

Introduction

Meaning in Life

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What, if anything, gives meaning to people's lives? Is there some special value attached to living a meaningful life? Do we have reason to pursue the presence of meaning in our lives; in the lives of near and dear; maybe even in the lives of people more generally? Questions such as these were until recently seldom discussed in professional philosophy journals, anthologies, or monographs. Over the last few years, however, the philosophical literature on life's meaning has been steadily increasing. This is a step in the right direction. Because even though meaning in life is not the only important topic in philosophy, it is certainly one important topic. The papers in this issue of *De Ethica* are all devoted to this currently growing field in philosophy.

One of the most prolific and influential philosophers writing on meaning in life today is Thaddeus Metz. In his contribution to the present issue, 'Neutrality, Partiality, and Meaning in Life', Metz investigates in what respects the value of meaningfulness – which Metz assumes is a value that is distinct both from prudential value and from moral value – is neutral or partial. He argues that while the value of meaningfulness is plausibly neutral in relation to time, it is not so in relation to any other conditions.

In 'Meaning in Life and the Metaphysics of Value', Daan Evers questions whether meaning in life, as many parties to the debate seem to assume, really requires the existence of objective value. Evers considers different arguments that could be brought forward in defense of such a claim, but he finds them all wanting.

My own contribution, 'A Subjectivist Account of Life's Meaning', is an attempt to defend a subjectivist account or theory of what makes a person's life meaningful. According to the account that I favor, your life is meaningful to the extent that your categorical desires are fulfilled or satisfied. I argue that this account avoids the problems facing other accounts (both objective and subjective) that have been proposed in the literature, and also that it does not fall prey to various independent objections that could be raised against it.

In the fourth and final paper, 'What Good is Meaning in Life?', Christopher Woodard offers an challenging critique of a view shared by many philosophers writing on meaning in life, namely that meaningfulness is a distinct kind of final value. Woodard rejects the final value claim with respect to meaning in life, and instead suggests a view according to which meaningfulness is only instrumentally valuable.

Earlier versions of these papers were presented at a workshop on Meaning in Life and Objective Values at Umeå University in November 2016.

