

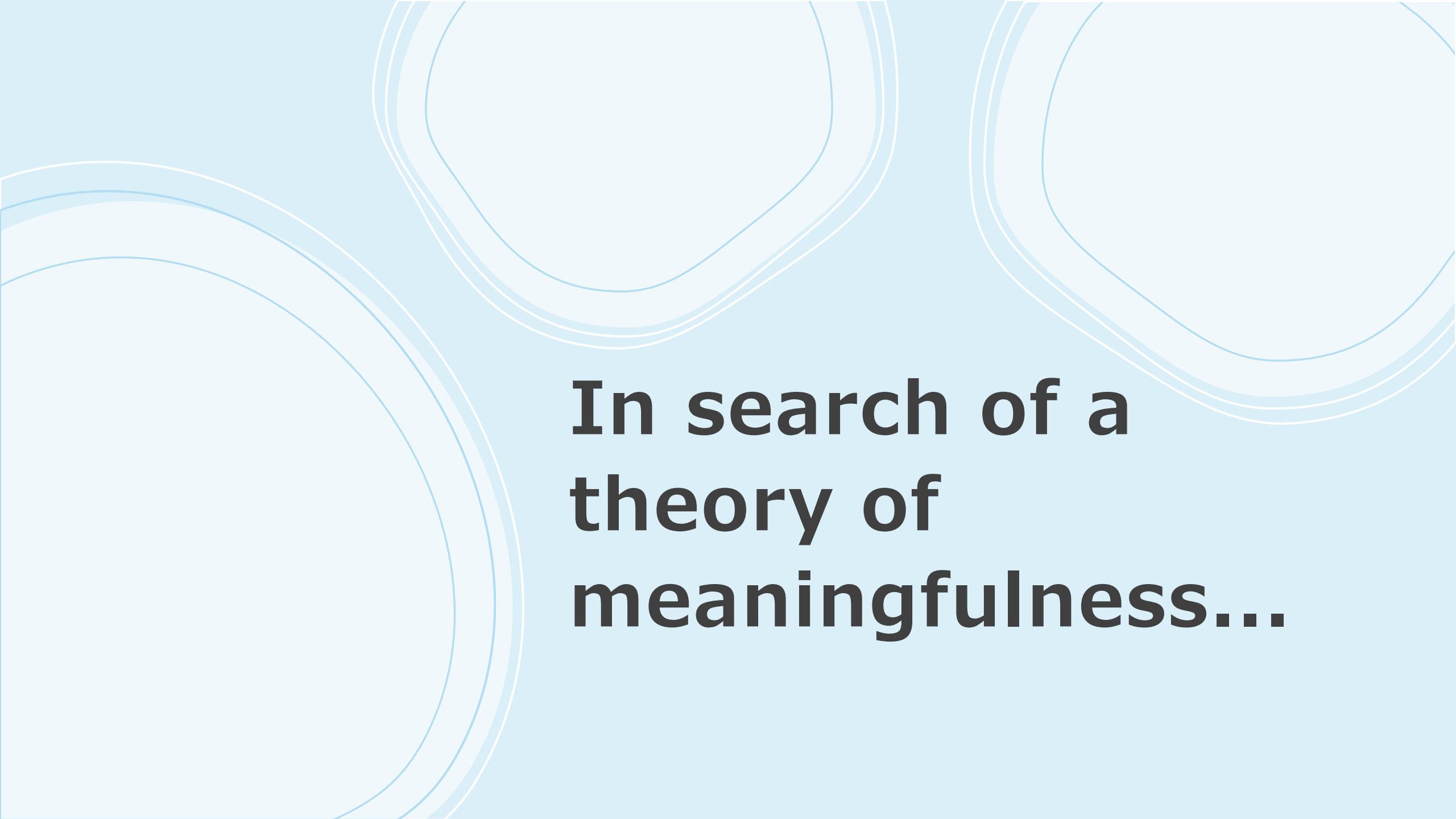


Meaningfulness

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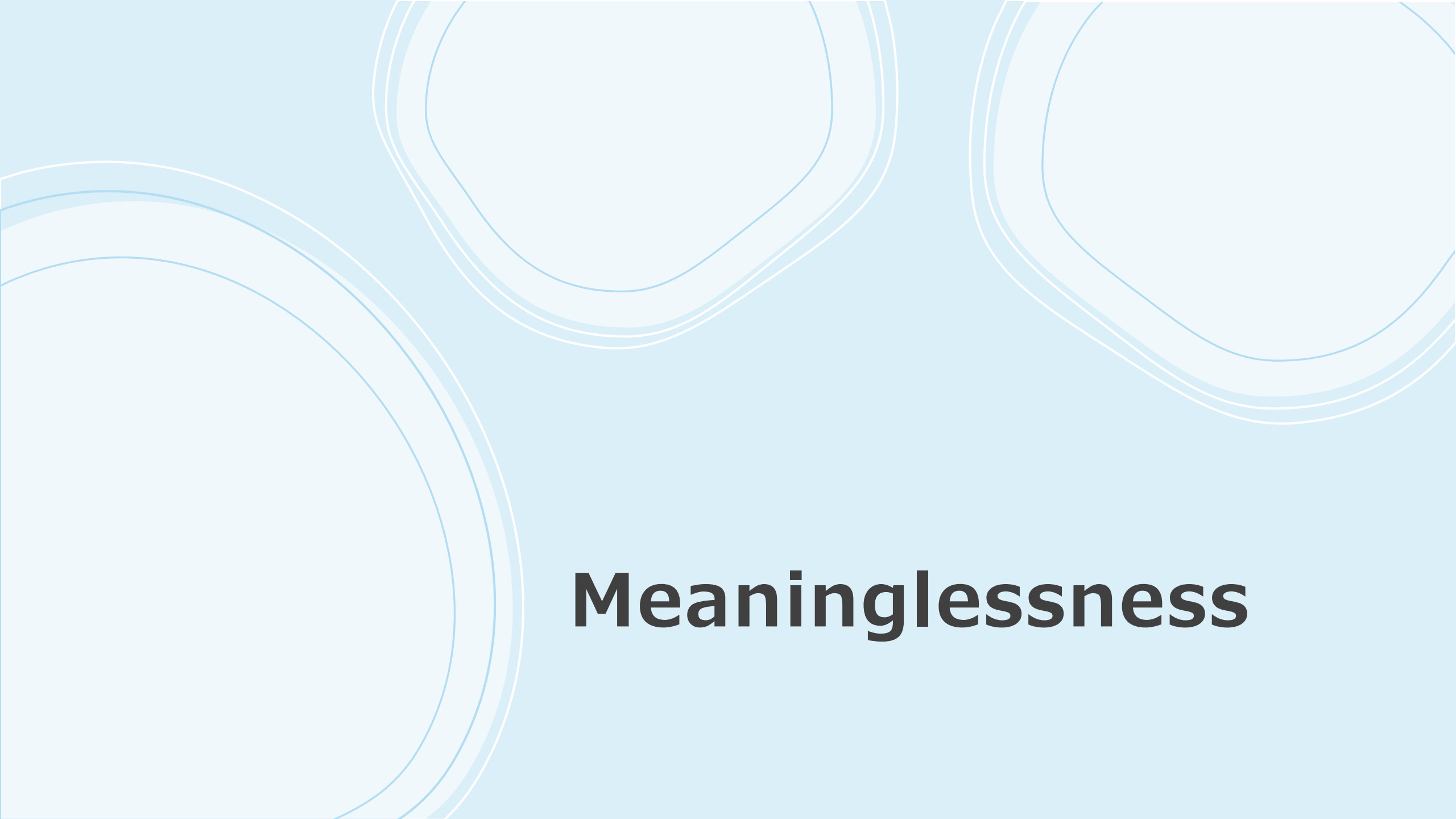


**In search of a
theory of
meaningfulness...**



Your idea of meaningfulness

Write down an activity that
feels meaningful to you.



Meaninglessness

The Myth of Sisyphus



As punishment from the gods, Sisyphus must eternally push a boulder up a mountain, only for it to roll back down again.

Sisyphus is often used by philosophers as a symbol for a meaningless existence.

The Myth of Sisyphus



Q1. If Sisyphus's existence is meaningless, what makes it meaningless? What does it lack?

The Myth of Sisyphus

"I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. **One must imagine Sisyphus happy.**" (Albert Camus)



The Myth of Sisyphus



Imagine we want to help Sisyphus. We can't release him from his punishment, but we do manage to give him a potion that makes him really want to just push and push the boulder. He's beyond happy – he is positively delighted! In his mind, he is living his best life.

Q2. Is Sisyphus living meaningful life now that he is happy?

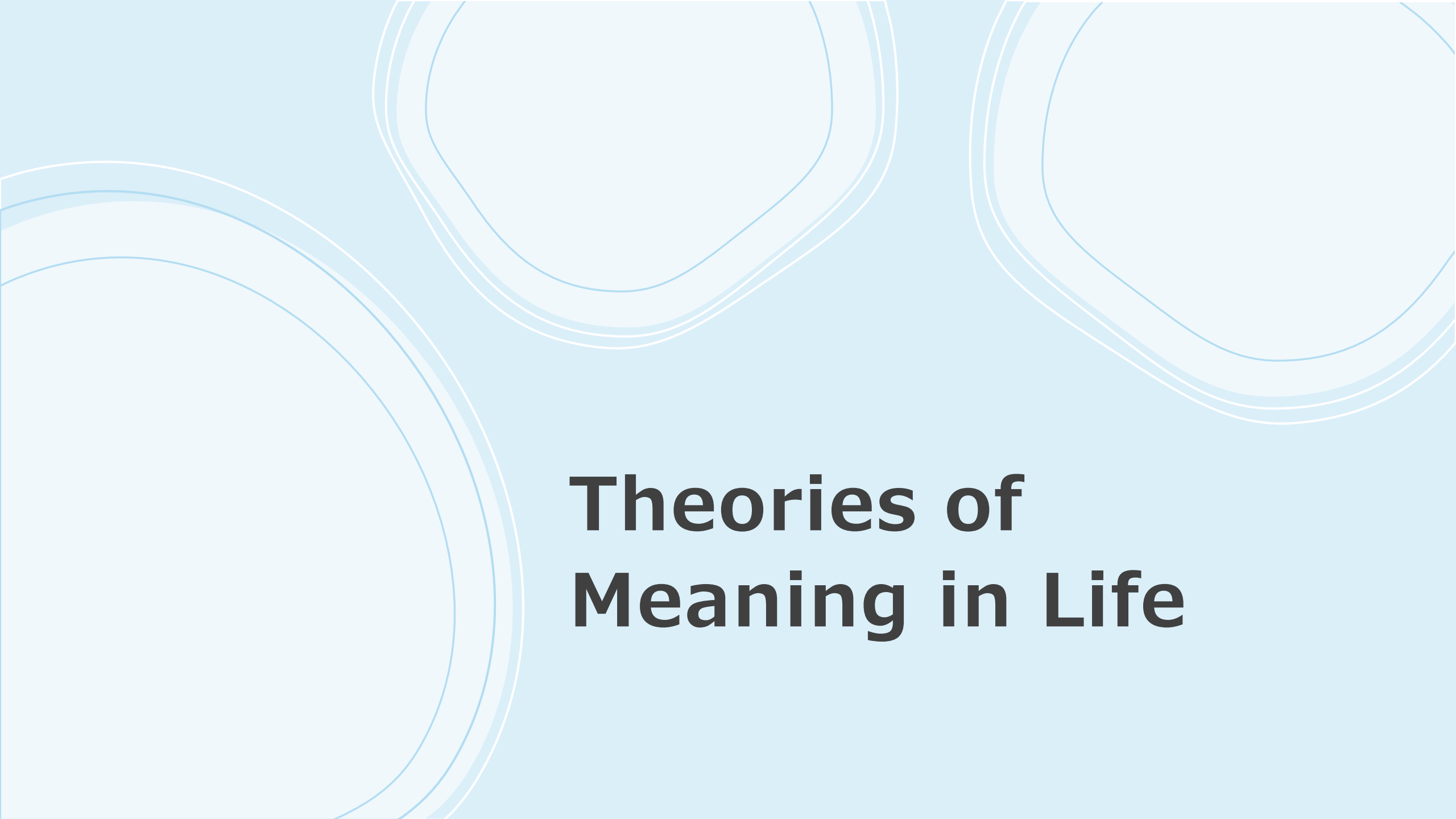


Seemingly silly behavior: man putting 21 black hats on a fire hydrant.



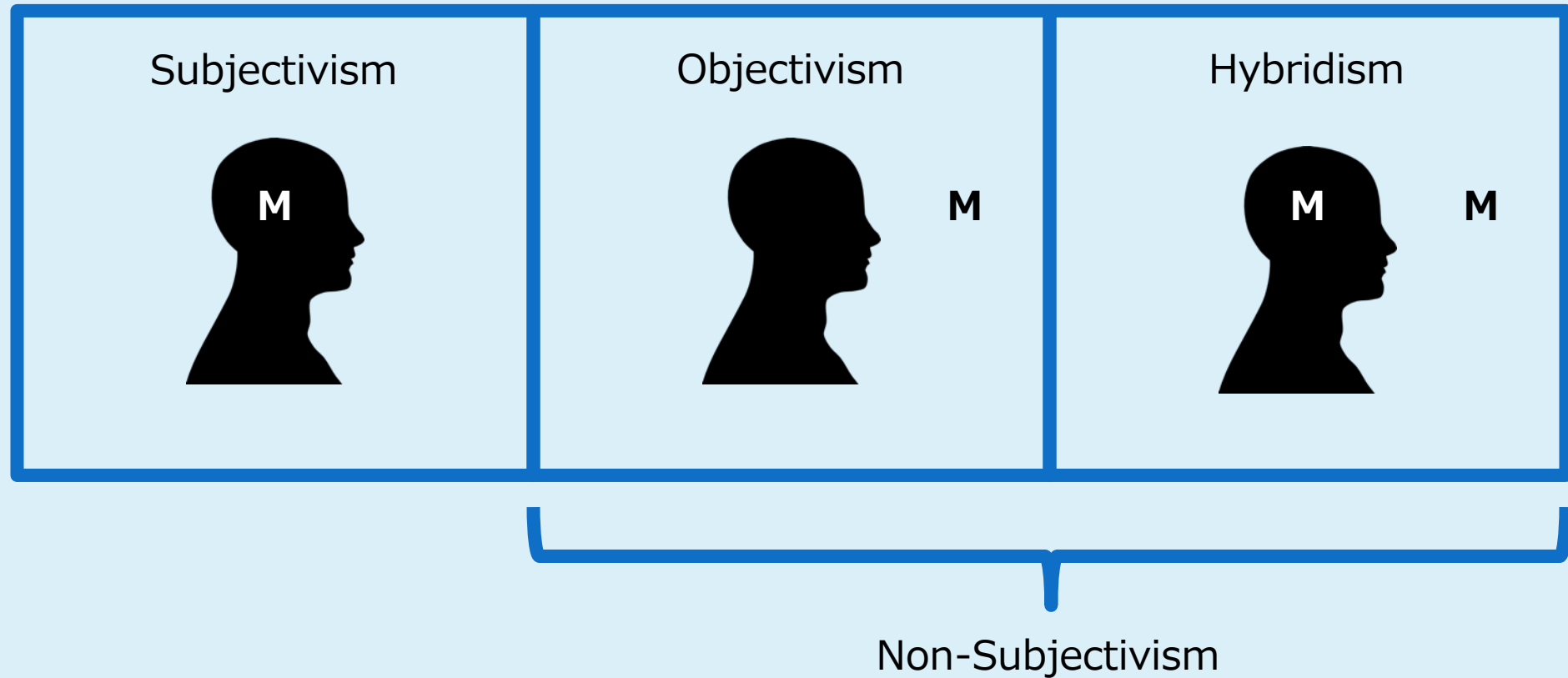
Sisyphean Silliness

Q3. Can any activity be made meaningful if we only add the right mindset?



Theories of Meaning in Life

Subjectivism and Non-Subjectivism





Susan Wolf's 'Fitting Fulfilment View': A Form of Hybridism

"Meaningfulness in life [comes] from loving something (or a number of things) worthy of love, and being able to engage with it (or them) in some positive way. As I have put it on other occasions, meaning in life consists in and arises from actively engaging in projects of worth. On this conception, meaning in life arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness, and one is able to do something about it or with it." (Susan Wolf)



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Q4. Does hat-stacking satisfy Wolf's view? Why or why not?

Q6. Consider your own example of a meaningful activity using Wolf's theory. Is it meaningful?

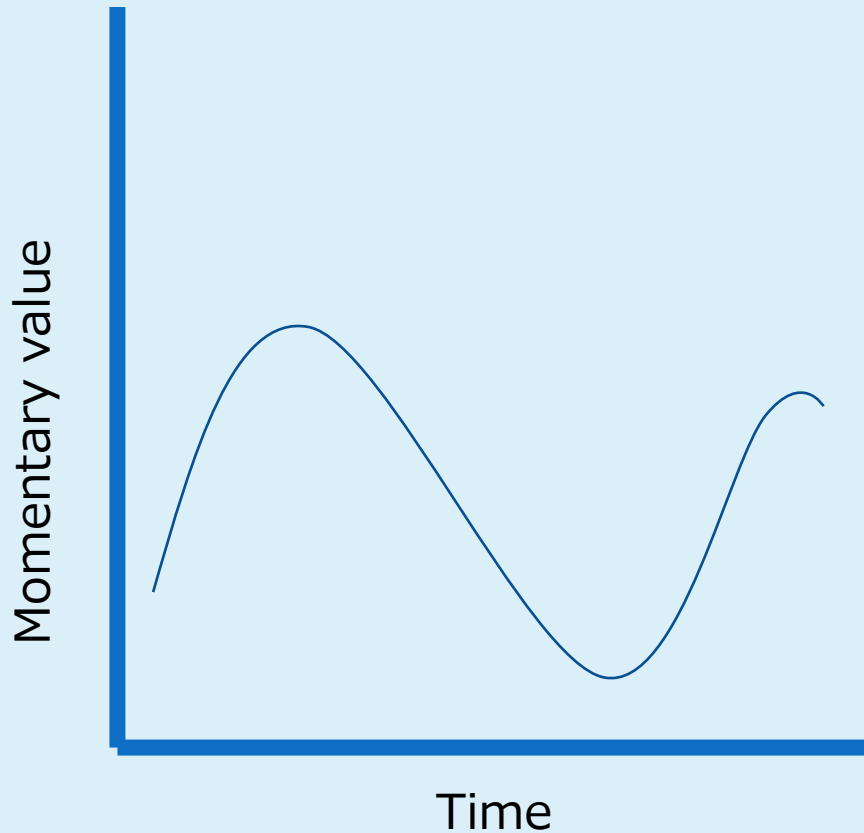


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Meaningfulness and Other Values

A hypothesis about life-value



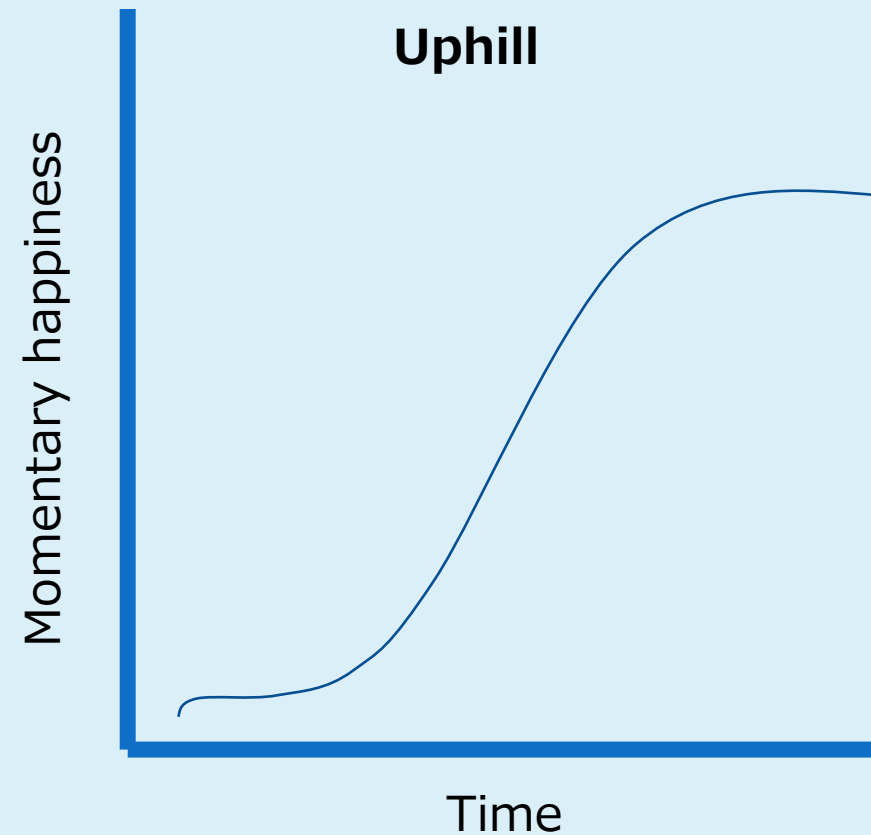
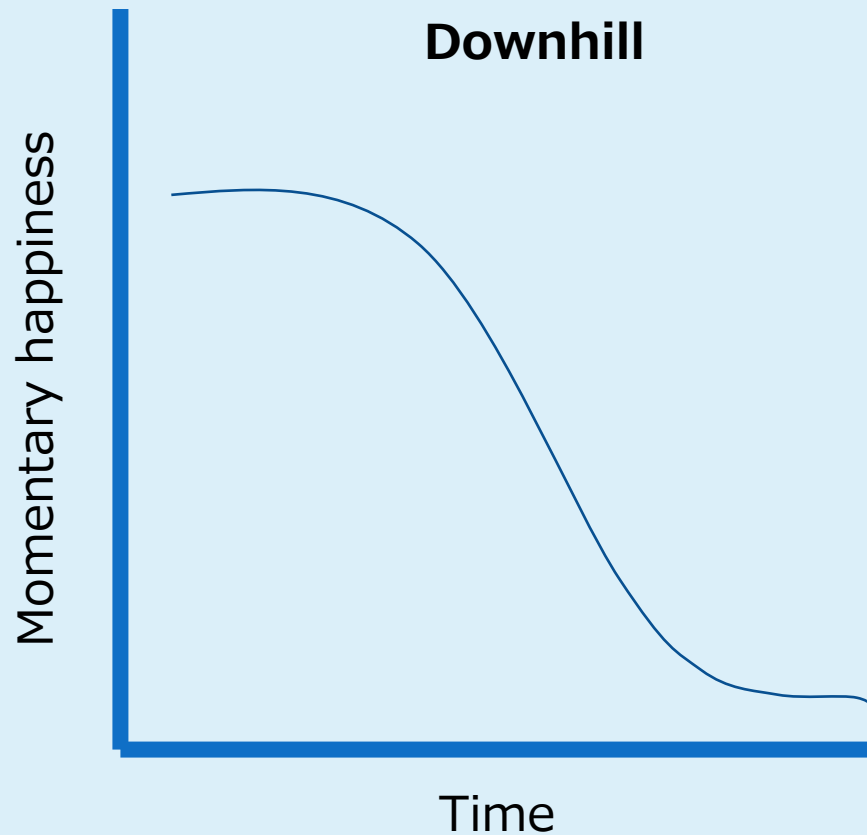
The overall value of your life is the sum of the happiness at each moment in your life.

Let's test this...

Challenge 1

These graphs describe two different lives. The sum of their momentary happiness is **exactly the same**.

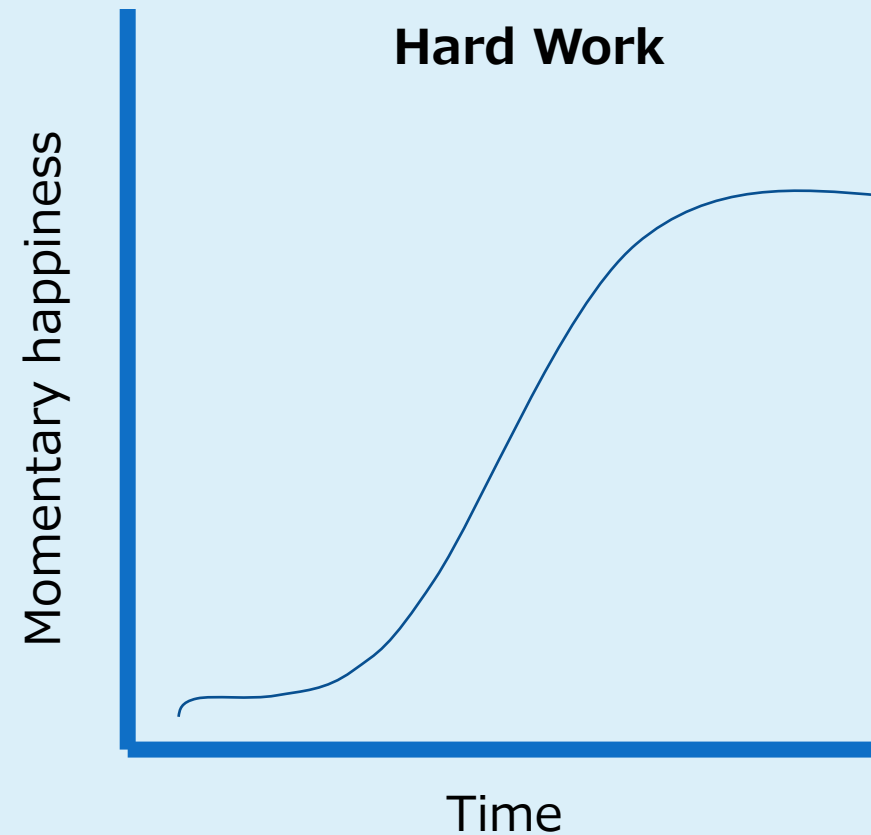
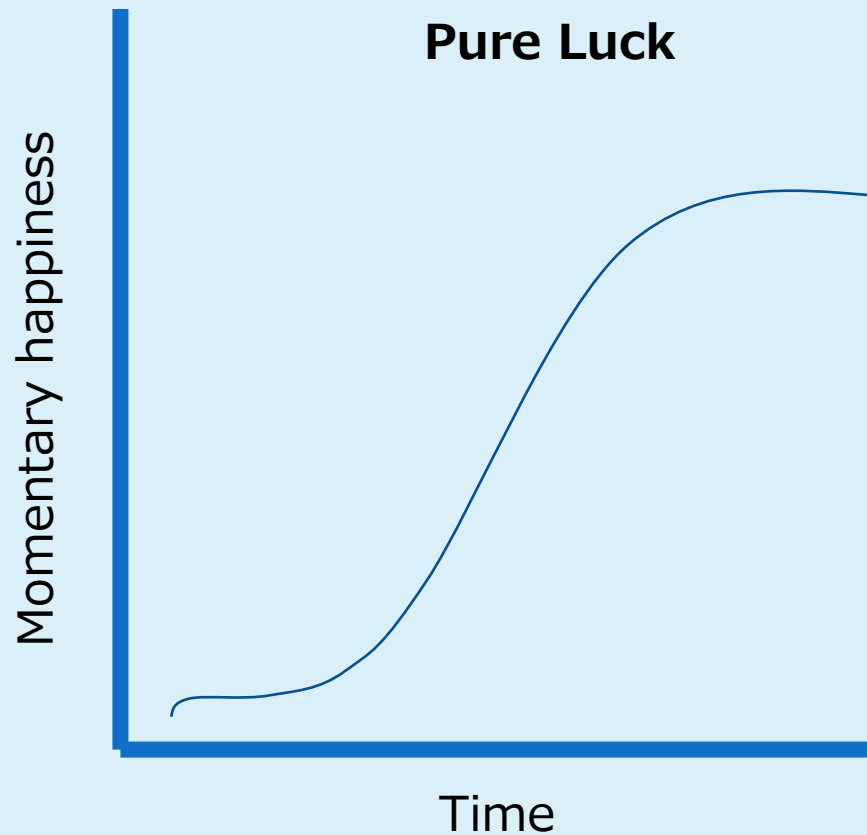
Q5. But which life would you choose for yourself?



Challenge 2

These graphs describe two different lives. The sum of their momentary happiness is **exactly the same**. Their trajectories are **both uphill**. The only difference is that one was due to **pure luck** and the other was due to **hard work**

Q6. But which life would you choose for yourself?

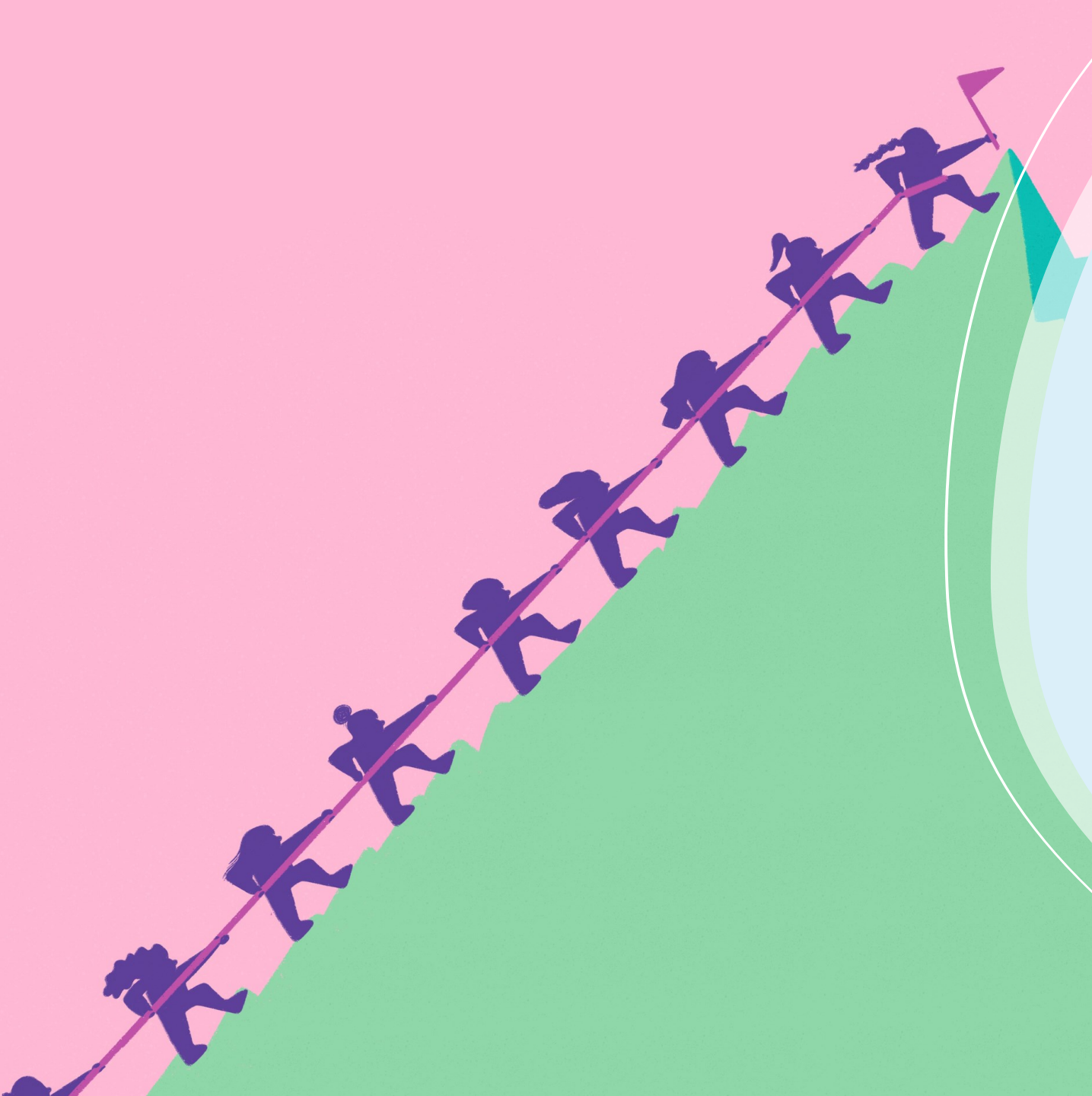


Discussion

Q7. Reflect on your choices from the previous questions (i.e., Downhill v. Uphill, Pure Luck v. Hard Work).

Were your choices guided by adding meaning to your life?

Or by something else (e.g. happiness, virtue, etc.)?

An illustration of a team of ten people, represented by purple silhouettes, climbing a green mountain. They are connected by a red rope, and the person at the top is holding a red flag. The background is a light blue sky with a pink and white curved border on the right side.

Bonus Exercise

You are in charge of a new national plan to increase the amount of meaningfulness in people's lives.

Q8. What policies and actions do you implement?

Further Resources

**LISTEN TO SUSAN WOLF ON THE
PHILOSOPHY BITES PODCAST**



**READ 'THE MEANINGS OF
LIFE' BY ROY BAUMEISTER**

