

KILROY CAFÉ

Philosophy for the Modern Age

©2010, Glenn Campbell, PO Box 30303, Las Vegas 89173
glenn@kilroycafe.com www.KilroyCafe.com



Issue #64
February 18, 2010

THE MEANING OF LIFE

Explained at Last!

By GLENN CAMPBELL

One day, we woke up on a strange planet, in a body that wasn't ours, living with a family we didn't choose. That's all we know about life, but it's all we really need. Before us is our remaining life on Earth, which we can either do something with or squander. It's our choice.

There is no outside authority to tell us what to do. There is only the reality all around us, which appears to be solid and non-negotiable. Of course, this reality could be an illusion, but it's the best illusion we have, so we might as well work with it.

The thing we find out quickly about reality is that it can hurt! Stick your finger in a candle flame and you're going to get burned. Your body will let you know you've done something wrong, and if you have any common sense you won't do the same thing again.

If you want a purpose in life, a pretty good starting point is simply to avoid pain. In the beginning, you avoid it in the present (by keeping your fingers out of flames), but as you get more experienced, you start looking ahead and trying to avoid pain in the future. A little bit of planning and prudence right now can prevent a whole lot of discomfort later on.

Unfortunately, a lot of people can't handle planning and prudence. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if you drink too much, blow all your money or ignore your own safety, you'll feel pain later, but most people just don't get it. They can't delay gratification or plan ahead. You are already ahead of the pack if you can anticipate reality based on what it did to you last time and act accordingly.

Once you start planning farther into the future, your plans evolve into principles. It's hard to predict the future exactly, so you rely on rational policies to protect you from pain. One policy, for example, is to always fasten your seatbelt when riding in a car. It may not make a difference on this trip or the next, but sooner or later it is probably going to save you a lot of pain. It's not immediate pain avoidance that protects you here, but a far-sighted philosophy.

The more sophisticated you become as a resident of Earth, the more you think about policies rather than immediate results. How do you achieve the best long-term outcome—i.e. the least pain over time? Sometimes, foresight says you must endure some pain now to avoid even greater pain in the future, and if you are disciplined enough, you'll obey.

Pain, however, comes in many forms, not all of them attached to the body. There is the pain of loneliness and the pain of seeing someone you care about suffer. It's painful when something you have built is destroyed, and it's almost as painful to see it happen to others. All of these different kinds of potential discomfort go into your calculations of what to do now.

When simply avoiding your own pain isn't enough to satisfy you, you can start to address the pain of others. Your fellow travelers may or may not be conscious, but they certainly seem to be, so you might as well treat them with respect. You know what it is like to have your finger in a candle flame, so if you can protect others from similar distress, why not? While you are imprisoned on this planet, you might as well help out your fellow inmates.

The next question is, What is the best way to help? Do you only address someone's immediate pain, or do you think about their long-term well-being? Again, policies soon become more important than immediate satisfaction. To save someone's life, you might have to cut off their arm. No one wants to be in this kind of position, but reality often gives you no choice.

Even if you know nothing about who you are or where you came from, reality will guide you. Reality is the environment you found yourself in when you landed here. It is the body you're in and the physical world all around you. You can close your eyes and dream of other things, but when you open them again, reality will still there, just as you left it.

Reality starts out as a great mystery, but eventually we learn its rules. For example, gravity is one rule. Step off an edge, and you'll fall and suffer. Other rules, like what makes us happy and how other people behave, can get very complicated, but the rules are always there, waiting to be discovered. The more we investigate, experiment and deduce the underlying mechanics, the better we can plan and predict.

There are a lot of things we'll never know, like "What is consciousness?" and "What made this all happen?" Without this knowledge, we have to find meaning and satisfaction in the world itself. Just by virtue of our being born, wheels are set in motion that we cannot stop. The noblest thing we can do with our life is master those wheels.

What is the meaning of life? Reality gives you problems, and you do your best to solve them. You need no more meaning than that.

—G.C.

www.Glenn-Campbell.com