



Against Nihilism: A Cross-Civilizational Argument for the Reality of Meaning, Value, and Human Purpose

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Abstract

This article argues the radical premise of total meaninglessness, demonstrating why comprehensive nihilism is philosophically wrong and logically unsound. Rather than operating as a single, uniform doctrine, nihilism is a collection of different denials rejecting human purpose, right and wrong, objective truth, and the reality of the world. Against these widespread negations, this paper builds a cross-civilizational argument to defend the reality of meaning, value, and purpose. Ultimately, it proves a completely meaningless view of the universe cannot stand up to serious, global philosophical scrutiny. The central thought is that strong nihilism collapses under its own conditions of assertion: it uses reason to deny reason, meaning to deny meaning, and evaluative seriousness to deny value. Through a qualitative comparative method, the article examines Western, Eastern, African, Indigenous, and Latin American philosophical traditions. Across these traditions, one finds not uniform agreement, but a deep convergence: human existence is interpreted through relation, practice, virtue, liberation, responsibility, harmony, transcendence, or consciousness. The article concludes that nihilism is not a final truth about reality but a pathological abstraction from broken relation, suffering, and civilizational disorientation.

Keywords: Nihilism, Meaning of Life, Moral Realism, Comparative Philosophy, Ubuntu, Buddhism, Confucianism, Aristotle, Kant, Liberation Philosophy

Introduction

The philosophy of Nihilism seems to be bold and resolute because it demands that it can face the universe without any illusion or self-deception, but, in the depth of this deep

demand, there lies self-contradiction, where it is said that nothing is meaningful, expressing the paradoxical sense of truth. When it is said that ‘truth is impossible’, to establish this matter, the help of the ultimate truth is taken. Again, when it is claimed that ‘all values are meaningless’, then the matter of truth is imposed on falseness, transparency on fraudulence and honesty on relief in one’s own mind. So, nihilism is not only a philosophy of pessimism but also a self-defeating thought of the human mind.

Nihilism is a view of several forms that include existential nihilism, moral nihilism, epistemological nihilism, and political nihilism. Existential nihilism is generally associated with the idea that life has no implied meaning. On the other hand, moral nihilism denies the absolute moral or ethical values. In fact, this article does not deny that sorrows, injustices, alienations, deaths, absurdities, or historical collapse can give birth to nihilistic mentalities; rather, its main philosophical view is that nihilism falsely creates a crisis of meaning for the nonexistence of meaning.

The scope of this article does not bear the totalitarian meaning, and no single article can cover the whole world’s philosophies. So, it just examines some selective and representative philosophical trends such as: Greek virtue ethics, Kantian moral rationalism, existentialism, Buddhist Madhyamaka, Hindu-Vedantic thought, Confucian and Daoist traditions, Islamic and Jewish ethical-theological traditions, African Ubuntu, Indigenous relational philosophy, and Latin American liberation philosophy.

Methodology: Qualitative Comparative Philosophical Analysis

This study uses a qualitative hermeneutic method. Its “data” are not numerical responses but philosophical arguments, civilizational traditions, ethical concepts, and metaphysical assumptions. The method involves four stages:

First, nihilism is analytically separated into existential, moral, epistemic, and metaphysical forms. Second, the coherence of the arguments within each doctrine is examined. Third, the major traditions or ideologies of the world are compared; the aim is to find out whether they support nihilism or, on the contrary, help to find a meaning in life. Fourth, all this information is put together to create a final philosophical argument.

This method is quite appropriate, because nihilism is not just a logical or rational issue; it is also a cultural, existential and moral crisis. Therefore, trying to refute it with logic alone will be too narrow or incomplete. Again, discussing history alone will be only descriptive, unable to reach any final solution. A qualitative comparative method allows the article to show both logical incoherence and cross-cultural insufficiency.

Scope of Research

This research has a specific boundary. It is basically a philosophical discussion. Here, the discussion is limited to the following topics:

Theoretical and Comparative Discussion: This research is based entirely on the concepts of philosophy. No scientific experiments, statistics, laboratory tests or human psychological data have been used here.

Specific Forms of Nihilism: Here, 4 main aspects of nihilism or meaninglessness have been discussed - the purposelessness of life (Existential), the lack of morality (Moral), the lack of existence of truth (Epistemic) and the lack of foundation of reality (Metaphysical).

Some Specific World Philosophies: Not all the philosophies of the world have been brought here. Only some major and influential philosophies have been chosen. For example—Greek philosophy, Kant’s ethics, Buddhist and Vedanta philosophy, Chinese Confucian and Taoism, Islamic and Jewish theology, African Ubuntu, indigenous thought, and Latin American Liberation Philosophy.

Not a historical account: This is not a history book that will present the history of all philosophical changes. Rather, only how the selected philosophies prove life meaningful, that is what is seen here.

The real purpose or main goal of this research is—to prove the claim of nihilism or meaninglessness wrong through logic and universal philosophy. Specifically, the focus is on these 3 topics:

Finding the error within nihilism: To examine how the claim of meaninglessness itself gets caught in the trap of its own logic (for example—whether the claim “something is not true” is itself a true claim).

Finding the Source of Meaning and Values: Showing how different cultures create meaning in life through human relationships, morality, and spirituality.

Finding Commonalities Across Cultures: There is a remarkable similarity between philosophies from different eras and countries—they all speak in favor of human responsibility, purpose, and meaning in life. Identifying those similarities.

So, Nihilism is not simply seen as a “feeling of sadness” in humans, but as a philosophical claim measured on the scales of reason.

Analytical Lens

This article uses 3 special lenses to examine nihilism and understand different philosophies:

Logical-Analytical Lens

Here, each claim of nihilism is examined as rigorously as logic. It is seen whether there is any self-contradiction hidden within these words.

Cultural and Interpretive Perspective (Hermeneutic-Civilizational Lens)

The philosophies of different countries have been seen as part of their own histories and cultures. How they have maintained responsibilities, values, and the purpose of life in relation to their society and era has been explained.

Comparative Philosophical Lens

The main structure or outline of all the selected philosophies has been compared side by side. The purpose is not to force all the philosophies into one thread, but to show how each philosophy, despite taking different paths, has finally reached the same final conclusion that “life is not meaningless.”

Final Summary

In simple words, this section tells us that this article or writing is not a matter of science; it is a purely philosophical battle. Where, using the weapons of reason and citing examples from the world’s best cultures, it has been proven that the claim of nihilism or meaninglessness cannot actually be sustained.

Conceptual Framework: What Strong Nihilism Claims

Strong nihilism can be summarized in four main propositions:

Existential nihilism: Life has no meaning.

Moral nihilism: Good and evil are human inventions that have no objective validity or basis.

Epistemic nihilism: Truth or knowledge cannot be reliably attained.

Metaphysical nihilism: Reality has no stable order, essence, or intelligibility.

Weak forms of these positions can be quite useful intellectually. For example—skepticism can purify people’s false certainties; tragic realism can correct immature or childish optimism; And anti-dogmatism can expose oppressive moral systems. But extreme nihilism goes much further: it denies the existence of meaning, values, truth, and order altogether.

The conceptual basis of this study is based on the proposition that nihilism is a philosophical denial or negation of meaning, values, truth, and purpose. On the other hand, the major philosophical traditions of human civilization have consistently affirmed the ontological and moral reality of these fundamental conditions of existence. This framework begins with the realization that nihilism is not a single concept, but rather a multidimensional philosophical position; it manifests itself in existential nihilism, moral nihilism, epistemological nihilism, and metaphysical nihilism. Although these forms differ in their emphases, they share a common negational framework, which is essentially directed towards the possibility of objective meaning and stable values.

The main conceptual assumption of this study is that there is an internal contradiction within extreme nihilism. By denying meaning, truth, rationality, or values, nihilism simultaneously relies on the very logical and evaluative frameworks that are necessary to make sense of such denials. This paradox establishes the first analytical dimension of this study, in which nihilism is examined as a self-defeating philosophical

position rather than a coherent metaphysical decision.

The second dimension of the framework places nihilism within a comparative philosophical perspective. The assumption of this study is that philosophical traditions that have developed independently in different civilizations provide important evidence about how human existence has been understood historically. Western philosophical traditions emphasize virtue, rationality, moral universality, and human purpose (telos); Eastern traditions emphasize consciousness, harmony, liberation, and interdependence; similarly, African, indigenous, and Latin American traditions base existence on interrelationships, communal principles, justice, responsibility, and collective development. Despite their diversity, these traditions reveal a significant philosophical convergence on questions of the reality of meaning and values.

Therefore, the conceptual logic of this study follows a relational framework, in which nihilistic negation is critically examined against the philosophical assumptions of different civilizations (meaning, moral order, and human purpose). This framework ultimately does not see nihilism as an ultimate truth of existence; rather, it identifies it as a psychological or pathological abstraction resulting from alienation, suffering, and the collapse of civilization. Through this comparative review, the study claims that this persistent recognition of meaning across different philosophical traditions provides a strong basis for rejecting or negating nihilism historically and philosophically. This extreme or ultra-strict claim of nihilism is the main topic of this article.

Theoretical Framework

The basic premise of this research is that human life is not meaningless. Analyzing the philosophies of various civilizations around the world, it can be seen that the meaning, values, and truth of life are not just imaginary concepts in the human mind; rather, they are naturally created through human relationships, morality, and reason. This theoretical framework is basically created by combining four major philosophical schools of thought in the world:

Western Philosophy: According to philosophers like Aristotle and Kant, human life has a specific goal and moral responsibility. According to Aristotle, human life is about progress, and according to Kant, our reason compels us to follow the right moral rules.

Eastern Philosophy: Creation is seen as an integral part of Buddhist and Vedanta philosophies. For example, the ‘emptiness’ of Buddhism does not mean that everything is meaningless; Rather, it means that every element in the world is dependent on each other.

Chinese Philosophy: The essence of Confucianism and Taoism is the harmony or order of life. It is possible to find the true meaning of life only by living in harmony with the laws of society and nature.

African & Indigenous Philosophy: The essence of Africa’s famous ‘Ubuntu’ philosophy is— “A man becomes a real man in the company of other people.” That is, a

man cannot live alone, his existence is revealed through relationships with everyone in society.

The essence: According to this framework, the meaning of life is created through social and moral relationships. Therefore, 'nihilism' or the idea of everything being meaningless is not an eternal truth. Rather, when a person is isolated from society, becomes lonely or suffers a major psychological trauma, this kind of meaninglessness is born in his mind.

Analytical Framework

This section discusses how the above theoretical concepts will be tested through a specific method or rule. Five steps are used to test nihilism (claims of meaninglessness):

Dimensional Decomposition: Rather than judging nihilism in a blanket manner, it is divided into four parts—existential, moral, epistemic, and metaphysical.

Internal Coherence Testing: Each claim is logically tested to see if it creates any errors or contradictions within itself. For example, if someone says "nothing is true," then this claim itself is revealed as a true claim, which actually goes against what he says.

Comparative Civilizational Analysis: The fundamental foundations of different cultures (such as responsibility, harmony, and society) are compared. The aim is to show that different cultures simultaneously prove that life is meaningful.

Relational Synthesis: The results of comparative examinations of logic and culture are combined to show that the meaning of life lies in the human ability to survive and think.

Diagnostic Interpretation: Nihilism is seen not just as a general doctrine but as a social and psychological 'symptom' or problem. It is mainly caused by human loneliness, cultural isolation and historical trauma.

However, this model evaluates nihilism in two ways: 1) whether it can be sustained by logic, and 2) whether major world philosophies support it. The final results of the research show that nihilism cannot be sustained by logic and has been rejected by the world's major philosophical schools of thought or doctrines.

Results and Discussion The Self-Refutation of Nihilism

It seems that the first argument against nihilism is absolutely logical. Any universal negation cannot remain standing; rather, a firm basement of thought must be needed. If any nihilist says that there is no truth, then that logic may not be true itself. The ambition remaining illusionless also becomes useless. His thought cannot lead his own thought meaningfully. For this reason, nihilism is an absurd philosophy because it destroys its own soil on which it cuts its own foundation.

A nihilist may answer it like: "I am not making a truth claim; I am merely

expressing a feeling,” but at that time, nihilism does not remain as a doctrine; it becomes a temperament of mind. Psychologically, it may be true knowledge. Despair may express frustrations but cannot flare the structure of the whole universe.

A nihilist may also say- meaning is unreal, and truth is only made by humans- but it does not prove that meaning is unreal. Language is created by humans, yet it is real. Law is also created by humans, yet active. Music is created by man, yet conveys the deep meaning of life. Marriage, scholarship, consolations, mourning, good justice, commitment, and memory are created in the story, but they are not false.

This notion - that only the non-human, eternal and cosmic meanings are the real meaning - is a wrong idea. This idea has not been proved well yet; it is a kind of undefended metaphysical prejudice.

Nihilism stays stable up to that time only when the definition of truth is questioned seriously, which is impossible in real life. The weakness of nihilism, therefore, is that it mistakes the absence of absolute or ultimate certainty for the absence of all meaning, value, and truth. Even when nihilism seeks to avoid any direct contradiction or contradiction by presenting itself as a descriptive attitude rather than a moral doctrine, it still fails to explain why suffering, injustice, responsibility, love, hope, moral obligation, and human dignity remain such crucial features of human life (Liggins, 2008).

Western Philosophy: From Virtue to Rational Moral Law

Moral Excellence, although the history of Western philosophy has seen repeated nihilistic crises, its major moral traditions have always rejected this nihilism. According to Aristotle’s thought of prosperity and virtues, the meaning of human life lies in ‘Eudaimonia’, which can be simply called ‘prosperity of life’ or ‘absolute happiness’. In addition, he placed special emphasis on ‘Arete’ or ‘character excellence’. The main foundation of Aristotle’s ethics is: What does it really mean for a person to ‘live well’? In seeking the answer to this question, he spoke about those qualities that are essential for a meaningful life. This life-oriented thought directly refutes Existential Nihilism. The meaning of life is not hidden in some cosmic passive approval; rather, it is possible to find true meaning only through the practice of the best activity or ‘Excellent Activity’ according to one’s own capabilities. Human life is not aimless. The true meaning and joy of life can be found only by developing the latent potential and qualities within oneself.

Aristotle believed that the ultimate goal or highest good of life is ‘Eudaimonia’, which is commonly referred to as happiness or well-being. According to him, true happiness is not achieved by passively enjoying life, but by actively living a life of moral excellence; as he noted: “Now happiness (eudaimonia) more than anything else seems unconditionally complete, since we always choose it, and also choose it because of itself, never because of something else” (Aristotle, 2009, p. 10). The basic meaning of this is that happiness is the ultimate goal of life, which is desirable to us not as a means to some other

end, but as an end in itself.

Aristotle also believed that being virtuous meant acting in accordance with character traits or 'areté' (excellence). He wrote: "The good for man is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue (aretê)" (Aristotle, 2009, p. 5). This makes it clear that true human happiness does not lie in passively waiting for the pleasures of life to come, but in honest and noble actions. Whereas existential nihilism claims that human life has no meaning or purpose, Aristotle argues that true meaning can only be found through active action and a moral life.

Finally, Aristotle explains that happiness is the ultimate goal of human life and is self-sufficient in itself. He says, "So then Happiness is manifestly something final and self-sufficient, being the end of all that we do" (Aristotle, 2009, p. 17). The implication is that true happiness does not depend on anything external to us, but is achieved through living a good life and doing good deeds.

Thus, Aristotle's philosophy directly rejects existential nihilism and claims that the intrinsic meaning of life is revealed through the active practice of moral virtues and the achievement of 'eudaimonia' or overall well-being. Whereas nihilism sees life as meaningless, Aristotle argues that true meaning is created through the pursuit of good deeds and human excellence; in essence, we can only find true purpose and happiness in life when we live up to our latent potential, which proves that a nihilistic or purposeless view of life is completely irrational.

Kant rejected nihilism in a different way; he based morality on rational duties. According to him, the demands of morality are rational and are expressed through the Categorical Imperative meaning that immorality is actually a violation of a rational law. While one may disagree with Kant's philosophy, his argument exposes a major weakness of moral nihilism: moral judgment is not simply an emotional choice, but is concerned with reason, consistency, universality, and respect for the individual. He wrote, "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant, 1785); this is his most famous expression of the Categorical Imperative, which proves that moral obligations do not come from personal feelings, but from reason and universality. Kant further explained that we should always consider humanity in ourselves or in others as an end, never as a mere means; that is, he based morality on reason and dignity rather than on mere emotion (Kant, 1785). Furthermore, he expressed the idea that the moral law is an objective reality within us—not a whim or emotional thing, by saying, "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe... the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me" (Kant, 1788). According to Kant, immorality occurs when one violates these logical rules. He asserted that, "Duty is the necessity of an action from respect for the law" (Kant, 1785), which again makes it clear that moral evaluation requires consistency, universality and respect for others, not just individual passions or preferences.

Kant rejected nihilism by basing morality on rational duty, which asserts that moral values are not simply personal preferences or feelings. He argued that moral action is based on certain universal principles that apply equally to all people. Immanuel Kant further emphasized that morality comes from respect for rational laws, not from emotion, and according to him, duty is the necessity to act in accordance with these laws (Kant, 1785). By claiming that moral laws exist within us, Kant showed that moral judgment is fundamentally rooted in reason, which proves nihilism (which denies universal moral truth) to be irrational. For Kant, moral values are objective and rational, not arbitrary or personal. Modern moral realism also directly refutes nihilism, because according to this doctrine, there are some specific moral truths or facts about whether an action is right or wrong, good or bad. If at least some moral propositions are proven to be true, such as “torturing the innocent for pleasure is wrong”, then strong moral nihilism is proven to be baseless and false. Essentially, moral materialism believes that morality is not just a personal view, but is based on some inalienable truth in the real world that is beyond our emotions or desires. On the other hand, existentialist philosophy complicates the matter a bit, but they do not support nihilism; Rather, Camus, Nietzsche, Sartre, and other philosophers directly addressed the futility of life, the sense of alienation, and the end of inherited metaphysical beliefs. However, it is not correct to see these works as evidence that ‘nothing has any value’; rather, it shows that traditional or inherited meanings can break down, forcing people to take responsibility for creating their own meaning in life. That is, the collapse of a false or artificial meaning does not mean that ‘meaning’ itself ceases to exist.

Albert Camus believed that the futility of our search for meaning in the face of the eternal silence of an indifferent world does not lead us to nihilism or the idea that ‘nothing has any value’; rather, this conflict forces us to create meaning for our own lives. According to Camus, when life fails to provide any predetermined meaning, that failure opens the door to a supreme freedom for man—where a man creates the meaning of his own existence through rebellion. He said: “The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world” (Camus, 1942). Despite the various struggles of life, Camus argued that we can choose to live meaningfully and noted in his famous work: “One must imagine Sisyphus happy” (Camus, 1942); indicating that we can find happiness even in seemingly purposeless tasks. Camus very clearly rejected nihilism, saying: “A nihilist is not one who believes in nothing, but one who does not believe in what exists” (Camus, 1951); that is, rejecting the old meaning does not mean abandoning the concept of meaning altogether.

Similarly, in existentialist philosophy, figures like Nietzsche did not declare life meaningless even when faced with the decline or decline of traditional and inherited beliefs. Nietzsche famously stated: “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. Yet his shadow still looms” (*The Gay Science*); through which he indicated the end of traditional metaphysical certainty. However, this does not give rise to nihilism, but rather

calls on people to take responsibility for creating their own meaning; as he later said: “Without music, life would be a mistake” (*The Gay Science*), which highlights the importance of creating one’s own values and meaning in life. Nietzsche also argues that, “The meaning and morality of one’s life come from within oneself” and insists, “There are no facts, only interpretations” (*The Will to Power*); which shows that truth is shaped by our own perspective. Finally, Nietzsche’s metaphor: “One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), proves that new creative possibilities can arise from the breakdown of old beliefs.

Thus, when analyzed in the light of Nietzsche’s philosophy, the claim of nihilists that life is meaningless is highly absurd. Nietzsche argues that the decline of conventional or traditional values does not plunge people into an abyss of despair; rather, it presents each individual with a unique opportunity and responsibility to create meaning for their own lives. He emphasizes that meaning is not an external, unchanging truth, but rather is constructed by human interpretation and perspective. By denying the meaning of life, nihilism essentially ignores the human capacity to create purpose, which makes this doctrine a self-contradictory or self-defeating position. Instead, Nietzsche suggests that individuals can create their own meaning out of the chaos of existence; demonstrating that the absence of inherited meaning does not mean that there is no meaning at all. As a result, nihilism becomes an irrational position; because it fails to recognize human agency or the human capacity to construct a meaningful life.

Eastern Philosophy: Emptiness is Not Nothingness

Eastern traditions are often misinterpreted as nihilistic, especially Buddhism and certain branches of Advaita thought; which is a serious mistake. Madhyamaka Buddhism, pioneered by Nāgārjuna, teaches us about ‘emptiness’ (*śūnyatā*). But this emptiness does not mean that nothing exists or has no importance. This ‘middle way’ of Madhyamaka philosophy rejects both eternalism and nihilism. Its theory of emptiness is fundamentally linked to dependent origination: that is, that objects do not have an independent or self-contained essence of their own, but rather arise through interrelations and causal relationships. Historically, this tradition has been fully embraced by the ossification of nihilism and has always been extremely cautious to avoid this notion.

Historically, this tradition has been aware of the charge of emptiness and has been very careful to avoid it. Madhyamaka Buddhism, as developed by Nāgārjuna, essentially teaches the concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), but this does not mean that nothing exists or has no value. Nāgārjuna explained that “the Middle Way is the absence of ‘arising’ and ‘not arising’... it is not existent, nor nonexistent, nor both, nor neither” (Nāgārjuna, 1995). This shows that his philosophy avoids both the extremes of eternalism and nihilism. Nāgārjuna further emphasizes that “for whomever emptiness is a view, that one has achieved nothing” (Nāgārjuna, 1995), indicating that emptiness should not be made into a

fixed or rigid belief. Furthermore, he states that “it is dependent origination that we call emptiness” (Nāgārjuna, 1995), through which he links the concept of emptiness to the theory of dependent origination, or the theory that things do not arise from any permanent self-existent entity, but rather from various causes and conditions. Finally, Nāgārjuna cites his *Kātyāyanagotrāsūtra* to explain the Middle Way: “Generally, this world relies on a duality of existence and non-existence... this arising is disappointment arising; ceasing is disappointment ceasing...” (Nāgārjuna, 1995); which proves that the Middle Way actually seeks to transcend these two extremes of existence and non-existence and find a unique reality.

This is a powerful refutation of nihilism. Something does not become meaningless simply because it has lost its singular or isolated existence; rather, its meaning is relational. A person, an action, a word, or a life, all these things become intelligible through interdependence, context, causality, empathy, and suffering. Buddhism never says that “nothing matters.” Rather, it says that attachment to the false permanence of something is the cause of all human suffering, and that liberation from this suffering requires wisdom and compassion.

Similarly, the *Bhagavad Gītā* rejects nihilism by presenting life as a field of moral action, especially in moments of extreme crisis. In contrast to Arjuna’s intense moral dilemma and mental conflict on the battlefield, Krishna’s teaching does not advocate passive surrender; rather, it emphasizes disciplined action, right duty, and spiritual insight. This proves that the meaning of human life is not emptiness or lamentation, but the fulfillment of one’s moral duty. Krishna emphasizes this point: “You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions... nor be attached to inaction” (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 2.47).

The *Gītā* essentially encourages the performance of duties without attachment to the results; even in moments of intense moral anguish, the solution is not emptiness or detachment, but engagement in purposeful action. Krishna further clarifies this point: “Perform your duty efficiently and without attachment to the results, for by working without attachment one attains the Supreme” (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 3.8). The gist of his teaching is crystal clear: true spiritual insight lies primarily in action, not in escaping from the world; and liberation comes through the discipline and wisdom of duty, not through the hand of emptiness. The *Bhagavad Gītā* teaches us that spirituality does not mean turning away from the world, but rather performing one’s duty without attachment in the harsh reality of the world. This philosophy directly rejects the concept of emptiness—which sees life as aimless—and establishes life as part of a higher moral and spiritual order.

On the other hand, *Advaita Vedānta* rejects emptiness by following a different metaphorical or philosophical path. It identifies the ultimate reality as Brahman and associates moksha or liberation with the knowledge of the relationship between Atman and Brahman. While the visible or mundane world is not considered to be the ultimate reality

in the absolute sense, this does not amount to nihilism or nothingness; it is essentially a hierarchy of reality, where the ultimate consciousness or existence is the fundamental basis of everything. That is, to call this world or universe ‘māyā’ or maya is not to declare it meaningless, but to point towards a higher and eternal truth.

Advaita Vedānta asserts that ultimate reality is Brahman, the unchanging, absolute consciousness, while the phenomenal world is considered mithyā (not absolutely real but dependent on Brahman) (Sadhana-Sansar, n.d.). The key *mahāvākyas* (great sayings) such as “Tat Tvam Asi” “That Thou Art” from the Chandogya Upanishad and “Aham Brahmasmi” “I Am Brahman” from the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad affirm the identity of the individual self (Atman) with Brahman (Britannica, n.d.). Furthermore, the great verse “Prajñānam Brahma” “Wisdom or Consciousness is Brahman” from the Aitareya Upanishad emphasizes that consciousness is the foundational reality of the world. These statements clarify the view of Advaita philosophy that while the world is not considered to be the ultimate reality in the highest sense, it is not meaningless. Rather, it is situated within a hierarchy of reality, where Brahman is the basis of all existence; which provides a completely non-nihilistic explanation of life. According to this interpretation of Advaita Vedanta, where nihilism finds no basis for existence, this philosophy claims that there is an absolute and indestructible truth deep within our visible world, which is the true identity of every being. Thus, the major traditions or philosophies of India do not support nihilism at all. They strongly criticize ego, delusion, attachment, and the false permanence of anything, but they never conclude that life is worthless or meaningless. (Prasoon n.d.).

Chinese Philosophy: Harmony, Way, and Relational Order

Confucianism rejects nihilism by emphasizing the development of moral character, moral responsibility, and social roles. In this view, meaning in life does not come through individual self-expression, but rather through interpersonal relationships and moral practice. One of Confucius’ most important works, *The Analects*, teaches us that “The superior person devotes himself to the root. When the root is established, the Way will grow” (Analects 1:2); meaning that moral conduct is the foundation of a meaningful life. Confucius further emphasizes that “The humane person loves others” (Analects 12:22), which highlights the importance of caring for others in finding purpose in life. Here, learning and continuous self-improvement are seen as a source of pleasure, as expressed in the statement: “To learn and at due times to practice what one has learned — is this not a pleasure?” (Analects 1:1). Furthermore, he emphasized the role of ritual and social responsibility in moral development, stating, “To subdue oneself and return to ritual propriety — this is humaneness” (Analects 12:1). That the purpose of life lies in fulfilling one’s duty is clear in his statement: “Do not worry about having no position; worry about how to stand firm” (Analects 14:7). This idea of continuous self-transformation is central to Confucianism, as expressed in: “What Heaven has conferred is called [one’s] nature;

following [one's] nature is called the Way; cultivating the Way is called instruction" (Doctrine of the Mean, 1); which proves that the meaning of life is found in personal development and moral education, not in nihilism. Moreover, Confucius teaches us that, "Things have roots and branches; affairs have beginnings and endings. To know what comes first and what comes last is near to the Way" (Doctrine of the Mean, 4); that is, human life follows a certain moral order and is by no means empty or purposeless. All these teachings confirm that Confucianism provides an excellent path or framework for finding the true meaning of life through moral action, social responsibility, and self-improvement.

Daoism rejects nihilism by presenting the Tao as the governing and supreme principle of all existence. Laozi states in one of his sayings, "The Dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao" (Tao Te Ching, Ch. 1); thereby emphasizing the ineffable nature of the Dao, which is the source of all existence, not a void. Taoism also advocates a natural flow and simplicity of life, as expressed in Laozi's saying: "To know that you do not know is the best" (Tao Te Ching, Ch. 71); that is, true knowledge comes through humility and not through unnecessary competition or eager effort. Taoism also encourages a balanced approach to life, as stated: "If you want to become full, let yourself be empty" (Tao Te Ching, Ch. 22); meaning that in Taoism, 'emptiness' refers primarily to a kind of openness or receptivity, not to a sense of meaninglessness. Here wu wei or the practice of spontaneous and effortless action is a key concept, which is expressed as: "Practice non-action (wu wei), and everything will fall into place" (Tao Te Ching, Ch. 37), which makes it clear that joining the Tao requires natural spontaneity, not rigid morality or artificial ambition. Thus, Daoism emphasizes a natural and genuine connection with the deeper stream of reality, which completely rejects nihilism and the meaningless emptiness of existence (Laozi, 2009).

Therefore, Daoism rejects artificial dominance and impatient or anxious striving, but it does not reject values. Meaning is not created through rigid control or doctrine, but rather through balance, responsiveness, humility, and harmony and harmony with the Dao (Wong, 2012).

Abrahamic and Islamic Philosophical Traditions: Meaning Through Creation, Law, and Accountability

Jewish, Christian, and Islamic philosophical traditions reject nihilism through creationism, divine wisdom, moral law, covenant, accountability, and teleology. Islamic ethics, in particular, has developed largely through philosophical and theological discussions on obligation, justice, predestination, moral conduct, and good character. In a broader sense, this philosophy of religion does not simply transform religion into an irrational belief, but rather examines religious meaning, concepts, practices and arguments in detail. In these traditions, humans are not seen as accidental absurdities, but as morally

responsible beings. Here the meaning of life is not created from nothing; Rather, it is acquired, interpreted and implemented through obedience, wisdom, love, justice, worship and sociability. One may disagree philosophically with theism, but these traditions can never honestly be claimed as nihilistic; Because their metaphysical structure (metaphysical structure) is basically built on a spirit of anti-nihilism.

As stated in historical religious texts: “I have set before you life and death ... therefore choose life” (Chabad-Lubavitch, n.d.); St. Augustine affirmed that man’s ultimate meaning and purpose lies in divine power, not in vanity - as expressed by his saying -” He who has God has everything; he who has everything but God has nothing.” Similarly, the Holy Qur’an states, “And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement, and indeed the home of the Hereafter is best for those who fear Allah” (Qur’an 6:32), which portrays life as a purposeful and accountable to Allah instead of seeing it as worthless (Quranica, n.d.); And it also says, “Indeed, Allah commands you to uphold justice and do good” (Qur’an 16:90), which affirms moral rules and obligations as divine wisdom and guidance. This combined voice of Jewish scripture and tradition, Christian philosophical theology, and the Quranic moral worldview strongly reject the idea of meaninglessness in any form. Instead, these traditions firmly declare that existence is essentially created by an absolute God, ordered by moral law, and purposeful through divine accountability. The fundamental premise of these Abrahamic religious traditions is that life is not a random or haphazard event, but part of a specific plan; where creation, moral law, and accountability to God are inextricably linked, forming a powerful bulwark against nihilism.

While one may disagree with theism in philosophy, these traditions can never honestly be described as nihilistic. Their metaphysical framework is fundamentally anti-nihilistic. They argue that existence is fundamentally created by God and is ordered and accountable by moral rules. Here, meaning is not invented or created from scratch; rather, it is discovered, accepted, interpreted, and lived through divine order, moral responsibility, and spiritual purpose (Vacek, 1996).

Southern Philosophies: Ubuntu and Liberation Against Nothingness

The Ubuntu philosophy of African philosophy is one of the most powerful refutations of nihilism in the world. This traditional South African philosophical system is essentially a wonderful combination of metaphysics, ethics and epistemology. The basic premise of Ubuntu is that individuals are always bound by relationships; it is through the proximity and companionship of other people that a person becomes a complete person. In contemporary terms, this is called, “I am, because we are”. However, its deeper philosophical significance is that the fullness of humanity comes only through social responsibility, communal harmony and mutual recognition.

This idea directly rejects the familiar form of nihilism, where an isolated or solitary

being stands before an empty universe. In the view of Ubuntu, the 'I' (I) is not an isolated atom or a single entity, but rather it is a unique achievement of interconnectedness. The meaning of life is not hidden in some mysterious supernatural world; rather, it is realized through service, recognition, justice, and living together. This is a final rebuttal to nihilism, because things like 'exploitation' or 'oppression' only make sense when 'justice' has a specific meaning.

This is a final rebuttal to nihilism, because things like 'exploitation' or 'oppression' only make sense when 'justice' has a specific meaning. To acknowledge the necessity of liberation is to deny moral emptiness. The cries of the exploited are not mere mechanical noises made in an indifferent void; This is a strong moral claim. Nihilism can never properly explain why exploitation or exploitative systems are wrong, why liberation is inevitable, or why the preservation of human dignity is so important.

This is a final rebuttal against nihilism, because the issue of 'exploitation' or 'oppression' only makes sense when 'justice' has a specific meaning. To acknowledge the necessity of liberation is to deny moral emptiness. The cries of the exploited are not mere mechanical noises made in an indifferent void; This is a strong moral claim. Nihilism can never properly explain why exploitation or exploitative systems are wrong, why liberation is inevitable, or why the preservation of human dignity is so important.

The African philosophy of Ubuntu is one of the most powerful refutations of nihilism in the world. This traditional South African philosophical system is essentially an excellent combination of metaphysics, ethics and epistemology. The basic premise of Ubuntu is that individuals are always interconnected; A person becomes a complete person only through the closeness and companionship of other people. In contemporary parlance this is called, "I am, because we are." But its deeper philosophical significance is that the fulfillment of humanity comes only through social responsibility, communal harmony and mutual recognition. On the other hand, in the philosophy of Latin American liberation, Paulo Freire emphasized the moral importance of the active role of the oppressed: "The oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors" unless they engage critically or consciously to liberate themselves (Freire, 1970). Freire also claims that, "Education either functions as an instrument...or it becomes the practice of freedom," which means that freedom is an active resistance against inhumane systems and a sincere commitment to the moral demands of justice (Freire, 1970). All in all, this combined voice of Ubuntu and emancipatory philosophies affirms that—human dignity and justice are realized primarily through collective recognition, care, and transformative action, as opposed to nihilism that claims life is meaningless.

Indigenous and Northern Relational Philosophies

Indigenous philosophies also challenge nihilism through a kind of relational ontology. This indigenous philosophy primarily discusses the nature of the world, human

existence, morality, social order, and political life. Recent studies on indigenous relationalism have focused on kinship, responsibility, land, country, ecology, and interdependence. This is important because nihilism typically assumes that a detached observer is looking out into a meaningless universe from a ‘void’ or ‘space’. Indigenous relational philosophies directly reject this false view. Humans never exist in a ‘void’; they are born into a dependence on land, ancestors, language, body, kinship, memory, responsibility, and ecological balance. Meaning in life is not something that is forced upon a dead or inanimate world; Rather, it is discovered and studied within a living web of relationships in life.

Modern philosophy in the Northern Hemisphere, particularly European existentialism, often begins with a sense of isolation or loneliness. In contrast, indigenous northern and polar perspectives begin with a close relationship with the land, the seasons, survival, community, and nonhuman or other living things. Taken together, these show that nihilism is not a universal human decision or outcome; rather, it is the result of a specific disconnection between oneself and the world and values. Challenging the idea of a separate and meaningless world, indigenous relational thinkers remind us that “relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality” (Wilson, 2008, cited in *Research Is Ceremony*). This is in stark contrast to European existentialism; where Jean-Paul Sartre famously stated that “existence precedes essence,” meaning that people must define themselves through their own actions and choices rather than seeking a predetermined meaning (Sartre, 1946/2007, cited in *Existentialism precedes essence*). For existentialists, this freedom can sometimes feel like they are “condemned to be free” - a phrase that refers to the enormous and heavy mental burden of creating one’s own values (Sartre, 1946/2007, cited in *Existentialism Is a Humanism*). Collectively, these lines of thought show how Indigenous philosophy finds meaning in life in relationships with the land and others, whereas existentialism finds meaning in personal freedom and choice - both of which strongly resist the idea of a meaningless universe.

However, Indigenous philosophy offers a different answer: meaning is not created by isolated freedom, but rather is found in inclusion, reciprocity, land, memory, and responsibility. Inuit and other indigenous knowledge systems often see land and life as active participants in moral and social existence, not as meaningless objects. This relational worldview suggests that nihilism is essentially the result of a kind of alienation, which refers to a disconnection from land, society, ancestors, ecology, and a sense of responsibility. Indigenous philosophies counter nihilism by reviving this belonging as the basis of meaning (Paul et al., 2021).

The Core Argument: Why Nihilism is False

Any idea that claims that there is no truth, no meaning, no value—all these things are needed to express that claim. Even the sentence “there is no truth” itself uses the

concept of 'truth'. To explain this, we need a language that has a specific meaning. So extreme nihilism ultimately creates a kind of self-contradiction or contradiction within itself. It essentially tries to deny something on which it itself is completely dependent. Extreme nihilism ultimately becomes self-defeating; because if nothing matters, then the claim "nothing matters" can no longer be considered important. Therefore, nihilism essentially depends on the very linguistic structure of values and importance that it itself is trying to deny (Kahane, 2017). Different philosophical traditions understand the meaning of life in different ways. Some associate it with virtue, reason, freedom, interdependence, harmony, God, consciousness, compassion, or communal living. These traditions may not agree on everything; however, they generally do not accept the idea that life is completely meaningless or empty. As a result, nihilism is not seen as the ultimate answer to human life, but rather as a temporary human response to intense pain, grief, or deep despair. Human life itself proves that nihilism is difficult to accept easily; for we constantly make promises to people, mourn the dead, teach others, help the poor, love, forgive, create art, and seek truth. All of these activities become meaningful only when we believe that something actually has value or importance, which is not a rare occurrence but an integral part of ordinary human life.

Liggins (2008) is a useful source for discussing the logical problems of nihilism. His research examines whether nihilism can avoid any self-contradiction or internal conflict at all. This is directly related to the idea that a nihilist's claim - such as "there is no truth" or "nothing has any meaning"—ultimately relies on truth, meaning, and logical language to express itself. Therefore, this source could support the argument that extreme nihilism is ultimately unstable; it seeks to deny the very concepts that are necessary to make its case (p. 1).

Human life also proves that nihilism is difficult to accept easily; Because we are constantly making promises to people, mourning the dead, teaching others, helping the poor, loving, forgiving, creating art, and searching for truth - every action of which becomes meaningful only when we believe that something actually has value or importance, and these things are not rare occurrences but an integral part of ordinary human life. The work of Liggins (2008) is useful in discussing the logical problems of nihilism, whose research mainly examines whether nihilism can avoid self-contradiction at all; Because a nihilist's claim - such as "there is no truth" or "nothing has meaning" - relies ultimately on truth, meaning, and logical language to express itself, this source supports the argument that extreme nihilism is ultimately destabilized, since it attempts to deny the very concepts that must be used to make its own claim (p.1). On the other hand, Wolf (2016) is a useful work for discussing why human life cannot be easily reduced to meaninglessness. He argues that meaningfulness is a real dimension of a good life that is distinct from happiness and morality; and that this is supported by the fact that human everyday practices - such as loving, caring, creating, helping, making promises, and

seeking truth - are not empty or meaningless acts, but rather demonstrate that humans have values, responsibilities, and altruism. Life is understood through engagement. Therefore, Wolf's argument can be used to show that nihilism is essentially weak because it completely ignores this meaningful structure of ordinary human life; Thus, nihilism ultimately proves weak because it uses a kind of meaningful language to deny meaning, and that truth, meaning, and value are not an afterthought added to life, but are essential from the beginning to make human life fully intelligible and meaningful (Wolf, 2016).

Discussion: Why Nihilism Still Feels Persuasive

The first reason why nihilism, even when it is untrue, seems appealing to people is the sudden collapse of inherited beliefs. When an established religious, cultural, political, or moral system collapses, people often conclude that all meaning in the universe must be false. But this is an overgeneralization, because the failure of a particular system of meaning never proves that life as a whole is impossible to have meaning. Second, nihilism confuses real human suffering with the real meaninglessness of life. It is true that intense suffering can make life seem temporarily aimless, but the world's major traditions consider this moment of suffering to be an area where the search for life's meaning becomes most urgent. For example, Buddhism through freedom from suffering, Christianity through redemption, Islam through patience and accountability, Ubuntu through social care, and liberation philosophy through resistance against exploitation create new meaning in this suffering. Another major reason for this is that nihilism misinterprets the smallness of man in comparison to the vastness of the universe as the worthlessness of his existence. Man may be as small as a speck of dust on an astronomical scale, but geographical size or volume can never be the measure of moral values. A small child, a poem, a secret promise or a little hand of kindness - however small in size can be of infinite and immense moral and human importance. Finally, nihilism often rests on a very narrow and weak theory of the meaning of life. It wrongly assumes that the meaning of life must be eternal, external, universal, and guaranteed in advance. But comparative philosophy shows us that there are many more excellent models of the meaning of life; Where meaning lies in human spiritual flourishing, duty, compassion, awakening, harmony, liberation, reciprocity or active and beautiful participation in reality.

Nihilism often seems appealing when inherited belief systems suddenly collapse. When religious, cultural, political or moral structures lose their acceptance, people may assume that all meaning has been lost. However, this is an overgeneralization. Just as the collapse of a particular monetary system does not prove that the existence of money or currency is impossible, Friedrich Nietzsche's discussion of the "death of God" is relevant here; Because he shows that the collapse of traditional certainties creates a crisis of values, so it also opens up the possibility of revaluation and the creation of new forms of meaning (Nietzsche, 1882/1974; Leiter, 2024). Thus, nihilism should not be considered the ultimate

truth of existence; Rather, it is often just a temporary reaction of people to the collapse of old monetary systems or values.

Another reason why nihilism seems acceptable is that suffering can make life empty or meaningless. Pain, loss, injustice, loneliness and despair can temporarily make human existence seem meaningless. However, the presence of suffering does not prove that life has no meaning. Psychological research on meaning-making shows that not only do stressful or critical events challenge people's universal beliefs, but they also motivate people to find new meaning and restore harmony and balance in their lives (Park, 2010). This fact supports the idea that suffering does not mean that life is meaningless; Rather, it can create a situation where the urge to find meaning in life becomes more urgent.

An alternative reason why nihilism seems plausible is that humans seem extremely small compared to the vastness of the universe. From a cosmic perspective, human life may seem short, fragile, and meaningless. However, this cosmic smallness does not automatically imply moral worthlessness. Guy Kahane argues that it is natural to be concerned about cosmic insignificance, but that it does not directly justify nihilism (Kahane, 2014).

Similarly, Thomas Nagel's discussion of "the absurd" shows that this sense of contradiction arises from the human capacity to see life from both an internal and an external perspective; but it does not completely destroy values (Nagel, 1971). A small child, a poem, a promise, or an act of kindness may be trivial in worldly or material terms, yet they are highly meaningful in moral and emotional terms.

A Narrow Concept of Meaning Above all, nihilism often relies on a narrow and weak theory of meaning. It assumes that meaning must be eternal, external, universal and predetermined.

Susan Wolf argues that meaning, beyond happiness and morality, is the third dimension of a good life; while Thaddeus Metz has shown that philosophical discussions of the meaning of life have a variety of natural, supernatural, subjective, and objective theories coexisting (Wolf, 2016; Metz, 2026). The weakness of nihilism, therefore, is that it mistakes the absence of a single absolute or ultimate meaning for the absence of all possible meanings.

Findings

When the concept of nihilism or meaninglessness is compared with the major philosophies of the world in this study, four main points come to the fore:

Nihilism defeats its own argument: If someone says "there is no truth in the world", then this statement is a big mistake. Because he himself claims that his statement is 'true'. If nihilism is just a feeling of sadness, then it cannot be a strong philosophy.

Man-made rules also have real value: Language, law, music and social rules are created by humans. But just because they are human-made, they are not fake or fake. They

govern our lives, behavior and society beautifully.

The world's great scholars have rejected meaninglessness: Great philosophers like Aristotle and Kant have shown that meaning or purpose lies within human thinking. Aristotle said that human life is to improve and to express the fullness of one's potential. And Kant said, our conscience or reason compels us to do good deeds.

All cultures believe in the meaning of life: People in different countries of the world have always found the meaning of life through society, relationships and rules. Therefore, nihilism is not an eternal truth; it only comes to people's minds when there is a major disaster in society or in life.

Implications

Thinking that "life has no meaning" is not a sign of intelligence. Since we live based on reason and truth, the meaning of life is a natural and necessary thing for living together in society. We do not need a miraculous message from the universe to find the meaning of life. When we do good deeds every day, help people and think logically, then the meaning of life is created. Nihilism is a sign of danger: When someone thinks that "nothing has value", then it should be understood that this is a mental or social problem. This happens due to loneliness, being away from one's own culture, or some major hardship. Therefore, to overcome this problem, relationships with people and social interaction must be re-established.

Limitations of the study

This study is written entirely based on thinking and philosophy. No science, statistics, or laboratory tests were used here. Here, more emphasis is placed on the ideas of a few specific philosophers like Aristotle and Kant. Many other philosophies of the world may have something different, which is omitted here. Attempt to unify all philosophies: There are many discrepancies or differences between different cultures of the world. While trying to bring everyone together, those discrepancies may have been somewhat ignored. No modern-day reasons were sought: No help was taken from medical science or modern psychology to understand why people in today's era feel so depressed or lonely.

Future Directions

Real-life research: Future research is needed to understand why today's youth are suffering from depression due to the Internet, social media, and financial crises. Understanding other cultures: It is also necessary to delve deeper into the philosophy of Islam or the thoughts of other indigenous cultures to see how they also view nihilism. Use of technology: An attempt can be made to understand how human relationships create

meaning in life through computer models or cognitive science (brain science). This is a temporary step: Future research can be done to determine whether this feeling of meaninglessness is permanent, or is it just a temporary step or test before people find a deeper meaning in life.

Conclusion

The futility of nihilism and the deeper meaning of life in its extreme form, nihilism is both absurd and untrue. It is absurd because it contradicts itself: it uses meaningful language, logical argument, and evaluative significance to deny meaning, reason, and values. It is also untrue because human existence, if examined in the light of different civilizations, is not structured on 'nothingness' at all. Greek ethics, Kantian rationalism, Buddhist philosophy of 'emptiness', Vedanta 'consciousness', Confucian spiritual practice, Taoist harmony, Abrahamic moral teleology, Islamic ethics, the African philosophy of 'ubuntu' interconnectedness, indigenous kinship, and Latin American liberation philosophy - all reject this nihilistic tendency to reduce life to a mere empty void. Nihilism is best viewed as a symptom rather than wisdom or insight: it is essentially a reaction to pain, loneliness, injustice, disillusionment, and spiritual or existential homelessness. Its main flaw is that it makes people's loneliness and despair universal. But the more logical and correct conclusion is this: the meaning of life may not always be clear, inherited or comfortable, but its existence is real. Differences or disagreements do not erase values. Truth does not disappear when faced with difficult situations. Human life is not a vacuum; Rather, it is a vast field of interrelationship, responsibility, suffering, compromise, and potential transformation.

Therefore, nihilism is a failure - both logically and civilizationally. It is impossible to live without contradicting oneself; It is impossible to argue for it without refuting its own logic; And it is impossible to universalize it without ignoring the deepest insights of the worldview.

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