Constructing a Life Philosophy

Constructing a Life Philosophy Paper

The above book has five chapters, each containing several viewpoints about the question asked at the beginning of each chapter. Many of these viewpoints are on opposite sides and, therefore, opposing views.

Here are the number of viewpoints in each chapter:

Chapter 1 "The Importance of Choosing a Life Philosophy" has 3 viewpoints
Chapter 2 "What Gives Life Ultimate Meaning?" has 5 viewpoints
Chapter 3 "How do Religions Give Life Meaning?" has 7 viewpoints
Chapter 4 "How Should We Make Moral Decisions?" has 7 viewpoints
Chapter 5 "How Should We Strive Toward?" has 5 viewpoints

1) Review "Why Consider Opposing Viewpoints?" and "Introduction" pages 9-14 before beginning to read.

2) Write a paper which focuses on the ideas in Chapter 1: "What Is Your Current Life Path?" and any one of the other four chapters.

3) You will briefly review the many points of view in Chapter 1 and the chapter you choose, then compare them (look for similarities) and contrast (look for differences) in the various opinions. Keep an open mind and read the various points of view to get out of them what the belief is. You don't have to agree with the author. You just need to understand where he/she is coming from.

4) Make some concluding remarks about what you learned which you felt was valuable for you and how this has affected your own view of life.

You may use other resources in addition to the book, and you may use other views from the other three chapters, but please note anything you include which is not actually in the two chapters in a bibliography at the end of your paper.

The paper must be at least four (4) pages long.
Constructing a Life Philosophy

By:
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Why Consider Opposing Viewpoints

First I must start with what is written on the back of this book. It states: “those who do not know their opponents arguments do not completely understand their own”. I would like to add to this thought with: “those who cannot show respect for their fellow man’s beliefs don’t respect their own”. I’ve often thought about this. How can we truly respect ourselves and our lifestyles, choices, personal philosophies, etc., if we do not respect those of the people around us? Don’t they also have the right of free will? What benefit is there in conforming—by force or otherwise? What purpose does that serve? How can we be a learned people if the only knowledge we have or will recognize is our own?

Opposing viewpoints states “the more inundated we become with differing opinions and claims, the more essential it is to hone critical reading and thinking skills to evaluate these ideas. Opposing viewpoints address this problem directly by presenting stimulating debates that can be used to enhance and teach these skills.”

Going through the Introduction of this book, it clearly lays out many opposing viewpoints and opinions. It challenges people to review their own strongly held beliefs and/or opinions in the face of opposition and/or disagreements. I personally know many people that believe a thing simply because it was something they were given as knowledge or truth in their upbringing. The problem with that is it belonged to someone else. I don’t know that we can claim a thing as our own without first recognizing why we claim it? These individuals don’t necessarily know why they believe it, what they believe even, or sometimes where it came/originated from. They just know it is “their own truth and belief” and can be very uncomfortable when the opposing belief or personal truth is challenged. Again, as the book states: “those who do not know their opponents arguments do not completely understand their own”.

What Is Your Current Life Path

I have waivered in and out my whole life with what I feel my life’s path is. Everything from my “possessions” wants, to work and education wants, to wants for my children and my wants for a spiritual relationship with the Creator, etc. A few years ago I almost checked myself into a monastery (they have a retreat program for the community) for a couple of weeks to deliberate that exact thing. I just needed to know “why’s” for my life path and who I am as a person, not as a mom-friend-sister-boss-etc., or the way everyone else sees me. I wanted to know me. I wanted to know what makes Christine who she is. I realized immediately that I wasn’t content with a life of just being—as in physically present, but not engaged in life. I want a life of exemption. I want a life of love, relationships, hope, faith, sincerity, and accomplishment. I want to “be” and “exist” in all facets of life and its complexities. I knew then that merely living wasn’t enough for me. Things had to change.

I had everything planned out for this trip and was ready to move forward. Babysitter, check. Bills paid, check. Time-off from work, check. It was at the last minute that I had to cancel because my daughter slipped a disk in her back. At the time I was rather upset and feeling like “this is why I am so confused, I have ZERO me time”, but then I realized that everything happens for a reason and I was okay with being present here and now until I got the answer of “why”—even if it was much later. I ended up taking a personal journey through “myself land”. I still took the scheduled time off from work and began to question everything: what was I really struggling with? Where is my faith these days (which is a direct link to my wants as an individual)? What are my hopes for life? I began to unravel as a person. It was
the scariest most frightful thing I have ever done. It required me to make peace with my childhood, my experiences, my weaknesses as a person, and shed the skin I thought was me. I gave myself permission to start over and become who I am and want to be, not how others see or want me to be, and it was difficult. Resistance was given and adversity was ever present, even from those closest to me, but I stayed the course. I am still on this course and working through my plan each day.

Right from the beginning, and as I started working through this, I realized my life path had one common thread—it is SO inextricably woven through me that I realized “it” and “me” could not be undone or unraveled or taken from one another. This thread causes me to be who I am and who I will strive to be each day. It is how I will relate to other living/non-living things and pushes me to be a better version of myself. It was my own “self-enlightenment” and path towards my own personal life philosophy. This thing was Christ. Yes, I am a Christian. Not by force or pre-conditioning, but by choice. To live and breathe meant to acknowledge this piece of me that I have felt compelled to acknowledge my entire life. This presents me with a whole different take on life, the world, and the people in it. Who I am, what I do, who I will become, my life’s choices and philosophy—they all revolve around my inner being and inner guide or “life map” as Chapter 1 points out. This process has been incredibly eye opening and I feel as though an entire pallet of bricks had been lifted from my shoulders.

**Reviewing Chapter 1**

Reading through Chapter 1, it gives us 4 viewpoints. They are: 1) Choosing a Map for Life, 2) Living with Shadows in a Cave, 3) Discovering our Personal Myth, and 4) Challenging the idea of a Life Plan.

As I read through Chapter 1, I felt as though I knew exactly what the writers were trying to convey. If I had read this book even just 5 years ago, it wouldn’t have had the same meaning to me as it did today. The chapter preface states “with our tendency to deceive ourselves, to seek comfort, and to avoid painful realities, the search for truth and self-awareness requires serious effort and courage.” This involves looking at our personal life “maps” and identifying/updating them in regards to truth, reality, knowledge, personal myths, growing, living, and being pro-active about our revisions to our “map”.

Viewpoint 1 goes into depth regarding our need for a life map. When I try to visualize this, I see mindless sheep wandering about whom only go where told; never self-aware or self-directing. However, having a life map, as mentioned above, takes effort and courage. We must deal with reality, not be afraid to revise our maps, and transfer what we learn to them as often as necessary. Our views of the world must not stay limited and narrow, but broadened and ever expanding. Viewpoint 2 in this chapter is about our subjective impressions of the world. In Plato’s “Living with Shadows in a Cave” he points out that human senses only give a distorted reflections, or shadow, of reality. He emphasizes that people must use reason as a tool to examine their beliefs. Viewpoint 3 discusses the discovery of our Personal Myths. We all have one, but what is it? The author Sam Keen states that “in a strict sense, myth refers to an intricate set of interlocking stories, rituals, rites, and customs that inform and give the pivotal sense of meaning and direction to a person, family, community or culture”. A living myth includes conscious celebration, unspoken consensus, the habitual way of seeing things, the unquestioned assumptions, and our automatic stance. He says that at least 51% of people are not self-consciously aware of the myth that informs their existence. Wow. After reading through this viewpoint, I really wanted to make a silly reality video, kind of like the late night talk show hosts who walk the streets asking random people American History questions, to tell me their personal myth—or even more simply put—what is their truth about their life
and why? Just like that—“yes maam/sir, can I just ask you a simple question—what do you believe and why?” I am pretty sure it would follow with lots of “huh, believe about what”? I would follow with “about you—what do you believe about you and why?” I think I might just ask people I know and see how they react! 😊 Viewpoint 4, the last in this chapter, is about Life Plans—or the challenge thereof! I actually really needed to read this. This viewpoint talks about essentially having life so planned out and rehearsed that you actually miss living it. The author Charles Larmore states that the “human experience reveals that happiness is often the result of unanticipated events. Moreover, the good that people pursue often falls short of the good that happens to them unexpectedly.” It’s so true. When I have planned for “good things”, it is often what I didn’t plan for that makes me most happy. I feel as though it’s because when I work to make something good, the expectation is set for it to “pay off”. When it doesn’t pay off, it has the opposite effect, I become disappointed (which he talks about). So, when I don’t make an effort, and it is not expected or anticipated, the surprise of the good is far more gratifying! That’s not all the viewpoint was about of course, it also emphasizes that although it is good to make goals and be self-directed, it is also good to allow life to happen to us and be happy in the not planned/looked for good, too. Its finding the middle of the two.

All in all, as I read through Chapter 1, I didn’t really find differences in opinions but rather the opposite—the differing viewpoints all sort of pointed towards the same thing—knowing who we are and how we want to live. The only viewpoint that was a little bit “off” was viewpoint 4, but not because he was wrong or oppositional (I actually really enjoyed and agreed with his statements), but rather because he was airing caution about living our lives scripted and so planned out that we miss out on “living”! I would imagine the other authors could agree with that statement. In a nutshell, I feel that all the viewpoints in Chapter 1 touched on seeking truth—within and outside ourselves to live a better life.

**Reviewing a Chapter of My Choosing**

Given all the above information and statements I have made about my own personal life path, I would like to review Chapter 4: What Motivates Moral Behavior? There are countless viewpoints on this, both in support and opposition to one another. I am sure we could write for days on this topic as it is heavily debated, but I will try to sum it up without losing sight of the facts!

The chapter preface begins with this: “The news is usually brimming with stories revealing the questionable state of ethics and morals in today’s world. From lying politicians and corrupt corporate practices to serial killers and genocidal wars, humankind seems to have an inexhaustible capacity for deceit and brutality. And yet even amidst such callousness, we also encounter great heroism, generosity, kindness, and honesty. Many would agree that humans have the potential to commit both good and evil. But how do we come to define what is “good” and “evil”? What enables us to choose between right and wrong?

In Viewpoint 1: Morality Requires Religious Belief, author Phillip Yancey believes that moral authority comes from God. He believes that humans must look beyond themselves to a higher power for moral guidance. He believes that without God, we are left with “collective sentiments of human beings” based on our personal choice and which is “vulnerable to dangerous swings of moral consensus”. In Viewpoint 2, author Frank Zindler believes that morality does not require religious belief, but that moral behavior is rooted in human physiology (evolution) via inherited traits and cultural adaptations. His opinion is that religion is primitive and should be replaced with reason. Viewpoint 3 provides us a humanistic belief:
that rational deliberation allows us to discern what is ethical without having to rely on religious laws and authorities. This viewpoint rightly titled “Secular Humanism Encourages Moral Awareness” really pushes that by promoting freedom of thought, church-state separation, and systems of ethics informed by reason, people can articulate moral principles themselves. Now, the 4th viewpoint titled: Secular Humanism is Harmful” is a really interesting follow up to viewpoint 3. John Gray argues that viewpoint 3—the belief that Secular Humanism Encourages Moral Awareness—is a belief system that tries to deny its own religious roots! (This is where I pause and allow my head to stop spinning). John argues that “secular humanism is harmful because it suppresses natural human inclinations and fosters tyranny in the name of progress and science”. He believes the liberal humanism is actually a secular cult that developed out of Christianity’s separation of religion and politics and that liberal humanism is suppressing humanity’s natural impulse towards religious belief. He states that “repressed religious instinct eventually reasserts itself in bizarre and dangerous ways” and that “we may not be far from a time when atheism will be seen as a relic of repression”. Viewpoint 5 and author Alfie Kohn gives us the opinion that “Altruism Promotes Moral Behavior” meaning that our moral compass is directed by us inherently; that we are empathetic beings which act out selflessness and selfless concern for others. Last but not least—this leads me to Viewpoint 6—which is in direct opposition to 5, titled “Self-Interest Promotes Moral Behavior” by Tibor Machlan. Tibor suggests that authentic morality is rooted in self-interest rather than altruism. He states that “when we help ourselves first, we are generally more successful at helping others”. He believes that humans are fundamentally self-interested.

Concluding Remarks

After reading through all these viewpoints, each and every writer has chosen to do/believe as they wish (via their life philosophy) with the knowledge given them thus far. I respect and commend them for having the courage to put it down on paper for history and the world to see. When thinking about them/it, I referenced myself back to Chapter 1—maps, myth’s, knowledge and life plans (simply put). I thought about Plato’s “Living with Shadows in a Cave” in regards to these authors and how they’ve taken their own myths based on their own beliefs, realities, impressions (subjective or not), etc., andchartered a course in life with their own map. Personally, I have yet to come across the smoking gun, viewpoint, or clear and convincing evidence that will make me change my life philosophy, just as they would likely not change theirs. As a matter of fact, reading this book has only further validated my feelings on my choice for my life’s direction. No one single opinion or evidence found outside the truth of the Bible has motivated me to revise my philosophy. Some say that is close minded, I say that it’s courageous given today’s culture and view of religion. I will admit I actually enjoy reading these opposing viewpoints because it reminds me of why I choose to believe what I do. However, I appreciate and respect all of their viewpoints and would never suppress others’ beliefs simply because I respect my own. So this brings me full circle to the beginning of this paper where I referenced the back of the book with “those who do not know their opponent’s arguments do not completely understand their own” and my own thought of “those who cannot show respect for their fellow man’s beliefs don’t respect their own”. It must be a choice. Everyone must define for themselves what their life philosophy is or isn’t going to be based on what they know. I hold my own personal life philosophy in such high regard that I cannot deny that right to anyone else. To do so means that I expect them to abandon their own conscience and would rightfully have to abandon mine.