

Atheism and the Meaning of Life

8 – 10 April, 2026
International Conference

at Aix-Marseille University, France



Call for Papers

As Hans Blumenberg has shown, a major characteristic of the Occidental thought tradition is the rootedness of its fundamental structures of meaningfulness in transcendence. Since the expansion of Christianity, this rootedness is guaranteed by a transcendent God. This radical dependence upon structures of transcendence as the ultimate resources of meaning becomes most eloquently obvious at the wake of Modernity when Christian faith is progressively fragilized, and the medieval ordo starts to erode. The erosion of this ordo-metaphysics gives way to a growing awareness of human autonomy, leading to the recognition of human agency. This shift carries significant consequences: Friedrich Nietzsche's famous aphorism declaring the death of God illustrates with great acuity the challenge linked to this revolution of paradigm: Following Jean-François Mattéi, Man is left in a "crise du sens", the French notion "sens" hinting at both meaningfulness and orientation. The entire metaphysical structure of the Platonic-Christian tradition crashes and (Western) Mankind is in an urgent need to find new resources for the generation of meaning. However, the repeated crises in the history of Modernity, and in particular the spread of nihilism in the late 19th century and the nihilistic ideologies of the 20th century, show insistently that it is far from obvious to take up this challenge. Whereas Nietzsche suggested that we become creators of new values, Søren Kierkegaard tried to handle the loss of metaphysical reassurance by claiming God as a subjective truth, and Martin Heidegger attempted to find the lost entirety of Dasein, and thus a genuine meaning in life, through a merely immanent conception of authentic possibilities emerging from the anticipation of one's own death. Yet, it is maybe – and paradoxically – in Albert Camus' Myth of Sisyphus that the indebtedness of Modernity to the metaphysical tradition becomes the most striking reminder of the devaluated resources of meaning: the revolt he presents as the attitude to adopt facing the absurd is understandable only against the backdrop of what has been lost,

culminating in the claim that life is lived all the better if it does not have meaning.

Unlike the continental tradition, analytical philosophy has long neglected questions about the meaning of life. This started to change at the turn of the millennium, and a new discourse has emerged, reexamining these "classic" philosophical questions in the context of a pluralistic and post-secular world. This conference seeks to explore responses to the challenges posed by the "post-metaphysical" context for the contemporary world and to engage with new perspectives on meaning. By explicitly addressing "atheism," we aim to sever the assumptions underlying the theistic framing of meaning: What is the meaning of meaning beyond theism? How can meaning be understood within a naturalistic worldview? Are classical theistic discourses on meaning influenced by cultural bias? Papers may address, among others, the following topics:

- ✓ The relation of meaning of life and atheism, naturalism, and/or secularism
- ✓ The meaning of life within philosophy of religion (especially non-theistic accounts)
- ✓ The meaning of meaning
- ✓ Atheism, Absurdity and Nihilism
- ✓ Atheism and Anti-natalism,
- ✓ Non-western theories on meaning(-lessness)
- ✓ Papers on the topicality of specific authors for dealing with the issue of meaning in late modernity (e.g. Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Camus, Sartre)

We invite you to submit a proposal:

<https://form.jotform.com/251553212647050>

**Decisions regarding the acceptance of proposals will be
communicated before January 6th**

About the Conference

The bilingual conference (English and French) approaches the question of atheism and the meaning of life as a multi-layered and complex issue. Accordingly, it seeks to bring together scholars from various disciplines such as social science, cultural studies, religious studies, philosophy, and theology in order to encourage an interdisciplinary exchange on the relationship between atheism and the meaning of life.



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Conference Fees: 80 €

The conference fees include coffee breaks and meals (dinner on April 8th and 9th, lunch on April 9th)

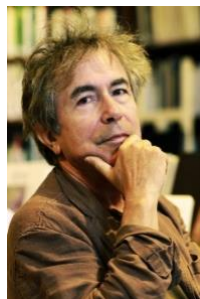
There is no funding for travel and accommodation
Participation is free for PhD students

Our Key Notes



Fiona Ellis

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François Jullien

Professeur émérite de
l'université Paris-Diderot et
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