WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?
Program 19
Meaninglessness of Life
by Ernest O'Neill

What is the meaning of life? Is there any meaning to it at all? What is the meaning of your life? Why are you here? Why am I here? Why are all we little human beings buzzing around here in these cities? Why do we appear here for 70 or 80 years and then suddenly disappear? What is the point of it all?

It just keeps going on and on. A.E. Housman put it this way:

"Yonder see the morning blink.
The sun is up and up must I
To wash and dress and eat and drink,
and look at things, and talk and think
and work and God knows why.

How often have I washed and dressed
and what's to show for all my pain?
Let me lie abed and rest.
Ten thousand times I've done my best,
and all's to do again."

I think a lot of us feel that way today. We wonder what's the point of it all. The place seems to be going to bits. It all seems to be fragmenting. The old values seem to have gone and the old principles seem to be forgotten. Anything that we knew about order, plan and respectability, and concern for each other seems to be going down the drain so fast we can't even remember it ever existed. There seems just no point in it. It seems like a tale told by an idiot.

That's, of course, what many of us are feeling these days, not least of all, little high school kids, even in America, where suicide among high school children is higher than at any other time in history. So, it seems as if those of us who are children and are able to see most simply life before us, seem most convinced that there is no point in it and no purpose in it.

The story is the same, whether it's in Hollywood or in the executive offices of London. People who are supposedly very sophisticated and very intellectual and have great families and great upbringing are all looking towards suicide as the only way out of a tale that is told by an idiot. Because that's what many people seem to think life is: it's a tale told by an idiot. There's no point in it. We just get up each day to try to get a good education, to get a good job, to get a good education, to have children so that they can get a good education, and get a good job, so that they can have children, ad absurdum, on and on, forever and ever. There seems so little meaning to it all.

Of course, that is intensified by the meaninglessness in our consequent behavior as human beings, because it does seem that we just mow each other down meaninglessly. The terrorism that is now dominating the international scene seems to be just an expression of our absolute indifference to human life and our feeling that the whole thing is getting beyond any kind of possible control at all. Many of us are wondering, "Is there any meaning to it?"

So what we have been saying over the past few weeks on this station at this time is there is great evidence of meaning in the original world as we know it. That is, when you look at a spring morning, you go out on a spring morning and you smell those daffodils, or you smell the tulips, or you smell the roses. You see how the bees are used in the whole world of plant life. You see how they flit, apparently carelessly, in an unplanned way, from

flower to flower. But you realize from reading your books what a vital job they are doing in the flowers.

You see how birds fly in apparent joyous delight and carefree pleasure. Then, you examine a bird under microscope, or you study birds, and you notice the order and design in their habits and their practices. Then you look at your own hand and see what an absolute miracle of construction it is, with all the tendons arranged so beautifully. If you just bend a finger and you begin to examine, with the help of a book like "Gray's Anatomy", you begin to examine the amazing number of muscles that are used just to bend your index finger. You study all the tendons that were used just to bring it into that shape. Then you begin to examine the messages that go from your brain to bring about that movement in your finger.

Then you examine the intricate system of blood circulation that enables life to continue in the finger while it bends. You realize that there is a great deal of meaning and purpose and direction in the world in which we live and in ourselves who are probably the most complex creatures in it. It isn't long before you realize there are two phenomena here in this world. There is great order and great design and great purpose evident in the structure of almost everything I can see with my eyes, and yet alongside that, there is the chaos and apparent meaninglessness of the bombings and the divorces and the arguments and the fighting and the strikes. We see that one sets the other off.

One contrasts with the other so that the order and design in the universe when we sit by a lake or a river fishing appears to us all the more beautiful and wonderful when it's set against the chaos of the industrial, social antagonism and disorder in which many of us live.

What, in fact, is the result is that most of us today would agree with each other, "Yes, you're right. There is amazing order and plan in our universe. You're right, there has to be some reason, or intellect that produced that order. You're right, evolution, or the survival of the fittest, or the law of gravity, or the Big Bang theory are only suggestions as to how that mind might have created that order. Those things themselves are only methods; they are not the originators of the order and design." It is true, if I have to use my mind to place beads in order on a string, then, whoever or whatever placed the elements in that intricate order that we find them in the periodic chart of the elements, that mind must be as orderly and as reasoning a mind as mine.

What, of course, strikes many of us today and what we, so often, bring up in our classes at school is, "Oh, but there's chaos, there's disorder. There's all kinds of disorder as well." But most of that is brought by us human beings. If you say, "Well, there is an odd collision among the planets, very odd, and it's remarkable because of its oddness, or its exception to the rule." Overall, we are surrounded by a very stable, reliable universe by which we set our clocks and by which we arrange our business appointments. One is driven to the conclusion by the way the order in our world contrasts with the disorder that we human beings have brought, one is driven to the thought that some power, some mind, some intellect, some reason must have originated it.

It is very important to keep things in perspective. It's vital that we do not allow ourselves to be driven off that important conclusion by the fact that there are exceptions to that and most of the exceptions are found in what we human beings have done to this world.

It is important, in other words, to retain your view of the wood and not to lose it because you are looking at the trees. In these

days, it's vital for us not to attribute to the Force, or Mind which originated the universe, the chaos and disorder that we human beings brought into it by the free exercise of our own wills.

So what is the meaning of the world? What is the meaning of life? Well, there seems to have been originally, in the intention of the mind of the reasoning power that produced the world, a great sense of meaning, a great sense of order and a great concept of purpose. What is the meaning of life? Let's talk a little more about it tomorrow.