

Social Indicators Research Series 63

Bernhard Schmitz

# Art-of-Living

A Concept to Enhance Happiness

 Springer

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Bernhard Schmitz

# Art-of-Living

A Concept to Enhance Happiness

 Springer

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# Foreword

## **On the growing importance of ‘art-of living’**

This book is about how to live a good life, a satisfying life in particular. The art of living is a topic that has interested man since ancient times and that has figured prominently in classic Greek philosophy. Today the issue is even more pertinent.

### *Happiness depends on life-ability*

For a long time happiness was seen as a matter of luck, as is illustrated by the history of the word, ‘happiness,’ which comes from ‘happening.’ Today we see happiness as a result of our own actions. One reason for this change of view is that social conditions now allow us more control over our lives and another is that recent happiness research has allowed us to estimate better how much control we have.

Happiness research has shown that most people live happy lives in contemporary Western nations; average happiness is around 7, 5 on a scale of 0–10<sup>1</sup>, and it has increased slightly over the last 50 years. The main reason is that living conditions are pretty good in modern Western nations. Yet not everybody is equally happy in Western nations; for instance, in Germany some 36 % of the population is very happy, scoring 9 or 10 on the happiness scale, while 15 % are unhappy and rate their happiness at 5 or less. Though these differences have become a bit smaller over time, they are still considerable, as is apparent from an average standard deviation of 2 for the German population.<sup>2</sup>

Why is there such a difference in happiness among people living in the same nation? One answer is that living conditions differ within countries; some citizens being better situated than their compatriots, e.g., have a higher income or a more

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<sup>1</sup>[http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap\\_nat/desc\\_na\\_genpublic.php?cntry=636&region=2748](http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_nat/desc_na_genpublic.php?cntry=636&region=2748).

<sup>2</sup>[http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/common/desc\\_study.php?studyid=10921](http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/common/desc_study.php?studyid=10921).

supportive family. Likewise some people are just luckier than fellow citizens, e.g., win a lottery or happen to work in a booming industry. Yet these differences in living conditions within countries explain at best about 25 % of the differences in happiness in the population. This means that about 75 % of the differences in happiness lies in what people make of their situation. We also know that about 35 % of the differences in happiness lies in genetic factors, which we cannot change. This leaves us with the suggestion that about 40 % of the differences lies in things that are within our control.<sup>3</sup>

*Happiness is becoming more dependent on life-ability*

This share of 40 % is not a fixed number; it was probably lower in the past and is likely to get bigger in the future. One reason is that the degree to which we are in control of our happiness depends on our life situation. The better the external living conditions in a society, the higher the average happiness will be, but the more the remaining differences in happiness across citizens will depend on their life ability. In the best possible situation, say in heaven, there will still be differences in happiness, say between people scoring 9 or 10. These differences will be near to 100 % due to variation in life ability. Since living conditions have improved over time, happiness has become more dependent on life ability and if living conditions will improve further in the future, happiness will become even more dependent on our talent for living.

A related reason for the growing importance of life ability is that we have more choice than ever before: We live in a ‘multiple-choice-society’ and can decide on many things that were preset for earlier generations, such as the type of work we do, whom we marry, and whether or not we have children. This greater freedom of choice is one of the reasons why most people are happy, but it also requires skills to choose. It is easier to follow custom.

*We value happiness more*

Happiness is a universal value; almost all humans prefer a satisfying life over a miserable life. Yet happiness is not valued equally at all times and in all places. Happiness ranks relatively high in the value hierarchy of contemporary Western nations, among other things because living a happy life is very possible in the conditions of modern society.<sup>4</sup>

All these have created a growing demand for information on how to live a happy life and this information demand is increasingly served by scientific research. Two new strands of happiness research have developed recently, ‘happiness economics’

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<sup>3</sup>Veenhoven, R. (2015) Social conditions for human happiness: a review of research. *International Journal of Psychology*, 50(3), 379–391, Section 5.3.

<sup>4</sup>Veenhoven, R. (2015) Happiness: History of the concept, in: James Wright (Ed.) *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 2nd edition Vol. 10, 521–525.

and ‘positive psychology.’ This book is part of the latter strand. It describes the current state of the art and presents interesting new findings. It will not be the last book on the ‘art-of-living’ but it makes an important contribution to our growing knowledge on this subject.

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# Ways for Living a Good Life

What defines a good life? What is the best sort of a person to be? These questions arouse since ancient times (Michalos 2015). This book series deals with exactly these questions: How can one achieve happiness and well-being and what determines the quality of life? According to Michalos, answers to early philosophers imply that a good life, on the one hand, should include wealth and physical attractiveness, and, on the other hand, a good life means living in peace and living in harmony with the conditions of the world and is based on an immortal soul.

Because of the importance of these questions, one goal of this book is to analyze ways how people can strive for a good life.

This question cannot be answered easily. Firstly, we give an overview of already-existing important concepts in psychology which may be related to living a good life. Secondly, we introduce our own approach: the concept of art-of-living as one way to achieve happiness.

The main reason for the necessity to elaborate this concept is related to the ideas of Veenhoven (2003a, b), who has edited a special issue in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* on the topic leading a good life. He points out that it is essential to discriminate between the outcomes of leading a good life and ways to achieve it. For example, if someone is exercising, e.g., runs long distances, this could eventually lead to (at least momentary) happiness. In this case, exercising would be the means and momentarily happiness the result.

Why is Veenhoven's discrimination between means and ends so important? Because some means can be learned and taught, whereas it could be very difficult to learn or teach the result, how to be happy, directly. Therefore, it is important to have a group of variables which can be learned and hence be trained and which may lead to happiness.

This book is conceptualized the following way: This introductory part points out important advantages why to study art-of-living. The following theoretical part illustrates our idea of the concept of art-of-living in greater detail. Then we present empirical studies evaluating a questionnaire to measure art-of-living, especially demonstrating its reliability and validity for a large group of concepts and different methods. In the final part, we present empirical studies showing that art-of-living

and therefore, happiness can be enhanced and by which means that can be accomplished. We performed intervention studies for different groups, for students at school, at the university, and for working people, and we describe in detail the contents of our interventions. In a final chapter, we describe the results of interviews with people which were nominated from a sample as examples for artists-of-living. Then we search for the art-of-living in the arts, especially in autobiographies of famous people and we present an outlook for further research.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Advantages of Using the Concept Art-of-Living

### 1.1 Introduction

In this introductory chapter, we firstly refer to Veenhoven's (2003a, b) important discrimination between leading a good life and its results, which could be happiness. Secondly, because we are interested in ways for leading a good life, we look at criteria which define what a good life is. Thirdly, as we are not the first ones who search ways for leading a good life, we consider some psychological concepts which have dealt in the literature with the ways of performing a good life. Then we discuss a group of more fine-grained and behavior-oriented strategies helpful for leading a good life. Finally, we summarize our considerations and derive aspects which could be seen as a foundation for our own integrative approach: the art-of-living. To elaborate the concept of art-of-living we took into consideration Veenhoven's (2003a, b) classification and refer to the philosophical background of art-of-living.

#### *1.1.1 Background: Veenhoven's Discrimination for Ways to Lead a Good Life and its Results*

Before we can introduce our approach for leading a good life we present Veenhoven's important discrimination between ways to achieve a good life and their results, which could at best be happiness. Veenhoven (2003a, b) gives an introduction in the special issue of the Journal of happiness studies, see also Veenhoven (2014).

For various reasons, Veenhoven (2003b, 2013) provides a basis for our concept of leading a good life, see Table 1.1. Firstly, the distinction he makes between life chances and life results is essential for our concept. Secondly, he discriminates between inner and outer qualities of life (Veenhoven 2003a). Outer qualities are

**Table 1.1** Veenhoven's (2003b, 2013, p. 199) classification of ways for leading a good life

|              | Outer qualities               | Inner qualities  |
|--------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Life chances | Livability of the environment | Life-ability of the person, Art-of-living <sup>a</sup> |
| Life results | Utility of life               | Appreciation of life                                   |

Note: <sup>a</sup>Not contained in the original table. Added by the author

environmental factors that have an influence on the quality of life whereas inner qualities depend on the individual. For our model it is noteworthy that Veenhoven conceptualizes life-abilities in the upper right quadrant. That means life-ability is classified as inner qualities as well as life chances. This table will be referred to later. Based on Veenhoven's classification we argue that it is necessary to distinguish between ways to achieve a good life and results of such an attempt. Veenhoven regards leading a good life as a mental skill and underlines that this is perceived as a positive concept and is similar to the construct of positive mental health. People can influence their happiness, and he points out that it "may be a practical venue for intervention" (Veenhoven 2003a, p. 349) which can be learnt at least partially. Summarizing his concept of leading a good life he emphasizes (a) that *there is not only one way to a good life* and (b) *ways of leading a good life can be viewed as skills* and (c) that *the difference between ways and results of leading a good life is very important*.

One could also refer to the factors considered in Lyubomirsky's (2008) model of influences on happiness, which argues that 50 % of happiness are determined by genes which cannot be influenced by the individual (forming the fix-point), 10 % are environmental factors and further 40 % are conscious behavior, which can be influenced by the individual. Ways of leading a good life would therefore be classified in the 40 % behavioral factor.

## 1.2 Criteria for Happiness as Indirect Advice for Ways to Achieve Happiness

It seems to be clear, that ways of leading a good life are determined by the kind of good life which is sought for. Because there are different kinds of a good life, we discuss these kinds as criteria for happiness. One could suppose the criteria give information about what could be done to achieve happiness. For example, one might speculate that to achieve hedonic happiness (see below) it could be helpful to perform joyful activities like going to parties and listen to nice music, where as to achieve eudaimonia, it would be helpful to reflect one's life and to find meaning in life. Therefore, it is also important how people conceive happiness and, from a more scientific angle, how happiness is measured. Attempting to measure latent variables like, in this case, happiness, one can use objective or subjective measures. It seems likely that objective measures of happiness could be income and occupation, but researchers have found that various objective life measures (like income, age,

occupation) were only weakly related to people's judgment of their lives, which leads to the necessity for subjective measures.

### ***1.2.1 Subjective Well-Being (SWB)***

Diener and Lucas (1999) define *Subjective well-being* (SWB) as life satisfaction, the absence of negative affect and the presence of positive affect, and his three component structure has been widely used in research. SWB refers to people's evaluation of their lives, containing affective and cognitive aspects, and is therefore seen as construct that represents everyday terms of happiness. It is not only related to short term pleasures but takes into consideration a broader picture of happiness (Diener 1984).

When trying to measure satisfaction with one's life, researchers often use a single item: "How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?" (Andrew and Withey 1976). A more refined instrument that is commonly used is the Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) (Diener et al. 1985), consisting of five items. This scale has been widely applied and shows good reliability ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

### ***1.2.2 Psychological Well-Being (PBW)***

Ryff (1989) has criticized the concept of subjective well-being, mainly because of its missing theoretical foundation and because it therefore neglects important aspects of psychological functioning. Based on theories of Maslow (1968), Rogers (1961), Jung (1933) and Erikson (1959), she developed the concept of *psychological well-being* (PWB) which is much more differentiated and integrates concepts of psychological functioning from various theoretical backgrounds into an overall construct. Two important criteria of positive functioning are: holding positive attitudes towards oneself (self-acceptance) and having warm, and trusting interpersonal relations (positive relations with others). According to Ryff there is considerable agreement in the literature on other important criteria such as self-determination, independence and regulation of behavior from within (autonomy). Another characteristic of mental health is the individual's ability to choose or create environments suitable to its conditions (environmental mastery). Positive functioning also includes beliefs that give one the feeling that there is purpose and meaning in life (purpose in life). Ryff argues that it is a kind of psychological functioning if one tries to continue to develop one's potential and to grow (personal growth).

Therefore, PWB summarizes the following concepts of positive functioning: self-growth, self-acceptance, environment, relationships, meaning and autonomy. Clearly this concept of psychological well-being gives more information what could be done to achieve well-being. For example, to achieve relationship

well-being one could improve one's relationships or to achieve self-growth, one can live in correspondence to one's needs and goals. Ryff's concept and instrument of PWB have been widely applied (cf. Baumgardner and Crothers 2010; Ryff and Singer 1996; Keyes et al. 2002).

### 1.2.3 *Eudaimonia and Hedonia*

The concept of *eudaimonic well-being* was introduced by Waterman (1990) and is based on the ideas of Aristotle, who uses the term "daimon" with the meaning of "the true self". According to Aristotle, a good life means living in accordance with your inner daimon and true happiness can be achieved from the realization of inner potentials, in other words, happiness derives from self-realization. As a result, one should live in line with one's needs, talents and values. Waterman argues that eudaimonic happiness results from personal expressiveness, for if people are fully engaged in activities and show their sense of what they are that will result in an experience of fulfillment and meaningfulness.

Huta and Waterman (2014) provide a thorough distinction between eudaimonia and hedonia: Following these authors eudaimonia is related to growth, meaning, authenticity and excellence whereas hedonia is characterized by pleasure, enjoyment, comfort and absence of distress. Both concepts can be dated back to philosophers dealing with the question about the nature of a good life or whether a life is well-lived. In hedonic philosophies the focus is on the above mentioned concepts pleasure, enjoyment, and absence of distress whereas in eudaimonic philosophies the focus is on activities reflecting virtue, excellence, the best within us, and the full development of our potentials. Although hedonic and eudaimonic happiness can theoretically and practically be discriminated the constructs overlap and can affect each other.

A questionnaire for eudaimonic well-being (QEWB) was developed by Waterman et al. (2010). The QEWB consists of 21 items which build a single common factor.

### 1.2.4 *Flourishing*

Psychological well-being as defined by Ryff integrates various approaches from different theoretical backgrounds, but there are some approaches which go even further and consider a more general concept than psychological well-being, for example the concept of *flourishing* developed by Keyes et al. (2002) and Keyes (2005).

Four different conceptualizations and operational definitions of flourishing are currently used within the psychological literature: Keyes et al. (2002) and Keyes (2005), Huppert and So (2009, 2013), Diener et al. (2010), and Seligman (2011).

For a detailed comparison of these approaches and empirical data, cf. Hone et al. (2014).

Keyes' approach is derived by examining the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) identifying each symptom's opposite. Following Keyes, complete mental health can be seen as a combination of high levels of emotional, psychological and social well-being labeled as flourishing.

Huppert and So's conceptual definition of flourishing is grounded upon three factors of well-being: positive characteristics, positive functioning and positive appraisal.

Seligman's conceptual definition of flourishing is based on five well-being components that can be defined and measured as separate but correlated constructs. According to Seligman's interpretation, well-being requires high levels of positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and accomplishments. The combination of these components constitutes the construct PERMA which can be measured with the PERMA-Profilier. In addition to that, Seligman outlines and defines flourishing as the "gold-standard" for measuring well-being and emphasizes the increase of flourishing as the main objective of positive psychology.

These four research teams have operationalized flourishing differently, but do all agree on three matters: first, flourishing is derived on a theoretical basis; second, flourishing refers to high levels of subjective well-being; and third, well-being is a multi-dimensional construct that cannot be measured adequately using a single-item assessment.

We regard the concepts of flourishing as generalization of well-being and especially psychological well-being. In all these four conceptualizations, well-being is measured mainly as a feeling, like in Keyes' instrument ("During the past month, how often do you feel...") and Huppert and So's instrument ("Most of the day I feel a sense of accomplishment from what I do"). Accordingly, Diener et al. phrase "I am a good person and live a good life" and Seligman "In general, how often do you feel joyful?" This justifies our approach to see flourishing as well-being and therefore as a criterion for ways to happiness. But especially the questionnaires of Diener et al. and Seligman also give hints for ways to increase well-being (e.g. Seligman: "How often do you achieve important goals you have set for yourself?") If someone tries to achieve self-set goals he is utilizing a good strategy to achieve happiness.

To sum up, depending on the kind of goal, one can derive assumptions about the way to achieve this goal: Pursuing the goal of subjective well-being, the way seems to be not very clear, whereas psychological well-being inspires you to accept yourself, to look for good relationships, lead a self-determined way of life etc., and eudaimonic well-being advocates to engage in activities and to let people work out their abilities. It can be concluded that the kind of goals set for leading a good life gives hints how to achieve it, but they are not very precise. Especially if one is interested in enhancing chances of leading a good life, one needs more detailed information about what people already do or do not do.