

On Purpose: How We Create the Meaning of Life, by PAUL FROESE. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 256 pp.; \$27.95 (hardcover).

Froese's book, *On Purpose: How We Create the Meaning of Life*, takes a big bite. The aim, as he puts it, is to show how "history, norms of self, communities of Truth, cultural tempos, and power dynamics determine how each of us understands the meaning of life" (20). And when Froese says "each of us," he means it, as the book's investigation includes Tolstoy, Whitman, Rush Limbaugh's "Dittoheads" fan club, Biblical literalists, civil war surviving Liberians, Phil Jackson, Rick Warren, Anthony Robbins, Eckhart Tolle, Anna Karenina, Oprah Winfrey, Maya Angelou, several Dostoyevsky characters, Seneca, Kierkegaard and more. Of course, there are hazards that come with making such a diverse—and theoretically all-inclusive—range of human beings the subject matter for the same question, how do we create the meaning of life? Froese is aware of the risks, and I am tempted to say that he accepts them as a necessary part of a second implicit purpose of the book. Froese tells us from the beginning that unlike most authors who weigh in on the subject, he will offer no programmatic advice, but he does carry with him an empathetic care for the subjects grappling with their existential questions. This empathetic care he shares with his readers to describe and understand, but also to engage the imagination of the reader, because, "Imagination enables all of us to create purposes that society never taught us" (20).

The exercise of thinking about Tolstoy, the Limbaugh Dittoheads, and Oprah together is engaging of the imagination, but it is also analytically fruitful, as it invites intriguing comparative questions. There is, for example, the paradox that is built into the question that the purpose-pursuing human subject poses for herself: How do I find the purpose of my life? How do I choose the meaningful path that transcends (overwhelms and escapes)

my individual choosing self? If it is transcendental enough to anchor my otherwise meaningless existence, how could it also be one among many equally available and selectable options? Throughout the book, Froese emphasizes the social sources and parameters involved in finding one's purpose, such that his answer to the paradox of choosing into something infinitely larger than the choosing self is that these things are not the subject of choice to the extent that we tend to think. This tendency to emphasize choice in these matters is cultivated in our own narrative explanations and by the "purpose industry" and the promise of therapeutic healing that it sells.

Froese's emphasis on the determinant influence of social context brings to mind *Habits of the Heart*, and the underlying worry for its authors that the social bases of religious life in America were being eroded, opening the way for the infamous path of "Sheliaism," a hodge-podge of self-oriented and self-directed practices, beliefs, and feelings that are accountable to no larger group and no larger tradition. Overall, Froese's is a counter-Sheliaism thesis, arguing that to the extent that people find purposeful meaning in their lives, it is because they have connected themselves to larger social contexts. Indeed, Shelia is typical of what Froese calls "self-enchantment," and contrary to Shelia's documenters, Froese does not seem to worry that self-enchantment carries the risk of eroding the social bases of spirituality; self-enchantment, in Froese's estimation, still sits inside a social framework. Froese's analysis of "self-enchantment" takes up three such frameworks, conceptualized in the programs of Anthony Robbins, Rick Warren, and Eckhart Tolle. Robbins, Warren, and Tolle work with different conceptions of self, but in each case, I wondered to what extent their programs merit the description "enchantment," which carries magical connotations, reason-defying relationships, and practices between self and world. The Robbins self, on the contrary, is one of *super-instrumental reason*; and while Warren and Tolle invite struggles with the ego-self that open space for something else, God in the former and

transcendent experience in the latter, calling these practices of enchantment suggests a quasi-magical relationship between self and world that I did not see evidenced. If the Robbins, Warren, and Tolle programs yield “self-enchantment” because they aim to uncover a satisfying, beautiful, and powerful moral purpose deep within oneself, is there any kind of purposeful feeling that is not “self-enchantment”?

Froese’s invitation to think all of these cases together, everything from Tolstoy to Limbaugh Dittoheads, as empirical instantiations of the same purpose-seeking problematic provides rich opportunities to pose all kinds of questions of this sort. The challenge is to find concepts that reach across broad empirical terrain while retaining their distinction-drawing capacities. Froese’s book is a bold and engaging step in this direction, and, as such, it is also an invitation for more steps of its kind.

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If I Give My Soul: Faith Behind Bars in Rio de Janeiro, by ANDREW JOHNSON.
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If I Give My Soul is an in-depth examination of the relationship between Prison Pentecostalism and narco-gangs in Brazil. Johnson examines a number of themes through sociological and historical perspectives, from Brazil’s marginalizing social structure, to the origins and growth of Pentecostalism in L.A. and Brazil, to the codes of Prison Pentecostalism and

narco-gangs in Brazil’s prisons and on the streets. Johnson weaves through these themes in several chapters, forcefully asserting Brazil’s general populace affords its poor very little—if any—human dignity, and that it is this phenomenon that drives the growth of and adherence to Pentecostalism. Prison Pentecostalism enables, as Johnson argues, a “politics of presence”: that a “persistent presence inside the prisons and jails is a political act with political consequences—inmates are people of value and worthy of redemption” (12).

Johnson takes us deep into Brazil’s prisons, having collective qualitative data at three sites for this study. The first field site is an APAC prison in Minas Gerais, where Johnson conducted preliminary participant observation in preparation for his larger study. Johnson’s second field site, where he spent the greatest amount of time, is Salgado jail, an impoverished suburb in Rio de Janeiro’s outskirts. Here, the growing mafia demonstrates its presence, as Johnson describes a nonfunctioning metal detector, a VIP section in the jail, and how the mafia holds the keys to cells and supervises visiting hours. Johnson carefully documents how he gained access to Salgado jail—presenting his research to the warden and enlisting his support—as well as how faith-based groups visited the inmates and helped provide Johnson with further access. Johnson spent 2 weeks at Salgado jail, in two 1-week stints, apart from conducting 20 recorded interviews there. Johnson also paid a few monthly visits to Cinza prison, though he did not conduct interviews there.

Johnson also takes us to the neighborhood in which CV (the mafia that runs Salgado jail) rules over the lives of residents, resists government intrusion, and navigates relationships with local Pentecostal leaders. Johnson describes the CV’s outright hostile attitude toward the state, blocking entrance to its streets with concrete-filled metal drums, and taking over the state’s responsibilities, such as protection of its residents. The narco-gang’s replacement of the state comes at a high price, however, as its