Jean-Paul Sartre on the Meaning of Life: Objections from an Islamic Viewpoint

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Abstract
Theories of the meaning of life are divided into two categories: nihilistic and anti-nihilistic. The latter is divided, in turn, into the view that life is meaningful and the view that life can be made meaningful. In this paper, we deploy a descriptive-analytic method to discuss Jean-Paul Sartre’s view of nihilism. In his view, God does not exist, the human being is born and dies without a reason, and then his life ends when he turns into a being-in-itself. Sartre’s view is subject to a host of objections, including the following: his restriction of the domain of knowledge to the empirical cannot itself be empirically established; given their confinement in the material world, human beings cannot come up with a comprehensive plan for their life; and that the meaninglessness of life is a self-contradicting idea that cannot be true in the external world.

Keywords: human, Jean-Paul Sartre, absurdity of life, purposefulness of creation.
Introduction

The attempt to find a meaning and purpose for life is a characteristic concern of human beings as reflective entities. Throughout human history, there have been two general views of the purpose and meaning of life. On the one hand, life is thought to be purposeful and meaningful—although there are further disputes over what purposefulness and meaningfulness of life consist in—and, on the other, it is denied that life has a meaning or purpose. On the latter, human life is a wholly meaningless phenomenon, which is why human beings suffer from anxiety, anguish, depression, fear of death, indolence, disappointment in life, and lack of proper rationale to endure the sufferings and hardships of life. This is the approach widely known as nihilism.

Nihilism has increasingly spread in the contemporary world, particularly in the western world after Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution. If we show that life has meaning and purpose, then something will be proved that is negated by nihilism.

In this paper, we lay out Jean-Paul Sartre’s view as a prime representative of nihilism. Our attitude in this article is philosophical in order to demonstrate that life is meaningful and purposeful, which is a step towards saving today’s humanity from absurdity and nihilism, and the citation of some verses of the Qur'an and hadiths is only for further confirmation.

1. Different Approaches to the Meaning of Life

There are two approaches to the question of the meaning of life: anti-nihilistic and nihilistic. The former is in turn divided into two general categories: the view that life is meaningful and the view that life can be made meaningful. The former is divided into two categories in its own right: naturalism and supernaturalism. Naturalists maintain that natural
and human sciences can pave the path for the meaningfulness of life. Facilities of the material world, they argue, can help us give meaning to our life. Thus, it is not necessary to appeal to a world beyond the material world in order to acquire a meaning for life. Proponents of naturalism hold that non-material entities, such as God and the soul, can give meaning to life, but they are not necessary for the meaningfulness of life (Metz 2000, 306). On the other hand, supernaturalists believe that natural and human sciences can pave the way towards a meaningful life. One’s life is, nevertheless, meaningful only if one is connected to the spiritual realm. If God or the soul did not exist, or if they did but one failed to be related to them, then one’s life would be meaningless (Metz 2000, 305).

Those anti-nihilists who believe in making life meaningful suggest that life is not meaningful per se, but people can create a value or a meaning for their life by their own merits. Camus, for instance, proposes ways such as combatting the evils to make one’s life meaningful (Kamber 2001, 59).

2. Semantics of the “Meaning of Life”
As pointed out above, anti-nihilists are divided into those who believe in the meaningfulness of life and those who believe in making life meaningful. These thinkers assume that “meaning” in “meaning of life” is tantamount to “purpose,” “value,” or “function.” According to Sartre in his *The Chirps are Down*, death destroys the being-for-itself and freedom: the game is over after death, one loses his freedom and being-for-itself, and his life ends up in nothingness. Moreover, according to his *The Dead without Burial*, where he constantly talks about the goals of political activities and being killed for the sake of these goals, the meaninglessness of life lies in its purposelessness. Thus, in this paper we treat the meaning of life as purposefulness of life, although,
according to the Quran and hadiths, life has value and function in addition to its purpose.

3. Intellectual Foundations of Sartre’s View

3.1 Epistemological Foundations
Ontologically speaking, there are two approaches in response to the question of whether there is an independent world outside the world of our minds, feelings, and consciousness: realism and anti-realism. Likewise, epistemologically speaking, there is a question as to whether it is possible to have knowledge of concepts and meanings. If we endorse ontological realism—that there is an independent world beyond the world of our minds, feelings, and consciousness—then we can say, in response to the latter question, that certain concepts and meanings might not fall within the domain of our perceptions and cognitions, because they belong to an independent world beyond that of our minds, feelings, and consciousness. Thus, we will be incapable of having full-fledged knowledge of them. Consequently, as far as epistemological issues are concerned, we will be led to the view that we are not able to know all concepts on our own. If we follow ontological anti-realism, however, and believe that there is no independent world beyond that of our minds and feelings, then in response to the above question we should say that all concepts fall within the domain of our cognitions. Thus, we will not be subject to any restrictions in our consciousness and grasp of concepts (Hollingdale 1994, 16).

As a naturalist, Sartre believes that true knowledge is grounded in sensory experience, which is possible only via experiments and observations. He adopts an anti-realistic approach here.

1. Proponents of realism hold that there exist concepts and meanings independently of us, which we seek to discover. In contrast, advocates of anti-realism believe that there are no concepts and meanings independently of us; we are the ones who create and construct these concepts and meanings.
3.2 Ontological Foundations
In his book *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre introduces three kinds of beings: being-in-itself, being-for-itself, and being-for-others. By “being-in-itself” he means a being without consciousness. Thus, it includes everything other than humans, such as solid objects, plants, and non-human animals. This is a relational being, without a reason for being (Sartre 1969, lxvi), which cannot be described in terms of concepts such as “change” (Sartre 1969, lxv). By “being-for-itself” Sartre refers to consciousness, which boils down to the conscious human being. Being-for-itself is characterized by its consciousness of its own being, which is inseparable from its being (Sartre 1969, 74). By “being-for-others” he refers to other human beings.

For Sartre, in their social interactions, human beings try to dominate each other. Everyone tries to limit the freedom of others. Such a relation obtains even between two persons who walk past each other on a street and have a glance at one another (Ahmadi 1381 Sh, 222-23). God is the greatest “Other” who limits human freedom. Thus, there is an unending fight between a person and other humans, on the one hand, and between the person and God, on the other.

3.3 Anthropological Foundations
Having classified entities into being-in-itself and being-for-itself, Sartre believes that what distinguishes human beings from beings-in-themselves is their consciousness. Since beings-in-themselves have no consciousness, they cannot enjoy freedom. Thus, we should posit an a priori nature\(^1\) for them. Since human beings are conscious, they are free; that is, they are condemned to freedom. Therefore, “freedom is

\(^1\) As far as human beings are concerned, the words “nature,” “quiddity,” “innate origin,” and “essence” are used synonymously.
precisely the nothingness which is made-to-be at the heart of man and which forces human reality to make itself instead of to be” (Sartre 1969, 440). Since Sartre denies any a priori nature for human beings, he believes that human beings are in a constant state of becoming throughout their life until they become God. However, the desire to become God is absurd and will be of no avail. When death comes, human life comes to an end, and thus human efforts are thwarted. In Sartre’s own words, “we lose ourselves as human beings in order that God may be born. But the idea of God is contradictory and we lose ourselves in vain. The human being is a useless passion” (Sartre 1969, 615). Sartre considers God as an obstacle to human freedom, since if human beings believe in God, then they have to posit an a priori essence for Him and live under His dominion based on this a priori essence and with values created by God, whereas human beings create their own essence by drawing upon their consciousness in line with their ideals, and then they come to replace God. Sartre says: “[T]he real problem is not that of [God’s] existence; what man needs is to find himself again and to understand that nothing can save him from himself, not even a valid proof of the existence of God” (Sartre 1975, 56).

By denying the existence of God, Sartre tries to establish his atheist humanism and suggests that it is the human existence which gives meaning to being and the world.

4. The Meaning of Life in Sartre’s View
Sartre believes that human beings have appeared in this world without a reason, and there is no necessity for human existence. He says: “[M]y facticity … [includes] the fact of my birth” (Sartre 1969, 556). The human existence is something merely given; therefore, “life is absurd”

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1. The priority of existence over the essence in human beings, which is a view commonly and fundamentally held by existentialists, including Sartre, has to do with this point.
(Sartre 1969, xlii). As to the absurdity of life he says, “[B]efore you live life, it is nothing … value is nothing but the direction you choose” (Sartre 1964, 77), because there is no God, and the absence of a plan for being and the world carries with it the possibility of life’s meaninglessness and worthlessness. He believes that human imperfections and failures in life and the absurdity of life have led human beings to construct the idea of God (Greene 1960, 65-66). Although the negation of God leads to human freedom, it destroys objective values. In other words, on the one hand, it leads to the human contribution to the evaluation of life, and on the other, it precludes the possibility of absolute, universally accepted values, because each human individual has a right to evaluate life. In these circumstances, the human being is deemed the foundation of everything, while he has no foundations. He sees absurdity in his freedom for making choices which he is not forced to make (because none of the choices has superiority over others), thus arriving at the absurdity of choices, values, and the self.

For Sartre, the “presence of others” contributes to the absurdity and unpleasantness of life as well. As pointed out earlier, the human being has a general dimension affected by other human beings and exemplifications of consciousness outside him, and there is a constant conflict among these instances of consciousness—they try to dominate or captivate each other; in Sartre’s own terms, “Hell is other people” (Ahmadi 1381 Sh, 223). To live is to accept the human condition—that is, to accept human freedom and abandonment (Ahmadi 1390 Sh, 172). Nevertheless, the worry and the disappointment arising from the absence of God and the abandonment of human beings should not disappoint us from being hopeful about our own actions. We should rely on ourselves and remain hopeful. Sartre suggests: “I am in the
circle of possibilities, but I can be hopeful of these possibilities only so far as they just lie within the domain of my action” (Sartre 1964, 48). Thus, human beings should act without relying on others. It seems that, for Sartre, life has value (as is indicated by his own activities in different areas), but it has no purposes or ends, because with death (the end of life) human beings fade into nothingness and beings-in-themselves. Even values and purposes that have been useful in human life are no longer useful and cannot make human death meaningful. Thus, in his view, although life is valuable, it is absurd because of its purposelessness, since there is no God, and nothing has a foundation, not even the values constructed and chosen by human beings. It should be noted that Sartre’s approach is different from that according to which life should be made meaningful. On the meaningful-making approach (like Camus’s), we construct meaning, whereby we save life from meaninglessness. In Sartre’s view, construction of meaning makes no sense, because human choices have no foundations. Therefore, life is essentially meaningless and no meaning can be constructed for it—it cannot even be made meaningful. Sartre invites human beings to activity and goes so far as to suggest that human abandonment, fears, and worries should not preclude his hopes in his actions—he should rely on, and be hopeful of, his actions, although all this will be gone after death.

He discusses the issue in his Being and Nothingness, saying, “[I]t is absurd that we are born; it is absurd that we die” (Sartre 1969, 547) and “[death] is an always possible nihilation of my possibles which is outside my possibilities” (Sartre 1969, 513; original emphasis). Moreover, Sartre points to the absence of necessity in death and its accidentalness in his The Wall.
In fact, for Sartre, death destroys one’s being-for-itself and freedom, and leads to absurdity and meaninglessness of life. Death annihilates all human possibilities, and turns his being from something for-itself, which has freedom, to something in-itself. The transformation from for-itself to in-itself is portrayed in the play The Chips are Down. The play begins with two main characters: Pierre is a combative revolutionary who gets killed upon a treason on the part of another member, and a woman who is poisoned because of her husband’s betrayal. The two are acquainted with one another in the world of the dead, and fall in love. If they can prove their mutual love to others within twenty-four hours, then they can return to the world of the living. The story is focused on how desperate they are in proving their love to others and how they fail to accomplish the significant goals they were pursuing.

It seems that Sartre goes one step further in The Dead without Burial, where he introduces another issue concerning death. In this play, it is shown that the goals that render life meaningful do not necessarily give meaning to death. Henry, a character in the play, says: “[T]he goal repels us, because we are no longer good for it. It will find other people who are good for it. Right now in Tours and Lille and Carcassonne women are giving birth to children who are going to replace us. We attempted to justify and make sense of our life, but we missed the goal. Now we die and turn into useless dead” (Sartre 1984, 35). Henry believes that as long as one is alive, his actions can be meaningful and justified in terms of functions he has chosen for achieving his goals. However, when a kind of death like theirs takes place (i.e., the kind of death which is not in line with their goals, because they have failed), then it cannot be justified by the purposefulness of life. In fact, the goal espoused by Canoris (the second character of the play) for his life gives meaning to his life, not to his death. On the other hand, Henry’s
argument against the functionalist way of giving meaning to life can apparently be deployed in a deeper sense, since the meaning given to life or death through a goal-achieving function can be true about everyone. Thus, it fails to yield a specific necessity to the unique existence of every human individual. For example, in this play, if these people died for the sake of their goals, then that could be done by other individuals as well. Therefore, meaning-giving cannot be personally and necessarily limited to a particular person’s existence. In his Being and Nothingness, Sartre says: “[I]f my acts in the world are considered from the point of view of their function, their efficacy, and their result, it is certain that the Other can always do what I do” (Sartre 1969, 534). As a consequence, death as my own death has no necessity or a unique meaning, whether or not it is for the sake of a goal.

5. A Critique of Jean-Paul Sartre’s View

5.1 Objections to Its Epistemological Foundations

1. It is unfounded to restrict knowledge to the empirical. The domain of knowledge is very wide, encompassing—in addition to experience—reason, revelation, intuition, and the like. One of the highest epistemic sources is reason. With reason, new concepts can be yielded through abstraction, combination, and generalization, or concepts can be analyzed and synthesized. Significant functions of reason as an epistemic source include reasoning, coming to conclusions, obtaining new knowledge via moving from the known to the unknown, and generalizing sensory data; sensory experience is deprived of such functions. Demonstrating a supernatural world lies within the boundaries of reason.

   2. How can it be proved through experience that experience is the criterion of knowledge? If the truth of the statement was based on experience, it would be a vicious circle, and if it was based on
something unempirical, then this would be acknowledging an epistemic source other than experience.

3. Experience can never make a judgment as to something’s impossibility, because the impossibility of something can never be experienced. Therefore, empiricists such as Sartre cannot make a judgement to the effect that something is impossible merely because it is not observed via our senses.

5.2 Objections to Its Ontological Foundations

1. Contrary to Sartre’s view, all entities are created by an absolute and perfect being, and have not come to exist on their own. According to an argument by Mullā Ṣadrā, the only being in the world is God, and all other entities, including human beings, are modes of His existence, and dependent on, and created by, Him. His argument proceeds as follows: existing realities can be of two kinds: either they are essentially dependent, or they are essentially independent. The dependent existence ultimately depends on an independent existence; otherwise, a vicious circle or regress would follow. According to this argument, the dependent existence does not exist separately from the independent being. Instead, the dependent being is a mode of the existence of the independent being (Mullā Ṣadrā 1388 Sh, 35-36). Thus, what exists in the world is not a plurality of entities; rather, it is one being (God) which has a plethora of modes and manifestations.

In addition to rational arguments, there are Quranic verses implying that the heavens, the earth, human beings, and the rest are created by God.

2. As against Sartre’s view, human beings, as well as all entities in the world—solid objects, plants, and non-human animals—have
consciousness, though they do not enjoy the same degree of consciousness. According to the Quran, the whole world glorifies God, and glorification requires cognition and consciousness.

3. As opposed to Sartre’s view, human beings, as well as the whole world, are in a process of motion and becoming. This is evidenced by Quranic verses according to which everything goes back to God (see, e.g., Quran 2:210; 3:109).

4. In contrast to Sartre’s view, Hell is not others; rather, others are created by God the All-Wise and worthy of respect. It is recommended to serve each other—helping others is said to be the greatest worship. The Prophet Muhammad says: “People are all God’s family. The most adored people by God are those who best treat God’s family” (Ya’qūbī, n.d., 2:105).

One of the most delicate manifestations of social interactions in the monotheistic view is enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong. This is so important that, according to the Quran, God considers the Muslim community superior to other nations because they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong: “You are the best nation [ever] brought forth for mankind: you bid what is right and forbid what is wrong” (Quran 2:110). Imam ‘Alī says: “All good deeds and jihad in the path of God are, in comparison to enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong, like a drop of water before tremendous waves” (Sharīf al-Raḍī 1414 AH, wisdom 374).

5.3 Objections to Anthropological Foundations
1. Sartre holds that the essences of all beings are prior to their existence, whereas in the case of human beings, their essences are posterior to their existence. Against this view, one can say that if by “essence” Sartre means the existential limits of things, which is discussed in Islamic
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philosophy, then one cannot say that human beings have no essence initially, since essence and existence are two concepts that occur to the mind upon the first look at beings, and before something comes to being, we cannot talk about its essence (except God who has a limitless being, unlike other entities in the world which are restricted by their limits). If, however, the absence of a prior essence for humans early in their creation means the common nature, which distinguishes the human species from other beings in the world—to which the Quran and hadiths refer as fiṭra or innate nature—then the claim is not acceptable, because human beings have common sorts of consciousness and tendencies\(^1\) which are specific to the human species.

Having said that, if the claim that human beings have no essence is tantamount to the view that every human individual has a role to play in the construction of his or her character and that human beings can construct themselves in whatever way they wish to—though limited by their fixed natures and by their environments and other factors—then this is true and evidenced both by our experiences and by Quranic and hadith doctrines. Human power is such that humans can make themselves inferior to animals or superior to angels.

2. As against Sartre’s view, notwithstanding their fixed essences, human beings enjoy full-fledged freedom of the will. The domain of human free will is so extended that they can degrade themselves to the animal degree or even lower than that: “When they defied [the command pertaining to] what they were forbidden from, We said to them, ‘Be you spurned apes’” (Quran 7:166) and “They are like cattle;  

\(^{1}\) Instances of common sorts of consciousness include being aware of certain self-evident propositions and knowledge of God, and among the examples of common tendencies are seeking truth, perfection, and beauty, worshipping, and the desire for eternity.
indeed, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless” (Quran 7:179). On the other hand, human beings can go so far as to become God’s viceroys, deserve the angels prostrating themselves before them, and finally meet God: “…then fall down in prostration before him” (Quran 15:29). Moreover, the full-blown realization of human consciousness and freedom as well as other human ends is not possible within the limited realm of nature, because within a natural outlook, all human knowledge is limited to the material realm, while this is but one realm of being, and it is not accurate and logical to restrict the human existential realm and his consciousness to the nature.

3. Sartre does not believe in God. His atheism is not grounded in rational and logical arguments. Instead, he allegedly “intuited” God’s absence. In his conversations with Simone de Beauvoir, he says: “[I]t was on that day and in the form of a momentary intuition, that I said to myself, ‘God doesn't exist’” (de Beauvoir 1984, 434-35). Thus, he denies the existence of God without presenting an argument for it, notwithstanding arguments for the existence of God based on innate human knowledge, reason, and revelation. As it seems, the “cosmological argument” and the “argument from intelligent design” have attracted the attention of western theists more than other arguments. According to the cosmological argument, the explanation of the world does not lie in it; as William Stoeger says: “The existence of something, whether it be energy, material particles, or operative laws, requires a cause which either necessarily exists in itself, or ultimately rests on a cause which necessarily exists in itself” (Margenau 1992, 13).

The argument from intelligent design is based on the empirical fact that a particular design or order is predominant in the world that needs an intelligent designer. This designer is a transcendent supernatural
entity. Some people, such as Osselton, an American mathematician, have drawn upon the theory of probability to show that “typing just the name William Shakespeare using a rather crude typewriter with only 50 different characters … would require about $50^{19}$ or $2 \times 10^{32}$ strokes on the keys” (Osselton 1984, 39). Thus, it is highly improbable to have a design without a designer.

Some others believe that the existence of God can merely be perceived through personal experience. Walter Thirring, an Austrian physician and theoretician, says: “I do not believe that I can understand God with my human logic. I can only appeal to my personal experience when I believe that he guides me as he happens to do with every little bit of his creation” (Margenau 1992, 120-21).

Muslim intellectuals endorse the existence of God through rational arguments and intuition (or personal experience). As was mentioned above, according to an argument by Mullā Ṣadrā, not only is God’s existence demonstrated but it is shown that the only being in the world is God, and other entities, including human beings, are modes of His existence and dependent on Him. The Quran says: “O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of Allah, and Allah—He is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable” (35:15), and Imam al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Shiite Imam, says: “…nothing exists but God, and He is a light without darkness” (Ibn Bābawayh 1398 AH, 128). Thus, created beings, including human beings, do not have an existential identity. They are, indeed, manifestations and signs of God’s existence.

In addition to these arguments, there are Quranic verses (e.g., 88:21-22) and hadiths reminding that knowledge of God, worship of God, and seeking God are inherent in our innate nature, and the human existential structure is such that he knows God. The Prophet Muhammad says:
“Every person is created with the innate knowledge of God” (Majlisī 1403 AH, 3:279).

4. In contrast to Sartre’s view, there is no conflict between the ideas of “God” and “human being.” In fact, the human dependence on God leads to an expansion in the meaning of humanity. The fact that human beings are created by God introduces an association with, and dependence on, God into every definition of human being. Thus, the human domain extends from the limits of createdness to the boundaries of creatorship. The two ideas are so intimately associated with one another that knowing God depends on knowing one’s own self, which is an instance of knowing human beings. The Prophet says: “He who knows himself has already come to know his Lord” (Majlisī 1403 AH, 2:32). The deep connection between knowing human beings and knowing God is evidence that there is no conflict between these two existential concepts.

5. Contrary to Sartre’s view, it is only God who can give peace and consolation to human beings, and it is only the remembrance of God that can save them from feelings of loneliness. The Quran says: “The friends of Allah will indeed have no fear nor will they grieve” (10:62). This verse seems to imply that human beings are in a constant state of fear and sadness, because, on the one hand, they constantly worry about losing their desired possessions. Thus, they fear and consequently feel anxious. And, on the other hand, they feel sad and depressed because they have lost their desired possessions. According to this verse, the friends of God are immune to fears and sadness, because they are friends with an omnipotent entity, who protects their desired possessions, and if they lose them, He can return them with His omniscience and omnipotence. Thus, a person connected to the origin of being never feels anxious, depressed, or lonely.
Therefore, the root of human loneliness is the absence of full-fledged knowledge, power, and self-sufficiency. If human beings are supported by an omnipotent, omniscient, and self-sufficient entity, then they can be saved from loneliness and attain peace. Such an entity is God. This is why the Quran says: “[T]hose who have faith and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Truly the hearts find rest in Allah’s remembrance!” (13:28). The term “truly” implies exclusiveness; that is, it is only God who can console human beings, because it is God who is omnipotent, omniscient, and all-sufficient. Moreover, in Sūra al-Ḥashr, God reveals another layer of human loneliness: “Do not be like those who forget Allah, so He makes them forget their own souls. It is they who are the transgressors” (Quran 59:19). One’s misdeeds lead to his distance from himself and self-alienation, which leads to feelings of exile, loneliness, and isolation, whereas the Quran says: “We are nearer to him than his jugular vein” (50:16) and “Know that Allah intervenes between a man and his heart and that toward Him you will be mustered” (8:24). Even at this layer of human loneliness, no one is present but God.

5.4 Objections to Meaninglessness of Life

1. Since human beings are created by God, their life has a purpose and a plan due to the existence of God the All-Wise. This plan or purpose is characterized by its comprehensiveness, because it is devised by an omnipotent, omniscient, and all-sufficient entity. Undoubtedly, a human life with such a comprehensive plan is qualitatively not the same as a human life in which God is not recognized as the wise creator and self-devised plans are supposed to make it meaningful.

2. A person who denies the existence of God is confined to the natural world, and has no connection with the supernatural realm. Of
course, a comprehensive wise plan cannot realize within a limited this-worldly life, because this world does not have the capacity to actualize transcendental goals. According to a divine and supernatural view, the purpose of creation is to approximate to God, meet Him, and join His infinite being. The path to joining God’s infinite being is to make sure that every word, deed, and intention is in line with divine proximity. Sartre denied God so as to present an infinite human being with limitless freedom and desires, whereas the limited capacity of this world cannot fulfil limitless desires. The gap is filled through a connection with an unlimited reality and an infinite world.

3. Within the framework of Sartre’s empiricism, no ground is paved for the flourishing of human spiritual potentialities, and whatever is supposed to give meaning to human life is restricted to the physical dimension and physical pleasure. This is notwithstanding the fact that the authentic dimension of human existence is the non-material and spiritual aspect on which the human character, identity, and humanity depend. The activities of the human material body are weakened in one’s dreams, since the soul is weakly attached to the body, whereas the soul emancipates itself from material boundaries in dreams, doing things that it can never do while awake (Mullā Şadrā 1981, 9:186). The information the soul can gain in its dreams from the past and future is sometimes so compelling that it precludes any possibility of denying the factuality of the soul.

4. In contrast to Sartre’s view, human becoming is not purposeless. Quranic and hadith doctrines explicitly talk about the human motion towards God: “O man! You are labouring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him” (Quran 84:6).

This is also demonstrated through arguments presented by Muslim intellectuals (the problem of substantial motion or al-ḥarākat al-
jawhariyya). The human soul is in motion towards God, and in this motion, the soul goes so far as to become a pure intellect and, at a higher degree, it becomes united with the Active Intellect, until it finally comes to be identical with the Active Intellect (Mullā Ṣadra 1388 Sh, 295).

5. As opposed to Sartre’s view, human efforts are not fruitless after death; God’s justice demands that human beings face the consequences of their actions. Since this world is too limited to manifest all the results of people’s deeds, they will face the consequences of their actions in another world free of this-worldly limits: “So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom’s weight of evil will see it” (Quran 99:7-8).

Moreover, one aspect of the meaningfulness of human life is the perpetual effect of his deeds in this world, which has been ignored by Sartre. Every person has three lives: individual, social, and historical. The three lives indicate the effects of humans’ actions in individual, social, and historical domains.

The Quran says: “We have attached every person’s omen to his neck, and We shall bring it out for him on the Day of Resurrection as a book that he will find wide open. ‘Read your book! Today your soul suffices as your own reckoner’” (17:13-14). As to human social life, the Quran says: “And you will see every nation fallen on its knees. Every nation will be summoned to its book: ‘Today you will be requited for what you used to do’” (45:28). And as to the human historical life, we read: “[D]ue to their domineering [conduct] in the land and their devising of evil schemes; and evil schemes beset only their authors. So do they await anything except the precedent of the ancients? Yet you will never find any change in Allah’s precedent, and you will never find any revision in Allah’s precedent” (Quran 35:43). The precedents or traditions in the
Quran seem to refer to historical effects of human deeds, and Quranic stories are evidence of historical effects of the deeds of past nations.

6. Sartre believes that life is meaningless, whereas life cannot have an external existence without a meaning. There is always a motion in life, and no motion can be conceived without a purpose.

7. Sartre’s views are incoherent; for instance, on the one hand, he emphasizes heavy human responsibilities when making decisions, and on the other, he denies God and negates universal and objective values. If the latter were true, how and why could human beings consider themselves responsible? Moreover, in such circumstances, can human beings know towards whom they are responsible?

**Conclusion**

Sartre rejects the origin of being—the infinite entity—without any arguments or logical reasoning, and as a consequence of such a rejection, he came to suffer from absurdity, loss of identity, and meaninglessness. However, the structure of the creation and the innate nature of human beings is such that they are acquainted with God. When everything is centered on monotheism, the smallest belief and deed will be formed in terms of purposes, which render one’s life meaningful, although there are different degrees of such purposes.

It seems that human beings can posit purposes for their life without believing in God or in any non-physical realms—purposes which might give meaning to their life. They can also posit purposes for their life and make it meaningful without believing in God and merely by believing in a non-physical realm, and they can posit purposes and give meaning to their life with the belief both in God and in eternal life. In all these cases, one’s life can become meaningful and purposeful, but it should be noted that these purposes are not at the same level.
The highest level is concerned with the origin of creation, and since human beings have the highest status among all entities in the world, they deserve the highest and the most transcendental ideals and ends. The Quran appeals to divine wisdom to emphasize that the creation of the world is not aimless. Human beings have appeared on the earth as God’s viceroys with a great mission: they have come to make the earth the manifestation of divine names. It seems that people who have not properly grasped the meaning of life have confused the requisites or components of life with its purposes.

The path towards the goal is as significant as the goal itself, because every person treads this path only once—life is a one-time experience for everyone. Such a serious alarm leads people to embark upon their search with accuracy and meticulousness. However, it is not easy to properly know the goal; it cannot be grasped by a person who treads the path for the first and the last time.

God the All-Merciful who wants human happiness and is aware of human failures has kindly taught people the goal of life and how to achieve it step by step. In different Quranic verses, God has made it obvious to people that the whole world, including human beings, will return to higher and more transcendental worlds, and the ultimate end of life is God: “Allah originates the creation, then He will bring it back, then you will be brought back to Him” (30:11). Thus, the goal of life in this world is a voluntary and free return to the origin. In other words, human beings should try to return to their origin and their original abode; that is, divine proximity: “Indeed we belong to Allah and to Him do we indeed return” (Quran 2:56).

God has also delineated how to return to Him and achieve this goal. He has assigned the task of communicating the instructions to the most
superior humans—that is, the prophets. Indeed, in light of their instructions and acting upon their teachings, one can arrive at one’s origin, the main and authentic end of life: “Answer Allah and the Apostle when he summons you to that which will give you life” (Quran 8:24).
References

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