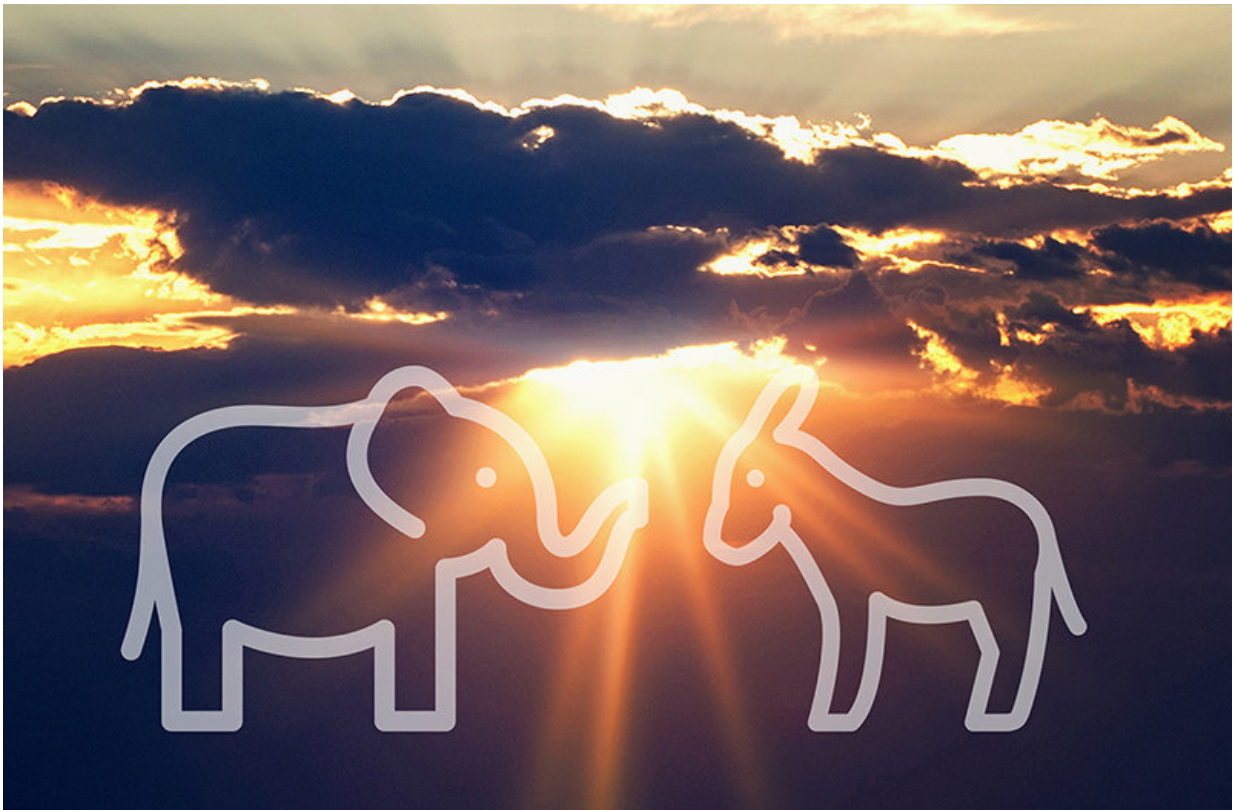


What is the meaning of life? Ask a conservative

July 17 2018, by Emily Gersema



More conservatives than liberals reported feeling a sense of purpose or that they live a meaningful life, according to a USC study. Credit: Letty Avila

"To be or not to be?" Hamlet asked aloud as he pondered the meaning of life.

Maybe he was a liberal.

A new USC Dornsife-led [psychology study](#) shows that conservatives, more so than liberals, report feeling that their lives are meaningful or have purpose.

"Finding [meaning](#) in life is related to the sense or feeling that things are the way they should be, and that there is a sense of order," said David Newman, a [doctoral candidate](#) at USC Dornsife's Mind and Society Center. "If life feels chaotic, then that would likely dampen your sense that life is meaningful."

The results, published on June 15 in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, were based on five studies examining how strongly conservatives and liberals feel that their lives have purpose.

Belief in God

The scientists analyzed results from two nationally-representative samples and three additional samples in which well-being was assessed in various forms. Altogether, these studies encompassed thousands of participants from 16 countries and spanned four decades.

Participants usually ranked their [political ideology](#) on a scale from one to seven, ranging from "extremely conservative" to "extremely liberal." They also rated how much they agreed or disagreed with statements such as "my life has a real purpose" and "I understand my life's meaning."

The psychologists were aware that religious belief may be a factor and adjusted the results to account for it. Even then, the association between political leanings and sense of purpose held strong.

The results suggest "that there is some unique aspect of political

conservatism that provides people with meaning and purpose in life," the scientists wrote.

What does your lean mean?

Newman cautioned against making conclusions about anyone's state of mind and overall well-being based solely on their political leanings.

"It doesn't mean that every conservative finds a lot of meaning in their life and that every liberal is depressed," Newman said.

Other factors may influence whether someone feels that his or her life is meaningful. "These factors range from various personal characteristics such as how religious someone is to situational influences such as one's current mood," Newman said.

More information: David B. Newman et al, Conservatives Report Greater Meaning in Life Than Liberals, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2018). DOI: 10.1177/1948550618768241 , [dx.doi.org/10.1177/1948550618768241](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550618768241)

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