

From the Death of Meaning to a Meaning of Death; a Biosemiotic Approach to Death and Loss

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Editorial

The relations between meaning and death are complex and paradoxical. On one hand, death is the end point of a meaning system, on the other hand, death is the main motive of the individual and social meaning-making procedures. The origin of man's history is death-awareness; which necessitates prediction, memory, and knowledge. Thus, we can imagine that immortality leads to the dissipation of all the meaningful connections of intra-inter-transpersonal fields of life. In contradiction, we all experience how other's death or our death threat can make everything meaningless and futile. That's why for Heidegger death is not a way to end but is a way of being; it is not Being-at-an-end but it is Being-towards-the-end, signifying death, which refers to how an existing human can be [1]. The world of possibilities and all the symbolic creatures are offsprings of death and experiencing death and loss necessitates life and awareness.

In these death exposures, our narcissistic bubble bursts, and the egocentric meaning-making machine breaks down [2]. We cannot stand such an incoherent life story. Therefore, we try to find the loss and death or substitute some things to reconstruct our narrative. Loss, absence, absurdness, and ignorance are negative concepts that associate the limbo unto hell of extremely painful emotions. The associative network of death contains a lot of these non-being objects. Not having and not existing states are interpreted as crucial threats and deficits. We avoid accepting the absence of the love objects and prefer to saturate the emptiness with all pessimistic scenarios, painful memories, and sentiments. Therefore, if we want to liberate ourselves from the inertia of the lost object [3] and related misinterpretations, we need a way to inhibit dysfunctional meaning-making pathways. Why? why me? are dynamics arise from the memory resistance to encounter the real absence of the object. Sometimes we maintain our sadness, anger, and fear instead of the lost object.

Many therapists and other helpers try to enter the dysfunctional interpretations, find their core beliefs, and insist to reframe the experience of loss and grief. The missing piece of the therapy for loss and grief is the mindset. We can not properly attain acceptance by a dual and fundamentally paranoiac mindset that illustrates "I" against others and time; a dual mindset interprets loss and death as an attack opposing "I" [4]. A nondual mindset can affirm the absence of resources as a limitation and simultaneously, a possibility of a new manner of being. Wilber (2000) define nonduality as the true nature of human in his integral theory of consciousness [5]. Acceptance and patience should be rooted in such a nondual mindset but we know that any confrontation with death and disability is distressing and painful and it is very hard to find such a neutral and wise attitude.

Usually, distresses lead to pains and pains turn to sufferings and sufferings tend to become torments. "Distress" is an imbalance between needs and resources. "Pain" has its story and flow of signs. In addition to the intensity of afferent signals to the pain control gate, there are some afferent signals which can interpret the pressure and harm as more or less threatening and therewith painful. When a painful experience is interpreted as a deterioration "suffering"

emerges. To fall into "torment" we need to interpret the suffering as a matter of rejection and depersonalization. In this way, suffering is not essential for the human condition but it is a sociocognitive construct; a passive, meaningless, and useless experience. According to Levinas's phenomenology [6]. Now, how can we accept ourselves and be patient with loss and death while we are under torture by a Tartarian wheel made of misinterpretations? [7].

What we have learned from traditional and modern existentialism is to accept the meaninglessness of what is [8]. Many existential approaches, like Frankl's logotherapy, prescribe proactive meaning-making to manage existential anxiety of meaninglessness [9]. It means that meaninglessness equals angst and despair. In my opinion, this is an overgeneralization because if do not feel isolated and obligated to know. If we can inhibit energy-information flows that rush in insecure moments and transform distress and pain into suffering and torment by nonjudgmental witnessing, we succeed to prevent high levels of emotional and physical dysregulations [10]. Mindful shifting of attention from the disastrous meaning-making mind to interoception and what actually happens in our body is a critical skill we need to tolerate the loss of object and loss of meaning [11]. Thus, effective patience originates from patience in meaning-making. No interpretation and pure self-reflectivity is a pause in energy-information flow and a door to liberty. It is not a pure meaningless experience but a suspension of meanings instead of fixation of meanings as hard reality.

In many spiritual traditions especially in Buddhism the emptiness, the formless, and the nothingness represent excellence and being values [12]. In Sufism "hich" or nothingness and meaninglessness is mentioned as the highest self [13]. From this viewpoint, being nothing, having nothing, and doing nothing represent the authentic existential situation of the human being. Furthermore, acceptance of these negative aspects of reality seems necessary for sustainable emotional homeostasis. Surprisingly, in the framework of a nondual mindset, meaninglessness and nothingness are interpreted as higher levels of liberty and possibility. Understanding and affirmation of these existentially negative values is a big step forward to psychological maturation and acceptance of perceived reality.

Biosemiotics is a systemic metalanguage that studies life as semiosis based on signs and codes [14]. From this viewpoint, human life is a

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multidimensional network of symbolic and prelinguistic meaning-making systems. As we mentioned above, all the biopsychosocial functions are indeed sequences of interpretations; from an interpretation of a second messenger by a DNA molecule to the interpretation of a loss by a subject. Each interpretant is a sign for another interpretant and the integrity of these meaning-making processes maintains the organism and its proper adaptation [15].

So, we should be watchful of our interpretations, especially in allostatic states. Development of a nondual mindset and bodily awareness are the main strategies to prevent misinterpretations of loss and death and tolerate the temporal silence or suspension of meanings. Knowing and doing and even being nothing for a while is not a crucial threat for us but constructing a torture machine via our insecurely biased attention and interpretations is a real threat to what still remains of us.

Meaninglessness is the initial insight into loss and death; It is the groundwork for acceptance of “what-is” and also our ethical responsibility for more coherent meaning-making towards “what-may-be-better”. Meaninglessness is a transition from the monosemic approach of a fixed and dual mindset to the polysemic approach of a flexible and nondual mindset. So, before reframing our minds and re-story our life we need to float in the meaningless of being and reasonless respect for the events. Even temporal experience of nonjudgmental meaninglessness can be liberating and insightful. Accepting the death of meaning in great losses and facing death can open an authentic way to make meaning for death in the narrative of life.

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