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The Idea of Meaning in Iddo Landau: Reflections on the Philosophy of Education

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Iddo Landau's ideas on the meaning of life and their potential ramifications for modern education are examined in this article. This essay starts off by criticizing contemporary existential pessimism and arguing in favor of the notion that we can still find purpose in a flawed world. It explores the cultural, philosophical, and educational factors that have made this question especially relevant in recent years. Through dialogue with authors such as Metz, Seachris, Grondin, Gesché, Eagleton, Schinkel and others, a proposal is articulated that defends the pedagogical relevance of the debate on meaning, especially in contexts of axiological pluralism and crisis of references. The main argument here is that Landau's work not only revives the importance of meaning in philosophy but also offers essential insights for a teaching approach that, by focusing on meaning, can effectively tackle today's educational challenges. The work concludes with a reflection on the need for the educational sphere to reflect on the meaning of life from a critical, existential and pluralistic perspective.

Introduction

The question of the meaning of life, far from being a marginal speculation or an idle philosophical concern, is one of the most profound expressions of human consciousness. To question meaning is, ultimately, to confront the ultimate horizon of existence, that which justifies, guides, and gives value to our actions, choices, and life trajectories. Although formulated in various ways throughout the history of thought, this question has taken on particular intensity in the modern and contemporary context, where traditional metaphysical certainties have been undermined and the existential conditions of human beings have been radically transformed (Taylor, 2007; Metz, 2013). In this sense, authors such as Landau (1997), analyzed here, indicated that this question has been of growing interest in scientific reflection (from diverse fields of knowledge, such as biology, psychology, philosophy and theology) for two centuries, an aspect that Metz (2007) qualified, indicating that this interest has grown exponentially since the 1980s.

Iddo Landau, Israeli philosopher and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Haifa (Israel), is one of the leading researchers who has addressed the concept of the meaning of life in recent years, with more than 40 publications on the subject between the early 1990s and the present day. In his numerous publications, Landau offers a systematic philosophical critique of contemporary forms of existential nihilism. This nihilism, as Scott (2022) explains, is currently manifested by increased longevity, presenting a direct relationship. As life expectancy increases, people's concerns focus on increasing the quality, along with the quantity, of life. This contemporary concern leads to aspects that have been identified by Esposito (2024) as: a crisis of meaning characterized by apathy, rampant consumerism,

existential anxiety and the loss of traditional beliefs. In this regard, the central thesis of Landdau is that many people who claim that their lives are meaningless do so not because their lives are objectively absurd, but because they start from erroneous conceptions, unrealistic expectations or inadequate normative frameworks for evaluating existential meaning. Thus, Landau's fundamental contribution consists of dismantling the philosophical assumptions of contemporary pessimism and showing that even in an imperfect, pluralistic, secularized world marked by suffering, it is possible to find, construct or recognize meaning.

This proposal not only has philosophical value, but also profound pedagogical implications. In a society characterized by acceleration, fragmentation and a crisis of references, the question of meaning can no longer be considered an intellectual luxury, but rather an urgent necessity that directly challenges education. According to Harmunt Rosa's sociological critique (2013; 2016), our society is characterized by an acceleration that manifests itself in various ways. He explains that we live in an environment that is increasingly driven by growing time pressure, in which events follow each other so quickly that it is difficult to keep up. Today, our lives are marked by this social acceleration, as if we were caught in a hamster wheel, constantly adapting to the chaotic nature of an accelerated environment. Rosa identifies three dimensions of social acceleration: (a) technological acceleration, (b) the acceleration of social change, and (c) the acceleration of the pace of life. This acceleration and fragmentation, coupled with the aforementioned crisis of reference points, which, as Kopciuch (2021) warned, is currently linked to personal and individual divisions over the concept of value, presents a scenario in which the concept of the meaning of life most likely resonates on the horizon of current postmodern thought. In this sense, delving into philosophical-educational reflection Authors such as Schinkel, De Ruyter and Aviram (2016) have argued, contemporary education cannot be limited to the transmission of instrumental skills or technical competences, but must incorporate an existential dimension that allows people to question the meaning, value and purpose of their lives. In this regard, contributions from the philosophy of education in recent years have taken an analytical perspective, in line with the reflective developments that philosophy itself has worked on based on the proposals of different authors. That is why it is pertinent to resort to primary sources (analytical philosophy) in order to identify their arguments, approaches and conceptions regarding existential issues. It is in this context that we turn to Iddo Landau, one of the leading voices who, over the last few decades, has addressed the question of the meaning of life. Thus, through the hermeneutic analysis presented here, we can see that, Landau's thinking offers a key contribution: it provides a conceptual framework that legitimizes the search for meaning as an essential human task, but one devoid of dogmatism or rigid transcendentalism.

This article aims to examine the main contributions of Iddo Landau, as a leading figure in the field of the meaning of life in our times, in order to identify his thinking and explore its possible pedagogical implications. The objective is not only to present his theses, but also to articulate them in critical dialogue with other relevant authors in the field, such as Thaddeus Metz (2007, 2013, 2022, 2023), John Cottingham (2003), Terry Eagleton (2008), Jean Grondin (2005), Joshua Seachris (2013), Adolphe Gesché (2010a, 2010b and 2014) and Ander Schinkel (2015), among others. Through this dialogue, we will attempt to show how Landau's approach allows us to establish a pedagogy of meaning, capable of integrating the existential question into the educational process, without renouncing philosophical rigour or pluralistic openness. Understanding, therefore, that the concept of the meaning of life has as many versions as there are personal ideas and that, at the same time, it requires plural, inclusive visions that address this existential question with the utmost respect.

The article is organized into several sections. First, it provides an overview of the state of the art, analyzing the recent historical and philosophical context that has led to the modern emergence of the question of meaning, highlighting the cultural, epistemic and existential factors that have contributed to its centrality. The next section will address the critique of the loss of meaning from a philosophical perspective, focusing on the tensions between secularization, freedom and axiological disorientation. The fourth section will examine in detail Landau's theses on the meaning of life, paying particular attention to his critique of existential perfectionism and his defense of the value of imperfection. The fifth section

will constitute the core of the article and will be devoted to exploring the pedagogical implications of Landau's thinking, in dialogue with current pedagogical proposals, such as character education, moral training and existential accompaniment (Puolimatka & Airaksinen, 2001; De Ruyter, 2002). Next, the convergences and tensions with other contemporary thinkers who have addressed the question of the meaning of life will be presented and analyzed. Finally, conclusions will be offered with a view to consolidating a general pedagogical proposal that integrates work on meaning as a possible and particularly interesting dimension of educational practice.

This work is therefore based on two convictions: first, that the question of the meaning of life is not only legitimate, but also philosophically fertile and existentially urgent; second, that this question must and can find its place in education, not as a doctrinal imposition, but as a critical, pluralistic and guiding opening. In this context, Iddo Landau's philosophy reveals itself as an invaluable source of conceptual resources for thinking about a pedagogy of meaning in times of uncertainty.

State of the Art: The Modern Emergence of the Question of the Meaning of Life

The question of the meaning of life, although implicitly present in many cultural and religious traditions, has not always occupied a central place in philosophy or collective consciousness. As Iddo Landau (1997) argues, the phenomenon of openly questioning the meaning of life is, to a large extent, a modern development. The intensity and frequency with which this question has been raised since the 18th century is linked to a series of cultural, philosophical and existential transformations that have reconfigured the way individuals relate to the world, to others and to themselves. In this sense, authors such as Metz (2007) have pointed out that this question has enjoyed growing interest since the 1980s.

In one of his first articles in which Landau delves into the concept of the meaning of life, "Why Has the Question of the Meaning of Life Arisen in the Last Two and a Half Centuries?" (1997), he argues that the question of meaning does not arise as a consequence of an objective existential deficiency, but as a result of a series of specific historical conditions. Among these, he highlights five: the decline of traditional religions, the rise of individualism, the proliferation of axiological pluralism, the advance of scientism, and the increase in personal expectations about what a meaningful life should be. These five factors are described below as a starting point for delving into the state of the question of the meaning of life.

The first relevant factor is the weakening of traditional religious worldviews, which for centuries had provided a stable, collective framework of normative meaning (Landau, 2011). Progressive secularization, promoted by the Enlightenment and the development of modern sciences, has led to an erosion of these frameworks. As Charles Taylor (2007) argued a few years ago, we live in a "secular age" in which religious answers are no longer taken for granted. In this new horizon, individuals are forced to construct their own meaning without resorting to a transcendent meta-narrative. The ontological burden of life becomes dependent on individual judgement, which generates, on the one hand, greater freedom, but, on the other, a strong existential uncertainty. It even raises debates about the validity of one's personal idea of meaning over that of another individual.

Secondly, the rise of modern individualism has reformulated expectations about the good life. Life is no longer conceived as the fulfilment of a pre-established social role, but as an autonomous project. This conception, linked to the most popular meaning in recent years, the purpose of life (Landau, 2014; Shiba et al., 2021), although liberating, also produces a burden: if one fails to give meaning to one's existence, the problem is perceived as a personal deficiency. In this sense, Metz (2013) observes that this modern view turns the search for meaning into an almost moral requirement for the individual, which can generate feelings of frustration and anxiety, an aspect also pointed out in the research carried out by Blair (2004).

Thirdly, contemporary axiological pluralism prevents consensus on what constitutes a meaningful life. Whereas in previous eras tradition, religion or culture offered accepted models of meaning, in modernity value systems have multiplied. This phenomenon, which Lipman (1991) identified as one of the fundamental challenges of moral education, presents the individual with a difficult task: choosing between multiple possibilities without an absolute criterion. Freedom thus becomes a demanding responsibility.

Fourth, scientism has pushed ultimate questions to the periphery of logical discourse by promoting a worldview that is centered on causal and empirical explanation. The prevalence of a materialist ontology has led to the belief that the universe has no inherent purpose, as Thomas Nagel (2012) cautioned. In this scenario, the question of meaning seems inappropriate, as it presupposes a teleology that the scientific paradigm does not admit (Landau, 2011b). Terry Eagleton (2008) made an interesting point years ago: while science can tell us how the universe operates, it doesn't really explain why we should care about it. On top of that, Landau brings up a fifth factor our growing expectations of what a meaningful life should look like.

Finally, Landau highlights a fifth factor: increased expectations about what a meaningful life should be. In contexts marked by material well-being, access to information and self-expression, life is expected to be not only bearable, but full, authentic and rich in meaning. This expectation, legitimate in many cases, can lead to a disproportionate evaluation of one's own life experience. If a high ideal of meaning is not achieved, there is a tendency to consider that life has failed (Landau, 2020).

In this sense, the question of meaning should be understood not as a sign of decline, but rather as a demand for lucidity anchored in the future rather than in the past. Gesché (2010a) noted that although people today are still searching for meaning, the methods by which we do so have evolved. We now view it as a journey involving freedom, critical thinking, and mutual recognition rather than searching for an external truth that has been forced upon us. This change in our conception of knowledge forces us to reevaluate the processes by which meaning is produced, disseminated, or discovered.

From an educational perspective, understanding the contemporary roots of the question of meaning allows us to identify it as a training necessity. As Schinkel, De Ruyter and Aviram (2016) point out, if individuals live in an environment characterized by plurality, uncertainty and the demand for self-realization, then it is essential that education provides tools for thinking, discussing and deciding on the meaning of life. This cannot be a question relegated to the private sphere, but rather a legitimate part of the philosophical, ethical, civic and, why not, educational curriculum. All in all, this could be one of the premises of Landdau's contributions: to help clarify the path towards understanding the meaning of life. It should be noted that this idea has been extensively developed by Schinkel and De Ruyter (2022) in identifying the school environment as the second most important socializing context in relation to the development of meaning (after the family):

> First of all, since education is by its very nature concerned with increasing children's knowledge and understanding of the world, it can hardly fail to have an impact on the first dimension of meaning we distinguished: the cognitive dimension, the dimension of understanding or sense-making....The implication is not that it is better to keep children less informed (though naturally we need to consider carefully what to introduce to children and when) but rather that the dimension of understanding or sense-making should not be divorced from the valuative dimension(s) of purpose and significance. (p. 9-10).

For all these reasons, the modern emergence of the question of meaning should not be interpreted as an anomaly, but as the result of a series of profound transformations in the human condition. By identifying and analyzing these factors, Landau not only offers a lucid reading of the present but also paves the way for a critical reconstruction of the concept of meaning. This diagnosis will be the starting point for addressing, in the next section, the critique of the loss of meaning in secularized and pluralistic contexts.

Criticism of the Loss of Meaning: Between Secularization and Freedom

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, philosophers, sociologists, and theologians have frequently discussed the sense that our contemporary world is becoming less meaningful. Concerns about a cultural environment that appears fragmented, morally ambiguous, and struggling to forge meaningful life paths have been voiced by thinkers such as Terry Eagleton (2008), Charles Taylor (2007), and Viktor Frankl (2004). It's crucial to remember, though, that not all academics see this circumstance through a tragic or nostalgic prism.

According to Landau (2017; 2024), many people who consider their lives to be meaningless make basic philosophical errors. One of the most prevalent is existential perfectionism, which holds that only an extraordinary life, one that is completely realized, coherent, and endowed with a transcendent ultimate purpose, can be deemed meaningful. With this perspective, you might believe that the majority of human lives, with all of their complexity, constraints, and shortcomings, are doomed to be unimportant. Landau, on the other hand, disagrees and believes that this viewpoint is a conceptual trap that must be overcome. This critique of perfectionism is part of a broader dispute about the impact of secularization. For many thinkers who have approached this question from the field of theology, or in other terms, such as Gesché (2010b), the eclipse of transcendent meaning has left the contemporary subject in a kind of moral limbo. In the absence of an absolute foundation, any attempt to give meaning to life would ultimately be fragile or illusory. Landau, however, distances himself from this reading and proposes a more open view of the secular phenomenon. In his view, the disappearance of grand narratives does not necessarily imply nihilism, but rather the possibility of constructing plural, situated, contingent and valid meanings.

This position is not merely reactive. It has an important affirmative dimension: Landau believes that many human lives already have meaning, even if their protagonists do not always recognize or identify it clearly and specifically. Thus, the problem is not the absence of meaning, but the difficulty in identifying it due to conceptual filters, excessive expectations or unattainable idealizations. Therefore, one of the objectives of his work is precisely to dismantle the arguments that lead people to mistakenly conclude that their lives are worthless (Landau, 2020).

Landau provides a number of classic illustrations of this tendency in *Finding Meaning in an Imperfect World* (2017). People who feel that their lives are pointless because they haven't made a significant contribution to society, succeeded professionally, or found a higher purpose. According to his analysis, these demands, which are frequently internalized without question act as barriers that keep us from appreciating the intrinsic worth of insignificant deeds, interpersonal connections, daily creativity, or moral integrity, obscuring the meaningfulness already present in ordinary aspects of life.

This criticism partly coincides with that offered by Metz (2013), who also questions overly transcendental views of meaning. Metz proposes a naturalistic approach to meaning, based on the objective value of certain activities, relationships, or achievements. For the University of Pretoria professor, the meaning of life does not depend on its eternal duration or its connection to a divine will, but on the ability to generate value in a meaningful way. On this point, both Metz and Landau converge in their defense of a secular, pluralistic and realistic approach to meaning.

However, while Metz is concerned with offering a normative theory that distinguishes degrees of meaning, Landau focuses more on dismantling the sources of error that lead to nihilism. His method can be characterized as therapeutic since it aims to release the subject from skewed perceptions of their existence. This strategy is obviously in line with the idea that philosophy can heal the soul, as proposed by writers like Martha Nussbaum (1994) and Pierre Hadot (2002), who view philosophy as a practice of existential transformation as well as a conceptual endeavor. This is an idea extensively developed by Alexander Nehamas (1998; 2016), which is structured around the conception of philosophy as a practice that *transforms* the subject. Initially, in The Art of Living (1998), Nehamas defended aesthetic self-construction, where the individual, emulating Socratic irony, shapes their character as a unified, unique and inimitable work of art. However, in his most recent work, Nehamas qualifies this potentially

solipsistic approach to introduce a more existential intersubjective dimension. The "art of living" is no longer understood solely as self-mastery but incorporates friendship (philia) as an indispensable mechanism of individuation. The meaning of life becomes relevant insofar as it is "shared with others". Nehamas now argues that our existential identity is essentially relational: we do not sculpt ourselves in a vacuum, but through the gaze and promise of the future offered to us by those we love. Philosophy, therefore, moves from being an individual poiesis to a shared praxis, where the value of life lies in the vulnerability of being shaped by another.

According to this viewpoint, Landau's criticism of the loss of meaning is an invitation to reconsider how we assess our lives rather than a straightforward denial of the modern pessimistic diagnosis. Instead of comparing existence with unattainable ideals, he proposes paying attention to the concrete, the real, what is actually lived. Instead of seeking a cosmic or absolute meaning, which can also be a source of meaning, he suggests identifying what, in our experience, generates value, orientation and moral satisfaction.

This vision has important consequences for freedom and ethics. As authors such as Kristján Kristjánsson (2018) have argued, the concept of ethics is closely linked to that of responsibility. People have both the right and the responsibility to select and create their own meaning in pluralistic contexts. This is a proposal of considerable relevance in the context of the analysis presented here. Despite the warnings of Degenhardt (1998), who pointed out that an ethics of beliefs has been little examined by philosophers of education, Kristjánsson's approach is closely related to the previous approach of Kunzman (2003), who detailed that ethical education, particularly moral education in public schools, requires curricula that help students explore and understand diverse moral justifications and motivations from diverse cultural, religious, and other sources, providing opportunities for students to interact with difference and develop the capacity for mutual respect and, when necessary, reasonable disagreement. However, without moral and ethical resources to direct that search, this freedom may feel like an intolerable burden. Landau's criticism then turns into a tool for emancipation: it aids in the destruction of discourses that tell us that our lives are useless if they don't fit into predetermined patterns and creates room for the creation of more inclusive and humane meanings while honoring moral and ethical spaces on both a personal and a societal level.

In relation to education, this criticism of the loss of meaning must translate into a pedagogy that does not replicate the demands of perfectionism but rather encourages critical reflection on one's own value criteria. According to Puolimatka and Airaksinen (2001), educating for meaning entails fostering an environment where people are free to come up with their own answers via discussion and freedom rather than imposing answers. In this way, education serves a liberating purpose by assisting in the destruction of erroneous notions of meaning and the discovery of worthwhile lifestyles despite imperfections.

To put it briefly, Landau's critique of meaning loss is a redefinition of the issue rather than a rejection of it. Meaning is not lacking; rather, it is concealed beneath layers of unrealistic expectations, cultural myths, and flawed individual beliefs. The work of philosophy and education consists of clearing this terrain, recovering our view of everyday life and opening up spaces for the free, plural, ethical and committed construction of meaningful life trajectories.

Iddo Landau's Contributions in the Face of Existential Pessimism

Iddo Landau's methodical criticism of existential pessimism is among his most important contributions to modern ideas about the meaning of life. This pessimism, which is pervasive in both popular culture and philosophical currents, holds that human life has no purpose because it is fleeting, contingent, devoid of transcendence, or characterized by suffering. With rigorous philosophical reasoning and an intellectually therapeutic approach that is similar to the Socratic tradition in many ways, Landau challenges this viewpoint. Again, in Finding Meaning in an Imperfect World (2017), Landau presents a detailed map

of the conceptual errors that, in his view, fuel the conviction that life is meaningless. One of the most common errors is, as already mentioned, existential perfectionism. This consists of thinking that for life to have meaning, it must meet certain idealized requirements, such as being completely coherent, morally pure, fully successful or connected to a cosmic purpose. Landau dismantles this thesis by arguing that it is unnecessary and unreasonable: no human life can aspire to perfection, and yet many imperfect lives are fully meaningful.

Another common error that Landau identifies is the fallacy of comparison. When people compare their lives to those of others who are extraordinary, brave, or brilliant, they often conclude that their own lives are pointless. A skewed view of reality is produced by this mechanism, which is exacerbated by meritocratic discourses and social media: the everyday is perceived as inadequate and the ordinary as failure. Landau proposes a hermeneutic shift: instead of evaluating life from an abstract ideal (lived by others), he invites us to value it from our own possibilities, achievements and concrete connections.

Additionally, Landau criticizes nihilism as a philosophical stance. In his article 'The Meaning of Life Sub specie Aeternitatis' (2022), he argues that many formulations of nihilism are based on misunderstandings about the concept of eternity, transcendence or absolute value. For instance, the notion that a finite life is meaningless since it is destined to end assumes that value is dependent on duration:

> What determines judgments about the meaning or meaninglessness of lives are the standards of meaningfulness we adopt. Most standards are compatible with most perspectives; they are usually not excluded by, or necessitated by, this or that perspective. (p. 8)

But, as Landau himself contends, many profoundly meaningful experiences, like love, compassion, or artistic creation, are fleeting, and this does not lessen their significance, quite the contrary, it may even deepen it. This thesis connects with a line of thought that has also been defended by Metz (2021, 2023) and Eagleton (2008): meaning does not need eternity, but meaningful density.

Landau's philosophical strategy and perspective is, in this sense, demystifying. His work seeks to free the reader from unnecessarily demanding or confusing conceptions of what it means to have a meaningful life. Instead of putting forth a closed normative theory, Landau takes a critical stance toward theories that inspire hopelessness. His more instructional works, like Two Arguments for the Badness and Meaninglessness of Life (2020), also exhibit this orientation. In this work, the author provides the reader with specific examples and thought-provoking activities to help them recognize the sources of meaning that are already present in their lives.

Landau's emphasis on suffering is a significant aspect of his critique of pessimism. Landau argues that, while suffering is difficult, it does not always imply a lack of meaning, unlike other writers who claim that it does. In certain cases, it can even intensify the search for or recognition of meaning. This perspective is reminiscent of that of Viktor Frankl (2004), who argued that human beings can find meaning even in the midst of the most extreme pain. Thus, as Brady (2022) also analyses, on the one hand, experiences of suffering can take on meaning for those who suffer if they manage to adopt a positive and virtuous attitude towards their suffering. On the other hand, suffering can be an essential component of a fulfilling life, considering all aspects. Landau takes up this idea but formulates it in more secular and philosophically analytical terms. Landau's work is not only critical but also constructive. Throughout his publications, including *Externalism, Internalism, and Meaningful Lives* (2021), *Viktor Frankl on All People's Freedom to Find Their Lives Meaningful* (2019), *Are There Objective Conditions for Meaning in Life?* (2021), and his contribution to the *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of the Meaning of Life* (2022), Landau has developed a defense of pluralism of meaning. This viewpoint holds that there are several legitimate approaches to leading a meaningful life, and no one theory can monopolize its definition. Because it encourages tolerance, acknowledges existential diversity, and rejects clear-cut models of personal fulfillment, this thesis has significant ethical ramifications.

Landau argues for a situated understanding of meaning in discussions with writers like Susan Wolf (2010), John Cottingham (2003), and Joshua Seachris (2013). According to him, meaning is found in actively engaging in relationships, projects, and values that are significant from both a subjective and intersubjective standpoint rather than in completing a universal mission. According to this framework, life acquires meaning due to its ability to produce value, belonging, and coherence in a tangible human context rather than its association with a transcendent instance.

Iddo Landau's stance on existential pessimism can be summed up as follows: existential (demonstrating the human ability to create and recognize meaning in imperfect contexts), methodological (exposing argumentative fallacies), and conceptual (critiquing insufficient definitions of meaning). In this way, his philosophy offers a clear and optimistic counterpoint to modern nihilism and provides a strong foundation for considering how a pedagogy of meaning can be expressed in a pluralistic, critical, and secular key.

Meaning of Life and Pedagogical Responsibility

Iddo Landau's thinking, as it has been outlined up to this point, not only offers a philosophical rehabilitation of the concept of meaning, but also constitutes an invaluable source of inspiration for contemporary pedagogy. Far from being a personal or abstract issue, the meaning of life question has significant educational ramifications. In addition to imparting knowledge, skills, or competencies, education also aims to support people in creating a meaningful life for themselves. This existential dimension of education has been championed by a growing number of philosophers of education who understand that education also involves helping individuals to find their way in life (Schinkel, De Ruyter & Aviram, 2016; Puolimatka & Airaksinen, 2001).

In this sense, Landau's proposal can be seen as a philosophy of meaning at the service of education: a philosophy that helps us to think critically about our own ideals, dispel myths about what makes a valuable life, and encourage multiple, tangible, and realistic interpretations of life's meaning. This viewpoint is particularly helpful in situations where a lot of young people feel that their lives are meaningless or lack direction because they are surrounded by existential anxiety. As Baumeister (1991) emphasized, the loss of meaning is linked to experiences of alienation, hopelessness and demotivation, factors that directly affect the educational sphere.

One of Landau's main contributions to pedagogical reflection on meaning is his critique of existential perfectionism (2017). Many young people internalize the idea that only an exceptional, brilliant, heroic, transcendental life is worth living:

> Thus, although the perfectionist position may seem very meek, its deeper nature is frequently immersed in conceit. Similarly, some people´s perfectionist standard for meaning in life result from narcissistic or egoistic urge to adore and aggrandize themselves. They want to feel that they, and therefore their lives, are ideal. Their frustration in failing to attain some degree of meaning frequently has do with the simple aggravation of failing to see themselves as superior and of being unable to worship themselves. (p. 42)

This conception is reinforced by social discourses that exalt success, productivity, or exceptionality. As a result, students who do not achieve these ideals often experience frustration, emptiness or inadequacy. At this point, Landau's thinking is particularly relevant: he dismantles these demands, showing that an imperfect life can be meaningful, that everyday life can be meaningful, and that it is not necessary to meet extraordinary standards in order to value one's own existence positively (Landau, 2017).

From a pedagogical perspective, this implies redefining the purpose of education. Instead of orienting education exclusively towards performance, competence or employability, it is about integrating a reflective, ethical and existential dimension into the educational process. As Aviram, Schinkel and De

Ruyter (2014) have argued, meaningful education is one that enables individuals to construct meaning in their lives, to make sound value judgements, and to make decisions consistent with their deepest convictions.

Landau contributes to this vision a framework of thought that is both liberating and demanding. Liberating because it frees us from the strict requirements that cause everyday experiences to be undervalued. Demanding because it encourages people to think independently, take charge of creating their own meaning, and challenge prevailing narratives that define what is valuable. This task calls for both independence and assistance in a pluralistic setting. As a result, the educator's role in this viewpoint is extremely moral: it involves asking questions rather than offering answers.

The role of the teacher assumes a unique prominence at this point. Educating in meaning does not consist of imparting a doctrine, but of fostering dialogue. The teacher is a mediator of meaning, a facilitator of critical thinking, an interlocutor who helps to clarify values, examine beliefs and articulate life projects. As Anders Schinkel (2015) argues, the educator can be seen as a "companion of meaning", someone who, without imposing a particular direction, helps students to explore the possibility of a life with purpose, meaning and value.

This pedagogical model also has curricular implications. Let us not forget Kronman's (2007) argument about universities' neglect of the meaning of life. The education of meaning requires institutional and methodological spaces that allow for it. This involves introducing philosophical, narrative, literary, artistic, or ethical deliberation activities into the classroom, as well as promoting an educational culture that is not afraid to ask questions about what is important. At this point, philosophy, especially the philosophy of education, has a fundamental role to play not only as a discipline, but as a formative attitude. As De Ruyter (2002) and Allen (1991) have emphasized, reflection on the meaning of life should be at the center of the curriculum, not as doctrinal content, but as the horizon of meaning of the educational process itself. Thus, education must help young people identify when these ideals are internalized uncritically, when they cause suffering, and how they can be reconfigured in more humane, sustainable terms that are more faithful to their own experience.

Furthermore, a pedagogy of meaning cannot avoid the problem of suffering. As Landau (2020) has shown, pain is not incompatible with meaning. On the contrary, it is often in pain that one's life orientation is tested and renewed. This implies that education must also prepare students to face loss, frustration, and finitude. This is not a matter of 'pedagogical positivism' but of existential realism. Teaching how to live with meaning also means teaching how to live with limits, with ruptures, with negative feelings, or with incomplete experiences.

Finally, a pedagogy of meaning must be pluralistic. In a diverse society, there can be no single answer to the question of the good life. A student's life may have meaning for one, but not for another. As a result, mutual understanding, cross-cultural communication, and receptivity to different points of view are necessary for meaningful education. In this context, Landau's thinking is profoundly democratic: it affirms the legitimacy of multiple forms of meaning, provided that these can be assumed in a reflective, free and committed manner.

It is therefore possible to confirm that, Iddo Landau's thinking constitutes a decisive contribution to rethinking education from the perspective of meaning. His critique of perfectionism, his defense of pluralism and his insistence on the possibility of meaning in imperfect contexts offer a powerful and fertile theoretical framework.

Convergences and Contrasts with Other Contemporary Authors

Iddo Landau's philosophical proposal does not develop in a vacuum. It forms part of a broad and pluralistic debate on the meaning of life, in which it relates to, converges with, or diverges from other contemporary authors who have addressed this question from different traditions and perspectives. This circumstance is undoubtedly what adds value to Landau's reflections on the subject, his great ability to confront ideas and at the same time integrate his own conceptions into the reflective context of other

thinkers. In this sense, the perspective of both suffering as a potential condition of meaning and perfectionism make his conception of the meaning of life a particular and especially rich vision for educational reflection. This section aims to show these affinities and tensions, focusing on thinkers such as Thaddeus Metz, Terry Eagleton, Jean Grondin, Joshua Seachris, Susan Wolf, Thomas Moore and Adolphe Gesché, all of whom are relevant both for their academic impact and for the richness of their approaches to the meaning of life as a concept.

One of Landau's closest interlocutors is undoubtedly Thaddeus Metz. He has defended an objective approach to meaning in books like Meaning in Life (2013) and his well-known entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2007). In contrast to existential subjectivism, Metz contends that some deeds, endeavors, or connections are valuable regardless of the subject's opinion. However, unlike transcendentalist theories, he does not require a theological foundation or a cosmic purpose to recognise that value.

Landau agrees with Metz in rejecting the need for theistic transcendence in order to speak of meaning. Both argue that the world, as it is, allows for meaningful experiences. But they disagree on how to conceive of the normativity of meaning. While Metz strives to formulate objective criteria for evaluating the degree of meaning in a life, Landau is wary of such normative models. His position is more therapeutic than constructivist: rather than defining which lives have more or less meaning, Landau is concerned with dismantling the erroneous reasons that lead one to think that a life lacks meaning.

Terry Eagleton is another important person with whom a conversation can be started. Eagleton provides a harsh critique of both religious and secular approaches to the meaning dilemma in The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction (2008). His work is among the most approachable and thought-provoking on the current scene because of his sardonic tone and interdisciplinary approach. Eagleton straddles the line between cynicism and optimism; he rejects radical nihilism while acknowledging the challenge of finding meaning in a secularized world. He agrees with Landau that life can have meaning in finitude, although his approach is more charged with philosophical, political and literary tensions.

Another approach that has had a wide impact on academic literature in recent years is that offered, from a hermeneutic perspective, by Jean Grondin. In his reflection, it is possible to identify an approach in which the meaning of life cannot be defined or demonstrated, but rather experienced, narrated and interpreted (2005). Grondin conceives meaning as a "gift" (in a way similar to Gesché's theological approach, which will be discussed later), something that is not constructed voluntarily, but rather recognized in experience. On this point, he distances himself from Landau's more rationalist perspective, who believes that meaning can be understood, argued and clarified through philosophical analysis. However, both authors agree that meaning is linked to concrete life, to bonds, to personal history.

Another author with whom Landau has had extensive debate about conceptions of the meaning of life is Joshua Seachris, who has defended a pluralistic approach to meaning, recognizing that there are multiple dimensions (cognitive, affective, narrative, ethical) involved in the experience of meaning in life (2013). Seachris has criticized the sharp dichotomies between subjective and objective meaning and has proposed an integration of perspectives. This view is similar to Landau's, in that both accept that meaning is neither a fixed essence nor an arbitrary construction, but a complex experience involving relationship, commitment and reflection.

Susan Wolf, who suggests (2010) that a meaningful life is one in which one loves what is objectively valuable, is also worth mentioning. Subjective components (love, devotion) and objective components (the worth of what is loved) are combined in this formula. Her proposal attempts to avoid both relativism and moral authoritarianism. Something similar can be identified in Baier's (2018) contribution regarding the importance of purpose in life, which has subsequently become widely accepted in terms of reflection and scientific contributions. Landau does not develop a similar normative theory, but he could accept this formulation as a valid description of certain forms of meaning. Both share a concern for overcoming the false dilemma between imposed meaning and arbitrary meaning.

From a theological perspective, it is possible to analyze another figure who, in recent years, has approached the concept of the meaning of life from this angle: Adolphe Gesché. For him, meaning is not something that is possessed or imposed. Rather, it is an opening, an orientation, a promise. Human beings live projected towards meaning, even if they cannot define it completely. In dialogue with Landau, Gesché's contribution can be read as a spiritual and existential complement to philosophical criticism. While Landau dismantles the errors that lead to nihilism from an analytical perspective, Gesché recognizes the wounded dimension of modern human beings but interprets it as a sign of depth. For Gesché, modern man has not stopped searching for meaning but seeks it in a different way: without metaphysical guarantees, without external authority, but with an ethical demand and a transcendental openness.

This openness to meaning is articulated in terms of otherness. Gesché suggests in *Man* (2010b) that humans are creatures of desire, waiting, and questioning rather than beings who explain themselves. This incompleteness is a constitutive condition rather than a deficit. The possibility of the Other, the Transcendent, and a meaning that is accepted rather than created arises in this emptiness. This conception of meaning as otherness has profound pedagogical implications. From this perspective, to educate is to help the subject to listen, to question, to open themselves up to a truth that they do not fully control, but which challenges them. On this point, his proposal converges with that of Landau: both argue that education should cultivate the question of meaning without imposing answers. Both maintain that meaning is not transmitted as a fact, but is awakened as a concern, a search, a responsibility.

Furthermore, Gesché offers an ethical reading of meaning. He contends in *Evil* (2010a) and The Meaning (2014) that one of the biggest obstacles to believing in meaning is the scandal of evil. But rather than succumbing to nihilism, he suggests that evil calls for greater meaning rather than less. Suffering, rather than nullifying meaning, radicalizes it as an ethical demand. In this he agrees with Landau, who also argues that suffering does not destroy meaning, but can intensify the need for its elaboration.

From an educational perspective, the convergence between Landau and Gesché allows for the articulation of a critical pedagogy of meaning. Critical, because it helps to dismantle discourses that trivialize, absolutize or manipulate the notion of meaning. But also open, because it leaves room for the plurality of ways in which meaning can be experienced: secular or religious, communal or personal, narrative or symbolic. As De Ruyter (2002) has pointed out, an education in meaning must respect individual convictions, but also offer a shared horizon of reflection that allows for dialogue and mutual recognition. Furthermore, Gesché's contribution allows us to revalue symbolic, narrative and spiritual language in the educational sphere. In a context where technicality tends to dominate pedagogical discourse, recovering the symbolic dimension is essential to make room for mystery, gratuitousness and hope. At this point, the pedagogy of meaning can benefit from theology, not as doctrine, but as existential wisdom.

Lastly, it's worth mentioning Thomas Moore, author of Care of the Soul (1992), who has defended the necessity of cultivating life's meaning as a daily practice from a perspective more akin to depth psychology and secular spirituality. Markus (2003) echoed this sentiment when he offered a set of criteria for assessing a sense of life's meaning based on individual preferences. In this way, Moore suggests treating the soul with the same consideration, tolerance, and aesthetics that one gives to a garden. His approach, although less philosophical, coincides with Landau in valuing the small, the symbolic, the imperfect. The notion that meaning can only be found in heroic deeds or transcendental revelations is criticized by both writers.

This diversity of viewpoints demonstrates how open the topic of life's purpose is to various disciplines, sensibilities, and traditions. Among this group, Landau stands out for his dedication to lucidity, his ability to dispel myths without devolving into complete skepticism, and his persuasive reasoning. His contribution consists of releasing thought from the barriers that keep us from recognizing the meaning that is already present in many lives, rather than proposing a novel theory of meaning. We could say that Landdau's proposal is ecological, in the sense that it focuses on what already exists, on its "reuse" in personal life, avoiding inventions or new preconceptions.

This openness to discussion is essential from a pedagogical perspective. As De Ruyter and Schinkel (2016) have argued, an education that takes the meaning of life seriously must encourage exposure to multiple perspectives, promote critical dialogue and cultivate discernment. The recognition of authors with different but converging views on certain principles, such as dignity, freedom, reflexivity, and affectivity, allows for the construction of a pluralistic, tolerant, and deeply human education of meaning.

In summary, it is possible to indicate that Landau's thinking finds fruitful resonances and contrasts in the contemporary philosophical landscape. The more normative, narrative, or spiritual viewpoints of other writers are enhanced by his analytical and therapeutic approach. This abundance of methods enhances and broadens the concept of meaning rather than diminishing it. In this situation, education can be invaluable, not as a guarantee of a single truth, but as a place where people can freely and responsibly confront, make decisions, and create meaning.

Final Thoughts: Educating in the Meaning of Life Today

The question of what life's purpose is has become not only valid but also urgent in a world characterized by speed, uncertainty, the pluralization of values, and the crisis of existential referents. The modern subject must construct or discover meaning in a fragmented, changing, and frequently uncaring environment, in contrast to earlier periods when meaning was passed down from religious or cultural traditions. Contrary to what some scholars have claimed, this circumstance is a profound educational opportunity rather than an irreversible tragedy. In this regard, Iddo Landau's philosophical writings provide strong conceptual frameworks for thinking about the role of meaning in modern education.

We have demonstrated in this article how Landau rigorously challenges the philosophical assumptions of existential pessimism in order to dismantle it. A more expansive, plural, and pragmatic understanding of meaning is made possible by Landau's rejection of perfectionism, nihilism, and irrational expectations about a meaningful life. This vision works especially well when it is connected to the task of education, which is viewed as both the dissemination of knowledge and the assistance in the growth of free, introspective people who are able to openly and responsibly express their own life stories. The pedagogy of meaning that emerges from Landau's thought is based on several fundamental pillars. The first is the recognition of the centrality of the question of meaning in human experience. This should not be reduced to a metaphysical or religious concern, but rather assumed as a constitutive dimension of subjectivity, present in the decisions, relationships, projects, and evaluations that people make of their lives. As authors such as De Ruyter (2002), Aviram et al. (2014), and Schinkel (2015) have pointed out, an education that ignores this dimension runs the risk of producing technically competent but existentially disoriented individuals.

The second pillar is the need to dismantle false beliefs about meaning, many of which are internalized by the dominant social discourse. Landau has shown that these beliefs, such as the idea that a meaningful life must be extraordinary, or that suffering invalidates any possibility of meaning, operate as epistemological obstacles that must be overcome. From an educational perspective, this involves teaching students to think critically about the life models they adopt, the cultural

The third pillar is the promotion of an active and pluralistic attitude toward the construction of meaning. While Landau does not offer a closed normative theory, he does insist that meaning is not a passive given or an external imposition, but a task that involves deliberation, discernment, and commitment. In education, this translates into a pedagogy that promotes reflection, position-taking, and moral autonomy. As Allen (1991) and Puolimatka & Airaksinen (2001) have emphasized, training for meaning is training in the capacity to take one's own life seriously.

The fourth pillar is the value of the everyday, the imperfect, and the common. Against those narratives of exceptionalism that swing so many educational and social discourses, Landau's proposal invites us to revalue the ordinary as a site of meaning. This has very inclusive potential: it allows diverse

lives, modest trajectories, unspectacular achievements to be recognized as meaningful. From a pedagogical perspective, this is what enables an ethic of care, attention, and recognition that can transform school culture.

The fifth pillar is the willingness to dialogue with other sources of meaning-religious, symbolic, or spiritual. At this level, Landau's thought can be brought into conversation with proposals like Adolphe Gesché's who insists that meaning is not mandated but welcomed, interpreted, and experientially realized as a promise. A pedagogy of meaning does not close off this dimension but rather sets up conditions for it to be discovered critically and freely. As Thomas Moore (1992) has indicated, to educate is also an act of caring for the soul, understood not as a theological category but rather as a way by which one inhabits the world with depth. These pillars form a pedagogy of meaning, not dogmatic, not relativist but critical, hospitable, and transformative meaning one that helps to unmask those discourses as suspect whenever meaning is reduced to terms of success, utility, or consumption. Alongside each search's uniqueness, such teaching and learning are open to multiple responses. And transformative, as it seeks to create people who can live purposefully in the face of the modern world's complexity, uncertainty, and finiteness.

This pedagogy demands institutional and political considerations that will allow it. The goodwill of teachers is not sufficient: educational systems must institute the value for ethical, philosophical, and existential training. There is also a need for the creation of curricular spaces to which the question of meaning can be addressed seriously, without fear of complexity or ambiguity. And there is above all else that education is not about preparing for the market but about supporting the construction of a dignified human life, conceived and lived with meaning.

In this context, Iddo Landau's thinking constitutes a potentially interesting contribution to the field of education, particularly to the philosophy of education. Not because it provides conclusive answers, but because it raises pertinent questions, breaks down barriers to thinking and reaffirms people's ability to find purpose in their flaws. These reflections involve the entire educational community, although it is true that the attention that may be developed in relation to the meaning of life in the early stages will be different from that which may exist in secondary or university education. All in all, the pedagogical reading that can be made of Landdau's contributions invites us, as philosophers of education, to reflect on how we can fulfil the essential task of educational goals: the integral development of individuals. In essence, Landdau's philosophy is a call to live openly, courageously and lucidly. And now more than ever, that invitation deserves to be considered, listened to and reflected upon in terms of education.

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