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PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE "ART OF LIVING"[1]

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Abstract: The article deals with philosophical questions on the "art of living" in philosophy in recent decades. It provides an overview of the conceptions that continue to resonate in philosophy, covering the basic approach to conceptions of the "art of living" found in the work of theorists such as P. Hadot, J. Kekes, A. Nehamas, Z. Bauman, A. MacIntyre, R. Veenhoven, W. Schmid, and J. Dohmen.

The basic framework of the "art of living" can, we believe, be imagined as a square, where each side represents an essential component (attribute): 1. *value system*; 2. *integrity of life*; 3. *meaning of life*; 4. *authenticity of life*. The art of living therefore presupposes that there is a value system the individual can use as a navigational guide and to make decisions in the world. It also presupposes an ability to integrate one's life within a meaningful whole and to seek out and find the meaning of one's life. Finally the art of living depends on the ability to lead an authentic life.

Key words: art of life; value system; integrity of life; meaning of life; authenticity of life.

Rediscovering the philosophy of the "art of living"

As the Dutch philosopher Joep Dohmen has said, the "art of living" has regained importance in recent decades; today philosophy is returning to its original goal and proposing that its aim should once again to teach people self-education (Dohmen, 2005, pp. 16-17).

The contemporary philosophy of the art of living is attempting to resolve the issue of "How should I live?" It sees the art of living as a form of self-direction towards the good life. The art of living is about teaching people to attain the good life. Even the phrase "the good life" is creeping back into philosophy, while questions about personal happiness and how a good life should be organised are once again being warmly embraced.[2] The classic Aristotelean question of the good life has again regained popularity (Dohmen, 2003, pp. 352-353).

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[2] This return to the good life is clearly linked to the revival of normative virtue ethics that was initiated in the early 1980s by MacIntyre, Nussbaum, Hurka, Cottingham, Kekes, Taylor, Steinfath, and many others.

In recent decades the philosophy of the "art of living" has encompassed Hadot's Stoic version (1995); Kekes' virtue ethics (2002); the aesthetic versions by Nehamas (1998) and Shusterman (1992; 1997); Schmid's liberal version (1998); and Dohmen's authenticity-based one (2003, 2005); in addition there is Ruut Veenhoven's utilitarian-based psychological hedonist version (2000; 2003) and others. These modern theorists have moved away from the classic Platonic, Aristotelean or Stoic visions of human nature (Dohmen, 2003, pp. 352-353). We shall now consider some of them.

P. Hadot's spiritual exercise. Pierre Hadot returned to notion of the "art of living" in the 1970s[3]. He had taught Michel Foucault and written about "spiritual exercises" as a lesson in how to read and talk about how we should live and die. Hadot's work was based on the idea that Western philosophy had originally been a way of life focusing attention in order to achieve internal transformation (Hadot, 1995, p. 264). Socrates' philosophy was about looking after the soul, while Plato saw it as practising for dying. Aristotle's philosophy was an analysis of practical wisdom. Epicurism and Stoicism taught us to live happy or, in other words, how to live without fear in the here and now.

Hadot thought it a pity that modern philosophy had lost its defining characteristics over time and had stopped being a practical philosophy to become mere education. Academic philosophy has no interest in the "good life", and so one has to return to philosophy conceived of as a way of life.

Hadot's conception of philosophy as a way of life was based on his study of Greek and Latin literature and an understanding of ancient thinking informed by history. Hadot was not of course the first, nor indeed the only thinker at that time, to note the relevance of the Antiquities to modern thinking, but he did emphasise that classic philosophy was above all a practical philosophy and that in ancient times philosophy had been *primarily* concerned with the "art of living" and the need to understand it as having shaped itself. Ancient philosophy called for every person to transform. It was a conversion, a transformative way of being and way of life, a search for wisdom. It was not simply about practising thinking or moral exercise but about spiritual exercise in the fullest sense of the word (Hadot, 1995).

While ancient philosophy proposed the art of human living, modern philosophy, thought Hadot, had cast for itself the role of constructing a technical language, one restricted to experts. With his emphasis on asceticism and the practice of spiritual exercise, Hadot forces us to reassess our modern assumptions when reading ancient writing. For him philosophy is the art of living, a way of life that takes all existence into account (Hadot, 2002).

Foucault's project to "aestheticise existence"

Dohmen (2003) argues that it was not until the work of Michel Foucault, inspired by the French historians that Paul Veyne and Pierre Hadot, that a truly renaissance project on the "art-of-living" emerged. For Foucault the art of living meant looking after oneself in order

[3] The humanist thinker Erich Fromm revisited the "art of living" in the post-second world war twentieth century era, warning that modern philosophy had moved away from conceiving of life as art. The modern "art of living" had been set against Christian ethics (Fromm, 1960).

to secure a certain degree of independence that can be realised within dependent relations. Foucault would later trace his way back to the classic art of living; he conducted an in-depth exploration of the life styles of the Ancient Greeks and Romans and was most struck by their vitality and "care of the self". Foucault points to various writings to show how in the first two centuries the Greeks and Romans created *practices* or *techniques* as part of their moral problematising through which they saw their life as a *work*, as *the greatest work of their life*, and one on which they worked copiously and unceasingly (as cited in Suvák, 2005, p. 134).

He also showed how as Hellenism declined increasing importance was placed on activities enabling human beings to cultivate relationships with themselves. The set of techniques people use to maintain control over themselves, and through which they gain pleasure from themselves, form the *art of existence.* Foucault used the term *artistic life* to highlight an aspect of an aesthetic existence that he considered extremely important: practical tasks through which the Greeks and Romans prescribed rules of behaviour, indicating an attempt to *transform oneself, change one's unique existence, create a work based on one's life* that corresponds to particular *stylistic criteria...* Understood thus a work cannot be set apart from the life we choose and actively create. The end goal of work aimed at self-cultivation is gaining *supreme control of one's self* (as cited in Suvák, 2005, p. 138).

Foucault talked of the need to create well-thought-out considered approaches so people can not only create behaviour rules for themselves but also attempt to change themselves, their own existence and attempt to make their life into a work of art that will produce aesthetic virtues and answers to specific stylistic criteria. He also spoke of the need to apply aesthetic values to oneself, to life and to one's existence.[4] His ideal of the "aesthetics of existence" attracted the support of Alexander Nehamas and Richard Shusterman.

Foucault thought that ancient ethics in its search for different life styles and shift towards the demand that human existence be aestheticised could help ground a particular moral perspective despite not positing Greek morality as morality *par excellence* but needed if we are to understand ourselves. Self-control, moderation and its other virtues are all intended to make life beautiful and intense. This approach is not based on universally valid principles but on self-control and the intention to turn one's life into a work of art. Foucault's project is rooted in the ethical activity of the individual, beginning from one's relationship with oneself (care of the self in the sense of paying less attention to external things—wealth, power, success, pleasure) and a determination to be different, and includes the aestheticisation of life as something that is lined to social functions (Foucault, 1991). This can be summarised by the following quote by Vladislav Suvák: Foucault did not believe in a morality that we should all surrender to—e.g. based on sensible principles (Foucault, 1991, pp. 53-64). The notion of morality as adherence to a codex, he believes, was on the way out or had already disappeared. One response to the absence of such a morality could be the individual search for an *aesthetics of existence*, which primarily involves spending one's life working on oneself. It is work that can be understood as being a specific will to *become different*, i.e. it is the will to reject the individuality forced upon us by society and its institutions. The aesthetics of

[4] His ideas are not consistent, however, because he did not have time to work on them systematically before his untimely death. The link between care of the self and care of others is also ambiguous.

existence is in this sense Foucault's version of an individually founded ethics—an "ethics" without "morality" (Suvák, 2005, pp. 143-144).

J. Kekes' virtue ethics. Many modern theorists would agree with John Kekes that "The art of life is the art of making a good life for oneself" (Kekes, 2002, p. xi). The art of life relates to a form of self-direction, aimed at the good life. Kekes thinks that the good life is characterised by certain common features, and he believes that it is possible to learn what makes some lives good and others not. He recognises that the good life necessarily comes in many different forms, is lived in diametrically different contexts and independently creates various dominant "styles". He therefore thinks it is beneficial to identify and investigate typical examples and analyse the key features that are constituent to a good life in a pluralist society.

Kekes' conception is a variant of virtue ethics in which building character is central. The concept of self-direction does not lie in radical juxtaposition to tradition but in the maintenance of a balance between tradition and reality (Kekes, 2002, p. 26). Anyone can learn to live with the help of moral rules and virtues, such as decency and honour. From the subjective point of view self-direction requires determination and a dominant position. The actions people perform gradually combine to form patterns, evolve and represent the character of the person. The characteristic or position in which a person lives is subjective, reflexive, temporal, evaluative and integrative amongst other things. Each characteristic occupies a dominant position, the core of the agent creating the psychological identity. These are the deepest, largely ingrained evaluative perspectives that determine a person's style (Kekes, 2002, p. 190).

Life's artists are highly motivated people whose consistent behaviour indicates a particular nature or character. They are well aware of the risks and "cultural pathologies" of the present day: moralism, hypersensitivity and romanticism. Kekes attempts to link ethics with aesthetics. An aesthetic perspective is associated with the self-creative aspect of personal fulfilment of one's life. The ethical perspective takes account of the specific universal and social moral rules that make a human social life possible (Kekes, 2002, p. 149). Each art of life project is located within a moral framework. Successfully practising the "art of living" means achieving the kind of results in life that are "personally satisfying and morally acceptable" (Kekes, 2002, p. 3).

Kekes considers personal virtues to be the basic elements that make up a personality and that are important for a person's identity and self-awareness. They are linked to the ideals that people accept as their own. The art of living requires people to continue pursuing the projects they engage in throughout their life. For Kekes the cultivation of personal virtues is deeply connected to the good life because personal virtues are personality characteristics, long-term tendencies to think, feel and act in a particular way, and they are a fundamental part of our identity that enables us to achieve personal satisfaction.

Life as art according to A. Nehamas. Alexander Nehamas writes about the "art of living" from an aesthetic perspective, as concerning a special kind of self-formation. The aim is to shape a unique individual, i.e. to acquire an original personality and way and form of life that is distinct from the rest of the world (Nehamas, 1998, p. 50). This can be achieved in two

ways: either by applying someone else's notion of life or by shaping our own "art of living". Nehamas discussed the following philosophers as presenting a model for life: Socrates, Montaigne, Nietzsche and Foucault.[5] From their writings we know how they construed and organised their identities. The aesthetic art of life is anti-universalist, since it does not present a particular way of life to be pursued by all. There are no rules on how to live. And just as there are many good works, so there are many good lives, but some of them may be judged to be better than the others. The aesthetic art of life is individual in essence; the main aim is to be unique (Dohmen, 2003).

Although Nehamas is convinced that the main concern in ancient philosophy was "how to live well", he himself said in an interview that unlike the ancient philosophers he was not persuaded that philosophy was the only way of leading a good human life (as cited in Suvák, 2015). Nor did he share the ancient contempt for manual and productive work, so for him a way of life that was implicitly rejected as belonging to the "art of living" could now take its place amongst successful good lives (as cited in Suvák, 2015).

According to Nehamas some excellent works of art are morally harmless, while others are morally neutral and yet others are morally dangerous. This is also true of an excellent life that presents us with models of new ways of life. A distinction must be made between the aesthetic and the moral criteria for success. Aesthetic values promote the ideals of difference and individuality, in contrast to common and general ideals of morality. But aesthetic values are a constant part of human lives and of our ethical framework that contains both universal and individual values. The main distinction between these is that moral values are required, whilst aesthetic ones are not. No one is obliged to become an artist. While aesthetic successes are met with admiration—appreciating an artistic attitude, moral good is more a question of respect (as cited in Suvák, 2015).

Bauman's life as a work of art. Zygmunt Bauman believes in a new individual-based morality. He thinks the fall of the modern "age of ethics" is the beginning of a postmodern "era of morality"; he talks of a "morality without ethics". Now that the ethical smoke clouds hiding a person's true moral fate have dissipated, it is finally possible to confront head on

[5] Nehamas distinguishes two conceptions of philosophy: philosophy as a theoretical discipline and philosophy as a way of life, the art of living. This first conception is dominant today (Nehamas, 1998, p. 3). Nehamas himself devoted his attention to philosophy as a way of life, distinguishing three genres of the art of living. The first is illustrated by Socrates' early Platonic dialogue in which Socratic ideals are universalist and he invites others to join him in examining life (which is subsequently the only one worth living); (Nehamas, 1998, p. 9). The second is illustrated by Plato's middle and late works in which, according to Nehamas, he proffered a series of controversial arguments designed to prove that a particular kind of life is best for all people. These first two genres are universalist in intent: they claim to show that a specific mode of life is best for all. The third genre of the "art of living", the primary subject of Nehamas's study is, he claims, the least universalistic of all. "According to it human life takes many forms and no single mode of life is best for all. Philosophers like Montaigne, Nietzsche and Foucault articulate a way of living that only they and perhaps few others can follow.... They do not want to be imitated, at least not directly. That is, they believe that those who want to imitate them must develop their own art of living, their own self..." (Nehamas, 1998, p. 10.) The third genre is "aestheticist" and "individualistic" and is the genre he himself would like to emulate in his own life (Nehamas, 1998, p. 10).

the "bare truth" of the moral dilemmas emanating daily from the lives of people struggling with the dreadful ordeal of having to make choices. The dilemma that reveals itself in all its harshness—with its ambiguities that have not been softened, polished or removed by philosophy.

For Bauman the modern conception of life is one of "fulfilling a mission"—realising potential, making use of the opportunities a person's disposition naturally has to offer, so it is basically the complete and consequential construction of identity in its entirety. This goal determined the selection of resources. Life consisted of the precise planning of the route, of the sober reflection of how difficult this is and the rational calculation of the costs and effectiveness of the means of getting there. He saw life as a whole. The absence today of a stable identity is a result of the modern consumerist world in which it is very hard to maintain a permanent identity. In the past the choice of life project determined all other choices but in "liquid modernity" identity is flexible and in a constant state of flux. People constantly have to redefine themselves and become someone else. An artistic life should therefore lead to a stable identity, something that is not visible and easy to achieve. First we have to recognise that life is a work of art and that we are all life artists who, within the constraints of fate, make our own choices. Together these determine our lives. Taking on responsibility for the outcomes of the choices we make is the perfect choice; it is the art of life and has a role to play in our attempts at achieving happiness.

A. MacIntyre's search for the good life. In his book *After Virtue* (1981) the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre states that a good human life is a life spent searching for a good human life. It is about telling our life story and by so doing searching for human values.[6] Attempting to understand what makes a life good can only be an ongoing project. The value of human life is linked to human potential, and our potential is bewilderingly enormous. We engage in the widest range of valuable activities that give our life meaning. Our understanding of these activities is continually evolving, and moreover constant change forces us to engage in a continual process of evaluation and re-evaluation. Comparing the various tasks and skills people have enables us to develop our skills in different directions, encouraging us to develop different perspectives and ways of thinking and so gain the better mental tools available to us (MacIntyre, 1981).

MacIntyre begins from the fact that there are certain narratives that underpin the unity of human life, the notion of life as a "quest" or "path". Thus the *self* is linked to a quality and its unity, expressed as the unity of character, which is essential to narration. The construction of personal identity centres around "what is a good life?", and the foundation on which personal identity is created is a structured narrative. The unity of life does not require the chronological organisation of facts, but, like a work of literature, it tends to be dramatic in form. The unity is based on the unity of the spoken commentary that binds together birth, life and death—just as in a dramatic play. Human beings are responsible for the way their narratives play out. Narration presupposes an ability to assess success or failure, a quest for

[6] MacIntyre favoured an aesthetic version based on the medieval notion of how to lead a good life by following the example of a medieval expedition. This was a "journey of life" on which the goals of the search itself were learnt.

notions of the good and that the story exists above and beyond the individual. The individual is both writer and artist. We are restricted by the actions of others and by our social environment. Each of us plays the central figure in our own drama and a secondary role in the dramas of others. Therefore we are not autonomous writers because we are the protagonists in our own stories but because we also feature in the story of others. In this way the narrative conception of the self is created. The subject is whatever is legitimately considered by others to be the ongoing story a person develops from birth to death. MacIntyre does not therefore attempt to ground personal identity in psychological continuity. Personal identity is identity which requires the unified narration of the character, because without this unity there can be no subjects with narrative stories (MacIntyre, 1981).

For MacIntyre the notion of good has a social dimension because it is fundamentally and inextricably linked to the nature of the given historical community which limits the way in which individual notions of what is good are conceived. As we have already stated a good life is what we live when searching for a good life. In seeking narrative unity I learn what is a good life for me; I understand and interpret my life as a complete whole whilst attempting to live a consistent life. In this conception virtues have the function of enabling individual attempts at a coherent biography.

"Aesthetics of existence" according to W. Schmid. German philosopher Wilhelm Schmid also perceives the art of living to be individual. It is a reflexive activity involving sensible choices and social behaviours that are essential to the good life. Two important aspects are key to Schmid's "art of living": awareness and the process of choosing. A person has to develop a kind of spiritual sensitivity and be conscious of what is going on in his or her life. The "art of living" is based on making individual judgements, decisions and acting (Schmid, 1998, p. 188). Schmid is a liberal and does not subscribe to the idea that there are rules according to which we should all live; choices are left to the autonomous individual.

Schmid describes the art of living as the art of taking responsibility for one's own life and trying to make it "beautiful", of finding one's own path to living a good and beautiful life based on one's norms, values and beliefs. The key points of his conception are a focus on the individual; caring for the self as the heart of the art of living; the importance of prudence and practical wisdom; and an emphasis on the fact that every human being is part of the social structure.

According to Schmid a person can exercise a certain degree of autonomy through his/her body, mind and actions in the world, experiences, self-identity and feelings that are distinct from the body, mind and actions of other human beings. A person conducts his own individual life, but the individual cannot develop independently from society and the social context in which he or she lives. But, a person's development and growth is dependent on that society. All human beings are social beings and are almost always part of the social structure and community in which they acquired their characteristics of prudence and practical wisdom.

Schmid addresses the issue of the nature of the good life or, better put, a beautiful life that takes account of the conditions of contemporary modern and postmodern life. He uses the phrase "beautiful life" more often than "successful" or "good" life. Being successful in life is too narrow a concept, too focused on success in life, while the concept of the "good life"

is too broad in interpretation and meaning. A beautiful life, according to Schmid, is a life that can be viewed as a work. A beautiful life is unique, with no established set of rules and norms, one that is individually shaped on the basis of opportunity and possibility—hence the philosophy of the art of living can only be "operative" not "normative".

Why should we attempt the "art of living"? What is the motivation for such a quest? Schmid's response is that death is the final argument. For him (Schmid, 2000a, pp. 88-89) only the finality of life gives us reason to craft it into something good and beautiful. This presupposes that all human creatures wish to live a beautiful life, much like Aristotle's eudaimonia, the exceptional goal of human beings.

If death is the last argument and practice of freedom then the main question concerning the "art of living" is "how should I live my life?" (Schmid, 2000b, p. 26).

Schmid identifies two basic aspects relating to the "art of living". The first of these is caring for the self, caring for one's own life. The prerequisite to care and development is choice. The second aspect is "work". A beautiful life does not come easily; just as effort is required to produce a work of art so too is it needed to shape one's life. Schmid distinguishes four areas of work: the creation of habits, enjoyment, the purpose of pain and living with death. He describes five techniques: the conscious use of time, living experimentally, the art of anger and the art of irony and negative thinking. Life creates an endless stream of work, and the art of living cannot end until forced to by death.

The basic notion of the "art of living" is the ability to make decisions based on free choice. Free choice is important for the "art of living" as the active shaping of one's life. Free choice is made possible through the elements of prudence and practical wisdom in the sense that people are capable of making sensible decisions. When the "art of living" is carried out through the art of choice, it is flexible because it is full of opportunities for one to individually shape one's life in a variety of ways. The basic components of sensible choice are according to Schmid: intuition, conscience, caution and practical wisdom.

Reading and interpreting, identifying questions, decoding settings and situations all form what Schmid has termed the "hermeneutics of existence". This hermeneutic skill, when applied to art and life as well, is decisively important for the "art of living". It leads to the creation of a work of art, and Schmid called this the "aesthetics of existence".

R. Veenhoven's psychology version. Dutch theorist Ruut Veenhoven favours a utilitarian hedonist position. He states (Veenhoven, 2003, pp. 373-384) that the term the "art of living" points to the ability to lead a good life. But given that there are various differing opinions on what a good life is, there may be differences in the way this ability is interpreted. He distinguishes two main perspectives of the good life: a "virtuous life" and an "enjoyable life" (moralist and hedonist viewpoints), and he explores the kind of competences required for these. He then comes to the conclusion that they are both two different "arts of living".

The moralist perspective is based on the idea that life is better if moral principles are observed. Hence the "art of living" is the ability to adhere to these principles. The pleasurable version of the "art of living" is the ability to enjoy life. The art of a virtuous life is the ability to live according to moral principles; however, ideas vary as to what these may be: e.g. in religions these are more important than abstract principles, and ideologies also have their own "arts of living". A good life could also be conceived on the basis of contributing to

a better society or protecting the environment. The third model of the capacity for the "art of living" in today's pluralist society is the ability to life according to a personal life plan. The postmodern philosophy of life sees little value in adhering to rules or ideals; instead value is to be found in expressing oneself. In the first place a good life should be authentic, and the art of living consists in discovering oneself and the corresponding life that goes with it. The "art of living" then is the ability to develop one's own uniqueness, which requires creativity and courage (Veenhoven, 2003, pp. 373-384).

The pleasurable perspective of the good life holds that it is the enjoyment of life that makes it worth living; pleasure indicates that we are doing well. There are two main variants of hedonism: the narrower one focuses on enjoyable experiences, and the broader one is about overall life satisfaction or "happiness". Although they are related, they are different strategies that require different skills. Narrow hedonism comes in two forms: an unfulfilled life and a peaceful life. Instead a contemplative life is practised in friendly company in the garden. The objection to a narrowly conceived hedonism is that pleasure alone is not everything and that we have experience of deeper satisfaction, e.g. coping with new challenges and seeking sense in what we do.

The more broadly conceived version of hedonism assumes that much of this satisfaction comes from productive activity and social engagement. It recognises that these may bring a marked degree of discomfort but assumes that the pain is balanced out by deeper and more permanent satisfaction. Here quality of life is not about the number of pleasures but overall long-term life satisfaction or in other words "happiness".

What is the art of leading a happy life? According to Veenhoven it lies above all in a general ability to deal with life's problems, the possession of common sense and energy and being able to tolerate a certain degree of frustration. Social competences are particularly important because the need to have and maintain social contact requires a marked degree of skill, particularly in regard to maintaining love and relationships. Moreover, a person's situation depends very much on his or her position in the social network. At the same time a person also requires deep self-knowledge, and individualist societies also require a greater degree of autonomy.

Dohmen's "art of living" as a learning process. Joep Dohmen came up with the concept of the art of living as a "learning process", consisting of four aspects: *responsibility, self-knowledge, competence and attitude*, the result of which, if applied successfully, is an "authentic lifestyle". It is a process of guiding oneself towards the good life. It is about the art of acquiring one's own practical reflexive and normative wisdom, skills and competences. The outcome of this process is that the person acquires their own attitude to life (Dohmen, 2003, p. 363).

Responsibility for oneself and a willingness to be vigilant is part of the art of living that cannot be achieved without freedom, for not everything in life is beyond our control; "people are not just pawns in a game called life" (Dohmen, 2003, p. 363).

On the other hand we should not exaggerate personal responsibility since people cannot bear responsibility for everything. Many things happen to them which they are not the slightest bit responsible for and nor should they be. Furthermore a person cannot be aware of everything. One should be prepared for the misfortune that could strike sooner or later.

People should be aware of their limitations and their potential, and how to deal with these practically. The art of living comes up against these limits of personal responsibility, and the aim is to identify a particular approach and contextual responsibility (Dohmen, 2003, p. 363).

According to Dohmen the art of living is preceded by a basic motivation to become a life artist. If a person has no voluntary desire to reflect on his or her life, this will generally force him or her to do so. A life crisis could lead to someone being converted to the "art of living". The motivation to become a life artist is decisive—it is unlikely to occur without inspiration, the will or the want or without developing a deeper interest in taking responsibility for oneself.

Self-knowledge. A person who has no self-knowledge will have great difficulty with the "art of living", since he or she has a faulty self-image and no idea who he or she is. Such a person is unaware of his or her potential and limitations, competences, skills, values and life goals. Directing oneself towards a good life presupposes an awareness of the extent to which one is capable of directing oneself. Dohmen recalls that Michel Foucault identified four different questions on self-care: What? By which means? How? For what purpose? The answers to these questions assume the person has some kind of self-knowledge. According to Dohmen the art of living presumes that one can answer questions such as Who am I? Under what circumstances can I live? What do I know? What am I capable of? What do I want in life?

Practice and competence. Dohmen adopts Foucault's emphasis on the idea that self-care is not just about knowledge but about actions as well. The concepts of self-*realisation* and self-*discipline* relate to this. Self-knowledge is simply a first step towards directing oneself towards the good life and the art of living; practice in the general sense of the word is also important. Being capable of selecting and following rules, altering habits and acting differently all require theoretical and also practical knowledge. The following motifs are useful: being informed, cooperation, long-term education and integration (Dohmen, 2003, p. 366).

Contemporary philosophy of the art of living is based on the idea that modern individuals have to live their own lives. This is related to the value pluralism that is also a fundamental problem in the present era. Everyone has to ascertain within their own situation whether they truly want to be beautiful or happy or virtuous. *Authenticity* leads people to discover the value orientations they would truly like to live by. The truly modern answer to the question of the good life is always personally motivated. An authentic life requires a person to have their own evaluative hierarchy. The real discovery is that the order of values matters: What are my basic values? How can they be developed and are they legitimate? The art of living refers to a learning process based on variable increasing values that change. Consequently Dohmen advocates the following position on authenticity: it is possible to develop one's own attitude based on self-direction and on that basis lead a good life (Dohmen, 2003, p. 368).

Authenticity should not, however, simply be replaced by subjectivism. It is not a narcissistic attitude, on the basis of which a person acts purely pragmatically. A person is authentic if his or her actions correspond to his or her value hierarchy or diverges from existing rules. An authentic person will always be prepared to legitimise their activities and offer solid reasons for their behaviour.

Essentials of the "art of living"

When summarising his conception of the "art of living", J. Dohmen states that, despite having different opinions on the basic questions, methods and goals, present day philosophers hold a similar position on the "art of living": it is a learning process which involves knowledge and decision making being undertaken on the basis of a value system. Most theorists consider it to consist of three inseparable components: *knowledge, action* and *a value system*. Knowledge refers to all forms of self-knowledge and experiences, knowledge of the conditions, rules and a personal value scale. Reliance on the human imagination gives this learning process an artistic element. The emergence and shaping of habits, practices, exercises and therapy leads to decisiveness and determination. A specific set of rules based on the organisation of moral and non-moral values forms the basis of the approach to be taken. Each individual has to decide the value hierarchy they live in adherence with. The art of living therefore undeniably becomes the ability to live (Dohmen, 2013, p. 19).

The basic framework of the "art of living" can be seen as a square where each side represents an essential feature (attribute): 1. *value system*; 2. *integrity of life*; 3. *meaning of life*; 4. *authenticity of life*.

Value system. Postmodern philosophy approaches values as a high abstraction that is not an effect of knowledge but of a game; it is the outcome of a calculation, of the gains and losses in life (Sisáková, 2001, pp. 123-127). This postmodern line of thinking is also accompanied by a defence of values against spiritual divergence, fragmentation and indifference. Theorists repeatedly emerge who reconstruct modern subjectivity or individual identity and the centre of individual authenticity. In their writing the psychological and social aspects of identity are tied to a specific conception of values, the value of the individual and the good life in particular. However, a good life is linked not to the demand for autonomy and authenticity but to a horizon of meaning, relying on aesthetic, cognitive and ethical values that connect the individual to the wider social setting. This interpretation is based on a pluralist axiological position—on the idea that values are conditioned, undergo change and are articulated in relations. They reject the extreme monistic idea of the existence of absolute values; evaluative processes in this direction are tied to the value of humanity but insist on the objectiveness of values. This is found in the conditionality of human needs and the means of satisfying them that have been created within the culture. Humanist concepts therefore refer to the value of tradition which is expressed in the "reasonable hierarchy of possibilities", which is linked to the contextual aspect which differs from culture to culture. Differences in these values are also reflected in the concepts of the good life (see Sisáková, 2001, pp. 203-204). This line of thinking appears in moral philosophy which again seeks to defend moral values.

The moral philosopher C. Taylor holds (Taylor, 2001) that human life is structured by what we attribute meaning to because we cannot act outside our value frameworks. Evaluations are, he posits, an integral part of contemporary human life[7]; people always

[7] So people perceive their world through a value filter, which means we view things as being of greater or lesser value or as trivial. The world is a moral space filled with values, and people always have a

consider the moral value of their needs and aspirations. This evaluative attitude is based on an ability to strongly value what it means for people to have certain immediate needs and desires and to assess these needs and desires whilst qualitatively distinguishing between them on the basis of values such as good or bad, lofty or grounded, virtuous or unvirtuous, meaningful or trivial.

The values create systems (structures) that are part of the cultural and civilizational make up and are reflected within traditions and cultural memory. They have an essential meaning in human life and in various forms of human activity and decision-making. For every decision-making process involving the selection of one of a number of possible alternatives there is a subject who weighs up values when making a choice. The act of choosing presupposes the assessment of the alternatives, which is not just about estimating the benefits and downfalls and minimising risk but also about applying a systemic approach that respects the way in which the decision-making process is linked to the wider picture. If the assessment is very complicated then knowledge of the values, demands and/or preferences associated with what is being decided is required along with knowledge of the value structures that can be applied to the assessment tasks including knowledge of what can be characterised as "patterns", models and "standards". Knowledge of the possible alternatives and the values associated with them therefore requires knowledge of the recognised value structures, and this relates to the issue of the decision being acceptable locally and more further afield (Tondl, 1999, pp. 22-37).

Integrity of life. According to humanist psychologists people interested in living a good life should also endeavour to integrate, which presupposes the integrity of the *self* and is also linked to the idea of perceiving life in its entirety. People such as these, Rogers posits, *live through their values* (rejecting the hypocritical culture of today and not living a double life); nonetheless, they recognise that they are in a process of permanent change and are prepared. A psychologically mature person, he believes, strives for a unified, integrated encounter with life and all its challenges, and moves towards integrity, integratedness and unity (Rogers, 1999, pp. 185-205).

According to Taylor we continually narratively reassess our lives, evaluating what has been and approving the current direction or seeking out a new direction, and hence project our own lives into the future. It is only through narrating our life that we can understand it, ascertain its meaning, and that indicates that while on the one hand we assess our actions as belonging to our overall life path, on the other it is only through narration that we are capable of thinking about which direction to take our lives in (Palovičová, 2004, p. 409).

MacIntyre was another one who noted that in order for us to be able to perceive our lives as having meaning we have to be capable of planning and tackling long-term projects (MacIntyre, 2004, p. 126). Any attempts to perceive human life in its entirety, as a whole,

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particular understanding of themselves and their world, which precedes human existence, and is also a horizon in which they can meaningfully ask questions, because amongst the constituent interests of human beings feature questions about direction, meaning and the value of life. The answer to these questions can only be found within a particular framework, provided by the horizon within which we understand things, ourselves and those around us (Sisáková, 2001, p. 404).

come up against two kinds of problems—the first is social and the second philosophical. The social one lies in the fact that in the modern era human life is separated into many different segments each with its own norms and modes of behaviour: work is therefore distinct from leisure, private life is separate from public life, the social from the personal, and childhood and old age are set apart from the rest of life. Each of these divisions has become so deeply rooted that we have learnt to think and feel through the distinctions between these various parts of life and not through the unity running through all these various parts. The philosophical problem stems from the tendency to adopt an atomistic view of human behaviour that makes it seem impossible to understand how life can be something more than just a succession of isolated and unrelated episodes. This has its roots in the separation between the individual and the roles in life that the individual has (Sartre, Dahrendorf), and it is behind the liquidation of the *self* that results because its integrity is being reduced to the rejection of non-authentic conventional social relations (MacIntyre, 2004, pp. 238-240). In contradistinction, MacIntyre stresses the fact that a person is the subject of a narrative stretching from birth to death, and hence is responsible for his or her behaviour and the events that comprise his or her life. It means that he or she must be prepared to explain what he or she has done, what has happened or what has been witnessed. The integrity of individual life is the integrity of a narrative embodied in the individual's life; it is the integrity of a narrative quest that is also a process of getting to know oneself (MacIntyre, 2004, pp. 253-255).

However, MacIntyre not only considers integrity to be determining for the good life but also points out the tradition of understanding it in terms of a virtue, which can only be defined in relation to the wholeness of a human life, the *virtue of integrity or constancy* (MacIntyre, 2004, p. 237), and whose appeal has to be restored.

Meaning of life. Understanding the meaning of life is key to understanding oneself; however, there need not be only one meaning since the different spheres of life may have other meanings. One can therefore also talk of a plurality of meanings which can be mutually empowering (or the realization of one increases the chance of realizing the others), but they also mutually exclude, and in this case one can talk of pathologies of the meaning of existence. The psychiatrist and neurologist V. E. Frankl emphasised the fact that the search for meaning is a primary force in a person's life, not the secondary rationalization of instinctual drives.[8] This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; for in contrast to other animals he has no instincts telling him what to do, and in the present era there are no traditions to tell a person his duty. So people often want to do what others are doing or do what others want them to do. In the first case we are confronted with conformism and in the second with totalitarianism (Frankl, 1994, pp. 7-8). However, meaning cannot be created or invented but must be found in each individual life situation (Frankl, 1994, p. 150). Frankl stresses that the meaning of human life is unconditional,

[8] As many will know Frankl founded the psychotherapeutic system called "logotherapy" which, as he himself said, concentrates on the search for the meaning of human existence, for "striving to find meaning in one's life is the primary motivating force in humans" He therefore spoke of the "will to meaning" as opposed to the "will to pleasure", central to Freud's psychoanalysis, and in opposition to the "will to power", as emphasised in Adlerian psychology (Frankl, 1994, pp. 65-66).

whether or not we are aware of it; its loss is a sign of a pathological state. If a person ceases to seek out meaning, the psychological state deteriorates and the number of frustrating effects increases, reinforcing neurotic and depressive tendencies (Frankl, 1994, pp. 150-151). Research by the logotherapist E. S. Lukasová shows that empty meaning leads not to desperation but indifference (Lukasová, 1994, pp. 195-201).

According to Frankl a person finds the meaning of his existence or squanders it or loses it, and then seeks pseudomeanings. True meaning is transcendental and anchored in the values of performance, experience and attitude. But this is true only of performances that enable a person to carry out an act that humanises the world and improves levels of dignity in life for the largest possible number of people; it is true only of the experience of love and a prosocial orientation and of an attitude of patient dignity. Pseudomeaning, he suggests, is an orientation towards success, pleasure and egocentrism. He defended this belief on the basis that a person "is able to live and even to die for the sake of his ideals and values" that are not, however, just mere self-expression, for meaning does not "emerge" from existence but is something that existence is confronted with (Frankl, 1994, p. 66).

Authenticity of life. Authenticity is considered to be one of the defining ideals of our culture because in political theory, social philosophy and the theory of law one can observe how theoretical approaches based on authenticity as a normative ideal are on the ascendency as is the universalist model that is becoming less about general principles and more about reflecting judgment and uniqueness. The notion of authenticity occupies a central place in the ideas of those who are critical of liberalism, such as M. Walzer, and those who defend it, such as R. Dworkin, and those who are critical of the formal universalism in deontological moral theories articulated in the work of C. Taylor, A. MacIntyre, B. Williams, and M. Nussbaum.

According to C. Taylor (2001), the modern discourse on authenticity developed from the ideas of J. J. Rousseau and J. G. Herder, and it is an ideal that calls for people to shape their lives not according to the demands of external conformity but to find their own ways of living that cannot be derived from society but are created from within, for no one is simply a function of a pre-given, determining and immutable form of universality. Authenticity is the idea of freedom—it embraces the fact that I can seek out my own life path and resist the external demand to conform. This is not the authenticity of theorists (F. Schlegel, Novalis, A. Artaud, A. Breton, F. Nietzsche, M. Foucault, and others) who consider authentic behaviour simply to be removed from the established normativity, while behaviours inspired by other value spheres, such as the aesthetic sphere (e.g. the search for truth or moral clarity), are devalued to self-deceiving manifestations of self-assertion. Authentic subjectivity, as he presents it, does not relinquish unity and coherence in favour of unstructured personal experience, nor does it concern coherence based on principles that oppose the external self. Rather it is about reconciling all constituent moments of the individual within a single life project that has the status of a normative creation against which the quality of life can be judged.

Today's theorists defend a notion of authenticity that conveys the idea that the good life can only be achieved if a person lives in harmony with his or herself if he or she is authentic. This means having the ability not only to implement his or her own life plans but also to shape a creative life project out of the materials available.

Summary

Regardless of the differences in opinion on these basic questions, methods and goals, today's philosophers share a common view of the "art of living": it is a learning process, one consisting of value-based knowledge and decision-making. The majority of theorists consider the following three components to be integral: *knowledge, action and value system*. Knowledge includes all forms of self-knowledge and experience, knowledge of the conditions, rules and value hierarchy. A grounding in human imagination lends this learning process an artistic element. The emergence and formation of habits, practices, exercises and therapies leads to decisiveness, determination. A specific set of rules, based around set moral and non-moral values forms the basis of the approach to be followed. All individuals have to decide which value hierarchy they are going to live by. Hence the art of living is unquestionably the ability to live (Dohmen, 2013, p. 19).

The basic framework of the "art of living" can, we believe, be visualised as a square where each side represents its essential components (attributes): 1. *value system*; 2. *integrity of life*; 3. *meaning of life*; 4. *authenticity of life*. Thus the art of living presupposes a value system that helps a person to orientate him or herself and make decisions in the world. It also assumes the ability to integrate one's life into a meaningful whole and the skills to seek out and find the meaning of one's life. Finally the art of living is also dependent on the ability to lead an authentic life.

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