WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?
Program 17
Order and Design - God's Existence
by Ernest O'Neill

What is the meaning of life? That's what we are talking about. Some of us have been saying that there must be meaning in life because there is so much meaning in the natural world itself. That is, there is so much order and so much evidence of purpose in it.

You see that in the birds flying south every winter. You can say, "Oh, it's just their instinct", but that begs the question, "Where did their instinct come from?" Indeed, where did they come from? If you say, "Oh, well, evolution, "big bang". Well, what made the "big bang"? What exploded? What evolved? What determined that evolution would be from simple to complex, or that the fittest would ever survive?

In other words, there is a lot of meaning in our world that you can only explain if you accept that there is a purpose and design. If there is purpose and design, there has to be a designer. There has to be some being, some force, some creature, some power that appreciates design or understands design, or has purpose in making the whole thing or in allowing it to come into existence.

What we have been sharing is that the greatest minds of our generation, especially the scientists whose whole discipline is based on the order and design of the universe, they know that fine well. The greatest of them, Albert Einstein, is in no doubt of it. He says, "My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds."

Men like Einstein or Darwin understand fine well that the order and design that their minds are able to perceive in the universe must come from somewhere, and must come from a mind at least as intelligent as theirs, and understanding the same things as theirs. In other words, they don't get into abstruse, really unrealistic, philosophical gestures that say, "The order that is in the universe is something we create with our minds." No, they know there is disorder they can compare against order and they know that their minds perceive order. It's not that their minds create order.

Now, the question we mentioned yesterday is this question: "Why, even though so many scientists, so many physicists, so many intellectuals in our era believe without any question that there is an intelligent mind of some kind behind the universe, why do some not believe that?" In other words, why are there some outstanding intellects that do not believe that there is a reasoning mind behind the universe, or there is an intellect behind the universe? How come so many so-called "educated" people, very sophisticated people in arts, and in science, writers, journalists, public figures, how come so many of them don't seem to believe that there is an intelligent mind or reason behind the universe?

There are all kinds of reasons for that. Some of them, like ourselves, apply our minds to our particular discipline, but don't apply them to the cosmic questions of life and death and what life is about. Some of us just don't do that. We may say, "Oh, now listen, if they have enough persistence and enough discipline and perseverance to achieve what they do in their field, surely they apply that same reasoning and that same intellect to their own lives." They don't. No. Many of us don't. Many great intellects do not apply the same reasoning, and the same common sense, and the same argumentative powers to the cosmic questions of life and death as they apply to their own particular, limited discipline in science or in the arts. That's just a fact. Many do not carry through their logic to their everyday life.

There is another reason. It's a reason expressed in a remarkably honest, open statement by Aldous Huxley, one of the famous Huxley family who for generations have been agnostics and, at times, atheists. Aldous Huxley makes this statement. He says, "I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning. Consequently, assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics. He is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do, or why his friends should not seize political power and govern in the way that they find most advantageous to themselves. For myself, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation -- sexual and political."

Now, we are set back when we hear one of the famous Huxley family making that statement, but that's what Aldous Huxley said in his book "End and Means." He said, "I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning. Consequently, assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption." That's a reason why many great intellects say that they do not believe there is an intellect or a reason, or a mind behind the universe. They don't want there to be one.

We all throw up our hands in horror and say, "No, no! Men like Huxley, scientists, people who are called to track down the truth, whatever it means, they would not take that kind of attitude." Yes, they would. The fact is, we are human beings. The fact is, even those of us who are most cerebral, those of us who are most intellectual, those of us who are most mental in our attitude to life, are also influenced by our emotions. And more than our emotions, are influenced by our own wills.

You remember it was Dostoyevsky who said, "The only reason a man will act against his own best advantage is to have his own way." The fact is, you cannot find a scientist who is absolutely objective. All scientists, even the most cold and rational, are finally the victims of their own presuppositions. Although their presuppositions are often the result of their education and background, but certainly they are often also the result of their own willful desires.

That's what Huxley says. He admits quite openly, in a remarkably straightforward and direct passage in his book, "Ends and Means", he says, "I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning." (I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning!) "Consequently, I assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption." Then he ends this particular paragraph by saying, "For myself, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation -- sexual and political."

In other words, those of us who tend to look at the great intellects of our generation and hope to poll them, and find that every one of them, without one exception, will believe that there is a mind and an intellect behind the universe because of the meaning in the universe, we are doomed to disappointment. You cannot determine truth by polling all the great intellects. You in fact yourself are responsible for thinking out what life is about, why you are here and what meaning, if any, there is in life.

You can't shrug it off, or slough it off, onto somebody else's shoulders. You have to bear that responsibility yourself, and you have to face the fact that many scientists, many great scholars, many public figures who don't believe there is a mind or an intelligent reason behind the universe take that view, because they don't want there to be such a mind or intellect.

Why? They would have to align themselves with it. Man often does not want to align himself with any other power or have to submit himself to any other will. So, the easiest way is to prove to himself that there is no such being in existence. Let's talk a little more about what you yourself think is the meaning of life

tomorrow.