

Melvin Chen

The Meaning of Life

"What is the meaning of life?" she asked.

"God and soulhood," thundered the theists.¹

"The best possible move in a game of chess," declared the grandmasters.²

"Happiness and pleasure," proclaimed the hedonists.³

"The good, the beautiful, and the true," chimed in the Platonists.⁴

"Rolling a stone up a hill only to have it roll down again at the top," whispered the existentialists.⁵

"A mathematical equation," purred Deep Thought.⁶

"The Planck time between the Big Bang and the early describable universe," exclaimed the physicists.⁷

"Complementary base pairs forming rungs of a double helix ladder," insisted the biologists.⁸

Absurdity and nonsense through and through, thought the artist.⁹

¹ Unless the Gods neither exist nor are interested in us (if they do).

² For certain computationally complex problems, we may need anal beads. Would a meaningful life be hostage to the use of anal beads?

³ Smartphone addicts hooked on their experience machines flit from pleasure to pleasure. No meaning lies there.

⁴ Widely held as meaning-conferring in a way that toenail-trimming is not. As if everyone agrees about the existence and nature of value.

⁵ Life is an endless Sisyphean struggle against defeat and meaninglessness.

⁶ $42 = 80,538,738,812,075,974^3 + 80,435,758,145,817,515^3 + 12,602,123,297,335,631^3$

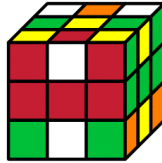
⁷ $t_P = 5.391247 \times 10^{-44}$ s, where t_P denotes Planck time

⁸ $5' -\text{ACC CTG AAC GCT} -3'$

$3' -\text{TGG CTG AAC GCT} -5'$, where one DNA strand is in a 5'-to-3' direction and its complementary strand is in a 3'-to-5' direction

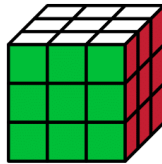
⁹ Still worth a laugh though: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUsLVStPbk>

The Metaphor of the Rubik's Cube



A challenge of colours and cubes
From the mind of a sculptor and an architect
With 54 stickers on 6 faces
And 43 quintillion possible combinations¹⁰
Of which only one is the solved cube
A metaphor for the chaos and tumult of life
Crashing on all sides
Demanding swift resolution.

Form the yellow disc with white ray florets
Turn the daisy into a white cross
Solve for the bottom layer
Solve for the second layer
Form the yellow cross¹¹
Solve for the yellow face¹²
Position the corners¹³
Reposition the matching corner pieces.¹⁴



An even more elegant algorithm à la Kociemba
Can sort apart the whites, yellows, reds, greens, oranges, and blues,
Bringing order to the chaos in four lines of code
And misleadingly suggesting that the most pressing problems of our day¹⁵
(If only we knew how to define them)
Admit of the simplest and most straightforward solutions.
Can we ever trust metaphors to deliver the whole truth?

```
1 !pip install rubik_solver
2 cube = 'woggyrybwbbbwworwrrrrgwggygggoyyrooobybybwowrybw'
3 from rubik_solver import utils
4 utils.solve(cube, 'Kociemba')
```

¹⁰ 1 quintillion = 1.0×10^{18}

¹¹ F U R U' R' F', where F denotes front, U denotes up, R, denotes right, and ' denotes counterclockwise 90°

¹² R U R' U R U2 R', where X2 denotes a double turn of 180° for the face X

¹³ L' U R U' L U R' R U R' U R U2 R'

¹⁴ F2 U R' L F2 L' R U F2

¹⁵ COVID-19, the impending ecological disaster, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and global inequality, to name a few examples.