

KILROY CAFÉ

Philosophy for the Modern Age

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ACCEPT LIFE!

It's the only game in town.

*If you care about living,
you'll do the most you
can with the opportunity.*

By GLENN CAMPBELL

What is the meaning of life? There isn't any. There's no instruction manual, no guiding force and no absolute criteria for success or failure. There's probably no cosmic reward or punishment at the end (although we can't know for sure until we get there).

So what's the point in living? Is life such an empty exercise that it's senseless to do anything with it? No! Life is a great opportunity!

Just because life has no inherent meaning doesn't mean you can't find meaning in it. It's remarkably easy! Life presents you with problems, and you do your best to solve them. It's the only game in town, so you might as well play!

We are all aliens. We mysteriously woke up on this strange planet, in an alien body, living with a *really* strange family. It's not truly our planet, our body or our family. We didn't choose our birth circumstances, but we're stuck with them anyway.

What do we do now? We respond to the demands of our environment. Just by virtue of living, we are presented with problems, and we learn quickly that not responding to them appropriately causes us pain. Certain other things seem to bring us pleasure, so we try to reproduce them.

It doesn't take any great cosmic plan to respond to pleasure and pain. Any laboratory rat can do it. What we aliens possess that rats don't is the ability to look ahead. After a bit of living, most of us come to realize that we can avoid a lot of pain in the future by taking some prudent actions today. Our pleasure and pain in the present soon becomes less important to us than pleasure and pain over the whole course of our lives.

Turns out, pleasure and pain are a lot more complicated than they seem. We soon find that things giving us pleasure in one circumstance may not do so in another. For example, one or two Oreo cookies: tasty! A whole package of Oreos? Not tasty! It may even lead to Oreo vomit! Every kid has to learn it on his own: Pleasure and pain cannot be predicted by a simple linear formula.

Life may be a virtual reality video game. It is possible that nothing we experience is real, but it certainly *seems* real to us, and that's good enough. Within the game, there are rules. For example, there is gravity, and you defy it at your peril. There are also "people" all around you—that is, sentient-appearing biologically based humanoid avatars—and these characters obey rules, too.

The world we are brought into is governed by its own preexisting rules that have to be actively discovered. What we want the rules to be has no bearing on what they really are. Other aliens may tell you what they think the rules are, but overall they are as clueless about life as you, so you have to probe the game-space on your own to test what really works.

You find meaning in life simply by playing the game according to the best rules you can find. You may be driven by pleasure and pain, but eventually you are dealing with them at higher and higher levels. Is it just your own pleasure and pain that's important, or should you also care about others? If you hang out with "people" long enough, you eventually start empathizing with them, as though they really existed, and their pleasure and pain becomes yours.

Soon, you are dealing with some very complicated theoretical principles, like "justice," "morality" and "the good of mankind." You might even start caring about the world you leave behind, as though it were going to continue.

It's a no brainer: If you are forced to play a game, you might as well accept it, treat it as an art form and get as good as you can at it. What is the alternative? You can refuse to play. You might do this by committing suicide or by not cooperating with the world imposed upon you. What this means in practice is that you refuse to plan ahead but simply live in the pleasure and pain of the present, thus assuring more pain later.

Life becomes empty only when you refuse to play, when you decline to take the helm of your ship but simply let it drift. Yes, life is tragic, brutal and unfair, but you got to keep playing anyway.

You can strive to play the game well, based on what you learn along the way, or you can give up, go passive and play it poorly. It's your choice.

—G.C.