Religion and the Meaning of Life

An Existential Approach

As humans, we want to live meaningfully, yet we are often driven by impulse. In *Religion and the Meaning of Life*, Williams investigates this paradox – one with profound implications.

Delving into felt realities pertinent to meaning, such as boredom, trauma, suicide, denial of death, and indifference, Williams describes ways to acquire meaning and potential obstacles to its acquisition. This book is unique in its willingness to transcend a more secular stance and explore how one's belief in God may be relevant to life's meaning.

Religion and the Meaning of Life's interdisciplinary approach makes it useful to philosophers, religious studies scholars, psychologists, students, and general readers alike. The insights from this book have profound real-world applications – they can transform how readers search for meaning and, consequently, how readers see and exist in the world.

Clifford Williams is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Trinity International University. He is the author of *Free Will and Determinism: A Dialogue* and *Existential Reasons for Belief in God: A Defense of Desires and Emotions for Faith.*

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY, AND SOCIETY

SERIES EDITORS

PAUL K. MOSER, Loyola University, Chicago CHAD MEISTER, Bethel College, Indiana

This is a series of interdisciplinary texts devoted to major-level courses in religion, philosophy, and related fields. It includes original, current, and wide-spanning contributions by leading scholars from various disciplines that (a) focus on the central academic topics in religion and philosophy, (b) are seminal and up-to-date regarding recent developments in scholarship on the various key topics, and (c) incorporate, with needed precision and depth, the major differing perspectives and backgrounds – the central voices on the major religions and the religious, philosophical, and sociological viewpoints that cover the intellectual landscape today. Cambridge Studies in Religion, Philosophy, and Society is a direct response to this recent and widespread interest and need.

RECENT BOOKS IN THE SERIES

Roger Trigg Religious Diversity: Philosophical and Political Dimensions

John Cottingham Philosophy of Religion: Towards a More Humane Approach

William J. Wainwright Reason, Revelation, and Devotion: Inference and Argument in Religion

Harry J. Gensler Ethics and Religion

Fraser Watts Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality: Concepts and Applications

Gordon Graham Philosophy, Art, and Religion: Understanding Faith and Creativity

Keith Ward The Christian Idea of God: A Philosophical Foundation for Faith

Timothy Samuel Shah and Jack Friedman Homo Religiosus? Exploring the Roots of Religion and Religious Freedom in Human Experience

Sylvia Walsh Kierkegaard and Religion: Personality, Character, and Virtue

Roger S. Gottlieb Morality and the Environmental Crisis

J. L. Schellenberg Religion after Science: The Cultural Consequences of Religious Immaturity

Clifford Williams Religion and the Meaning of Life: An Existential Approach

www.cambridge.org

Religion and the Meaning of Life

An Existential Approach

CLIFFORD WILLIAMS



CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press 978-1-108-42156-0 — Religion and the Meaning of Life Clifford Williams Frontmatter <u>More Information</u>

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108421560 DOI: 10.1017/9781108377317

© Clifford Williams 2020

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2020

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd. Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data NAMES: Williams, Clifford, 1943– author.

TITLE: Religion and the meaning of life : an existential approach / Clifford Williams, Trinity International University, Illinois.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom : Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Series: Cambridge studies in religion, philosophy, and society | Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2019041193 (print) | LCCN 2019041194 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108421560 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108377317 (ebook)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Philosophy and religion. | Meaning (Philosophy) | Life. | Religion. | Spirituality.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC BL51.W5877 2020 (print) | LCC BL51 (ebook) | DDC 204-dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019041193

LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019041194

ISBN 978-1-108-42156-0 Hardback ISBN 978-1-108-43298-6 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

Acknowledgments		<i>page</i> vi
	Introduction	I
Ι	Why Should We Care about Meaning?	8
2	Boredom	30
3	Denial of Death	42
4	Acquiring Meaning	56
5	Suicide	79
6	The Divine One	97
7	Life after Death	112
8	Obstacles	135
9	How Should We Live So as to Die Well?	153
	Epilogue: Facts the Heart Can Feel	174
Notes		176
References		179
Index		186

Acknowledgments

I want to thank Chad Meister and Paul Moser, editors of the series of which this book is a part, for asking me to do this book; the two anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press for their valuable insights; students in my Death and the Meaning of Life classes at Wheaton College for their discussions of issues treated in this book; Ryan Kemp, Bob O'Connor, Adam Wood, and Jay Wood for discussing the first chapter at a Wheaton College philosophy department colloquium; Kent Anderson, Michael Au-Mullaney, Joshua LeClere, Laurie Lee, Tim McGarvey, Mark Talbot, Christie Taylor, Henry Williams, and Brady Woods for commenting on one or more of the chapters; Sadie McCloud and Phil Christie for talking about ideas connected to meaning; Christine Dunn and Linda Williams for their copyediting; and Sarah Denne and Jeni Eklund for going through the whole book and discussing it with me chapter by chapter at Live Café in Oak Park, Illinois. I owe Sarah and Jeni big thanks for their numerous insights that made their way into the entire book.

I also thank Wipf & Stock Publishers for their permission to use a condensed and reworked version of pages 59–70 in my *The Divided Soul: Kierkegaardian Explorations* for four pages in "The Lure of the Crowd" in Chapter 8.