Quality of Life Philosophy V. Seizing the Meaning of Life and Becoming Well Again

Søren Ventegodt, Niels Jørgen Andersen, and Joav Merrick
The quality of Life Research Center, Copenhagen, Denmark
Copyright © 2003 Soren Ventegodt et al.

Abstract

This paper presents a positive philosophy of life developed to support and inspire patients to take more responsibility for their own lives and to draw more efficiently on their known or hidden resources. The idea is that everybody can become wiser, use themselves better, and thus improve quality of life, subjective health, and the ability to function. To be responsible means to see yourself as the cause of your own existence and state of being. To be the one who forms your own life to your liking, so that others do not shape it in the way they prefer to see you. Seen this way, taking responsibility in practice is one of the most difficult things to do. One of the greatest and most difficult things to do in this context is to be able to love. To be the one who loves, instead of being the one who demands love, care, awareness, respect, and acceptance from somebody else. Since almost all of us have had parents who maybe loved us too little and mostly conditionally, we all harbor a deep yearning to be loved as we are, unconditionally. A lot of our energy is spent trying to find recognition and acceptance, more or less as we did as children from our parents, who created the framework and defined the rules of the game. But today, reality is different. We have grown up and now life is about shaping our own existence. So we must be the ones who love. This is what responsibility is all about. Taking responsibility is, quite literally, moving the barriers in our lives inside ourselves. Taking responsibility for life means that you are willing to see that the real barriers are not all these external ones, but something that can be found within yourself. Of course there is an outside world that cannot be easily shaped according to your dreams. But a responsible point of view is that although it is difficult, the problem is not impossible; it is your real challenge and task. If there is something you really want, you can achieve it, but whether it happens depends on your wholehearted, goal-oriented, and continuous attempts. This paper describes the philosophy about seizing the meaning of life and becoming well again, even when there is little time left.
Existentialist views concerning the meaning of life are based on the idea that it is only personal choices and commitments that can give any meaning to life since, for an individual, life can only be his or her life, and not an abstractly given entity. By going this route, existentialist thinkers seek to avoid the trappings of dogmatism and pursue a more genuine route. When the world improves, life in general improves, so, while the individual desires to live well and fully, humanists feel it is important to do so in a way that will enhance the well-being of all. While the evolution of the human species is still (for the most part) a function of nature, the evolution of humanity is in our hands and it is our responsibility to progress it toward its highest ideals.