. I am conflicted by this format.

My life is on fire: A possible meaning of life

It has been forty-three days since 18 April 2023, the day I technically began my break. It is currently sixty-one days to 31 July 2023, technically the day my break ends (I don't know exactly when it ends because I have willfully blurred the lines. I signed up for orientation). One-hundred-and-four days of summer vacation (this was not intentional). And yet, I have experienced none of it. Because I have yet to have a full, free day to myself.

My bar for a "full, free day" is high — no interruptions of any kind, just peace to and for myself. Every day since the start, I have been doing something. Either fulfilling my filial piety duties, planning my academic plan, adulting, gymming, socialising, journaling, reading, watching documentaries and YouTube videos, gaming, discording. It goes on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on.

Things keep happening. Life sucks (it really doesn't).

Happy results day!

29 May 2023, two days ago, my results were released. I did not immediately open them, even though I was able to, because I did not want to see it. Plus, I would rather my parents and sister saw it and not tell me anything. After all, they care, and I don't.

Except, that is a lie. I do care about it, merely instrumentally. I only care because FYP's prerequisite is a good enough GPA (> 4.00 mandatory, 3.75-3.99 opt-in; Department of Philosophy, n.d.). And I also care because I want to do well. My grades are a measure of me doing well.

God, that is such a Singaporean mindset.

The value of grades: Making the central problem clear

Why are my grades valuable? Why is my GPA valuable? Why do people care? My parents care because they want to know how I am doing in school. I barely tell them anything, and what little I tell is incomprehensible to them because I am not even trying to

effectively communicate what I am doing and experiencing. My future employers will care because that is one of the basis of employment consideration. God only knows why.

So why exactly are my grades valuable? In this essay, I do not care if grades are instrumentally or intrinsically valuable. The point is: why do I feel bad about my grades? It's not like they're bad. They're actually pretty good. Plus, it is confirmed for one instance, I would have gotten an A for HY4015 PHIL Methodologies if my proposal weren't overly ambitious and had it conformed to the academic norms (Thank God it doesn't. Thank God I finally have something that manifests who I really am).

Prof Leo not only pulled through on this, but also acted as my academic mentor. He told me that I should shed this toxic, Singaporean mindset. I should recognise, accept and live according to the following: grades do not matter (exaggeration). What truly matters are one's contribution, impact, and accomplishments. Yes, grades are one's accomplishments. But one is so much more than that. Getting published is a different accomplishment. Making friends, living in this horrible society, economy and system is an accomplishment. Technically, me still being alive after all these years is an accomplishment. Yay, me.

So why do I feel so bad about my freaking grades? Is it because I feel robbed? Do I feel a sense of injustice? Am I feeding my insecurities: "I'm not good enough". No one is ever good enough under this system. We want our perfect grades to give us things in return, because we see our education as an investment worthy of our blood. And when it isn't what we'd hope, when it doesn't yield what we desire, we die.

What is the point of it all?

Ironically, The Meaning Of Life™ was only covered in a single lecture in HY1001 Introduction to Philosophy, and it was covered under Plato and Aristotle, so not exactly the discourse you're looking for.

I ask myself: What is the point of getting good grades? What is the point of achieving all this? What is the point of portraying myself a certain way? When did I become like this?

The last sentences are exaggerations, of course, but they still contain what I am trying to say. I recognise the external forces acting upon me. I recognise that all the pressures are carving my wants and desires. At some point, I will break, and I can only hope that I become Chill™ and not revert into my former self, or the... extreme version of my past self.

Point is: I am living my best life, and yet I am unhappy, because I know I want a different version of my best life, and because I am not living my target version, I am unhappy.

This isn't a "What can I do?" situation. I don't want to cancel my social plans. I wouldn't change a thing. I don't even want my dissatisfaction to disappear. I just want inner peace. I want to accept my feelings, and accept that my life is like this, regardless if it is a temporary feature or a permanent one.

We are capable of great things, yet we have no obligation to do great, to be great (I ignore moral and intelligence obligations in this sentence because common sense argues we have no obligations in life; e.g. Kant's SPM, Trilling's Intelligence obligation; Kant, 2017; Trilling, 2008). We are free to be ourselves, and if we so choose to do things that are great, so be it. Chasing happiness will get us nowhere. Living in the moment seems to be a standard path of happiness.

I don't have a meaning of life for you. Run from every philosopher who says they do. All we have are possible answers and strong arguments. If happiness were to take centre stage, moral obligations will kill us all.

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