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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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# Contents

<b>1 Introduction: Advantages of Using the Concept Art-of-Living . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction . . . . .	1
1.1.1 Background: Veenhoven’s Discrimination for Ways to Lead a Good Life and its Results . . . . .	1
1.2 Criteria for Happiness as Indirect Advice for Ways to Achieve Happiness . . . . .	2
1.2.1 Subjective Well-Being (SWB). . . . .	3
1.2.2 Psychological Well-Being (PBW). . . . .	3
1.2.3 Eudaimonia and Hedonia . . . . .	4
1.2.4 Flourishing . . . . .	4
1.3 Research to Ways of Living a Good Life . . . . .	6
1.3.1 Veenhoven’s Classic Views . . . . .	6
1.3.2 Wisdom. . . . .	6
1.3.3 Self-Determination Theory (SDT). . . . .	7
1.3.4 Strengths and Virtues . . . . .	8
1.3.5 Orientations to Happiness (OTH) . . . . .	8
1.3.6 Conclusion: Research About Ways to Happiness . . . . .	9
1.4 Behavior and Strategies to Enhance Well-Being. . . . .	10
1.4.1 Fordyce. . . . .	10
1.4.2 Happiness Increasing Strategies (HIS). . . . .	10
1.4.3 Happiness Inducing Behaviors (HIB) . . . . .	11
1.4.4 Meta-Analyses of Interventions of PP. . . . .	12
1.4.5 Conclusion . . . . .	12
1.5 Our Own Concept: Overview . . . . .	13
1.5.1 Our Criteria for a Concept for Art-of-Living. . . . .	13
1.5.2 Philosophical Background: Wilhelm Schmid. . . . .	15
1.5.3 Our Model of the Art-of-Living . . . . .	17
1.6 Summary and Conclusion. . . . .	19
References. . . . .	19

- 2 Development of a Questionnaire Measuring Art-of-Living. . . . .** 23
  - 2.1 Introduction . . . . . 23
    - 2.1.1 Questions Regarding the Concept . . . . . 23
    - 2.1.2 Questions Regarding the Instrument and Its Validity, Reliability and Factorial Structure. . . . . 23
    - 2.1.3 Sequence of Studies . . . . . 24
  - 2.2 Study 1: Preliminary Combined Qualitative and Quantitative Survey: How Do People Think About Art-of-Living? . . . . . 24
    - 2.2.1 Method Study 1 . . . . . 24
    - 2.2.2 Results of Study 1. . . . . 26
  - 2.3 Study 2: The Questionnaire Measuring Art-of-Living. . . . . 27
    - 2.3.1 Method of Study 2 . . . . . 27
    - 2.3.2 Results of Study 2. . . . . 30
  - 2.4 Discussion Study 1 and 2. . . . . 38
    - 2.4.1 Limitations Study 1 and 2. . . . . 38
    - 2.4.2 Outlook Study 1 and 2 . . . . . 39
  - 2.5 Study 3. . . . . 40
    - 2.5.1 Art-of-Living Questionnaire: Revised Edition . . . . . 40
  - 2.6 Study 4. . . . . 41
    - 2.6.1 A Shortened Form of the Art-of-Living Questionnaire . . . . . 42
  - 2.7 Overall Discussion . . . . . 43
  - References. . . . . 43
- 3 Validation Studies for Art-of-Living . . . . .** 45
  - 3.1 Relationships of Art-of-Living to Different Constructs of Well-Being. . . . . 45
    - 3.1.1 Introduction. . . . . 45
    - 3.1.2 Method . . . . . 47
    - 3.1.3 Results . . . . . 49
  - 3.2 Validation: Key Constructs in Positive Psychology—Relationships Between the Art-of-Living and Flourishing. . . . . 51
    - 3.2.1 Introduction. . . . . 51
    - 3.2.2 Method . . . . . 52
    - 3.2.3 Results . . . . . 54
    - 3.2.4 Discussion. . . . . 55
  - 3.3 Relationship of Art-of-Living with Personality (Big Five), Anxiety, Emotional Intelligence, and Mindfulness . . . . . 56
    - 3.3.1 Introduction. . . . . 56
    - 3.3.2 Method . . . . . 57
    - 3.3.3 Results . . . . . 58
    - 3.3.4 Discussion. . . . . 60

- 3.4 Validation: Key Constructs of Positive Psychology—Ways of Leading a Good Life Relationships Between Art-of-Living and Strength and Virtues and Orientation to Happiness. . . . . 61
  - 3.4.1 Introduction. . . . . 61
  - 3.4.2 Method . . . . . 62
  - 3.4.3 Results . . . . . 63
  - 3.4.4 Discussion. . . . . 65
- 3.5 Validation: Related Constructs—Resilience, Coherence, Self-Regulation and Wisdom and Their Relationships to the Art-of-Living . . . . . 66
  - 3.5.1 Introduction. . . . . 66
  - 3.5.2 Method . . . . . 69
  - 3.5.3 Results . . . . . 71
- 3.6 Art-of-Living: Measuring the Construct Using the Situational Judgement Test. . . . . 72
  - 3.6.1 Introduction. . . . . 72
  - 3.6.2 Method . . . . . 73
  - 3.6.3 Results . . . . . 75
  - 3.6.4 Discussion. . . . . 75
- 3.7 Validity of Self- and Peer-Assessment for the Art-of-Living . . . . . 75
  - 3.7.1 Introduction. . . . . 75
  - 3.7.2 Method . . . . . 76
  - 3.7.3 Results . . . . . 77
  - 3.7.4 Discussion. . . . . 78
- 3.8 Art-of-Living in Working Life . . . . . 79
  - 3.8.1 Introduction. . . . . 79
  - 3.8.2 Method . . . . . 81
  - 3.8.3 Results . . . . . 83
  - 3.8.4 Discussion. . . . . 84
- 3.9 Summary . . . . . 85
- References. . . . . 86
- 4 Measurement of Art-of-Living in Daily Life by Diaries . . . . . 93**
  - 4.1 Introduction . . . . . 93
  - 4.2 Method . . . . . 94
    - 4.2.1 Sample . . . . . 94
    - 4.2.2 Procedure . . . . . 94
    - 4.2.3 Instruments . . . . . 94
    - 4.2.4 Psychometric Properties of the Diary . . . . . 95
  - 4.3 Results . . . . . 97
    - 4.3.1 Validation of the Diary . . . . . 97
    - 4.3.2 Relationship Between Art-of-Living, Current Events and Applied Strategies . . . . . 99

- 4.3.3 Synchronous Relationships Between Art-of-Living, Affect, and Well-Being . . . . . 100
- 4.3.4 Asynchronous Relationships Between Art-of-Living and Well-Being . . . . . 102
- 4.3.5 Relationship Between Dynamics in Affect and Overall Well-Being . . . . . 103
- 4.4 Summary and Overall Discussion . . . . . 106
- References. . . . . 107
- 5 Interventions to Enhance Art-of-Living. . . . . 109**
  - 5.1 Comparison of a Cognitive and a Combined Cognitive/Body-Related Intervention for Enhancing Art-of-Living and Happiness . . . . . 109
    - 5.1.1 Introduction. . . . . 109
    - 5.1.2 Interventions of Previous Studies . . . . . 112
    - 5.1.3 Hypotheses . . . . . 114
    - 5.1.4 Method . . . . . 115
    - 5.1.5 Results . . . . . 121
    - 5.1.6 Discussion. . . . . 125
    - 5.1.7 Conclusion . . . . . 128
  - 5.2 Spoilt for Choice? How Does the Kind of Assignment for Strategies of Art-of-Living Effect Training Results? . . . . . 129
    - 5.2.1 Introduction. . . . . 129
    - 5.2.2 Hypotheses . . . . . 130
    - 5.2.3 Method . . . . . 130
    - 5.2.4 Results . . . . . 136
    - 5.2.5 Discussion. . . . . 140
  - 5.3 Happiness at Work. A Training to Increase Art-of-Living at Work . . . . . 141
    - 5.3.1 Introduction. . . . . 141
    - 5.3.2 Goals and Hypothesis . . . . . 143
    - 5.3.3 Method . . . . . 143
    - 5.3.4 Results . . . . . 150
    - 5.3.5 Discussion. . . . . 155
  - 5.4 A Web-Based Adaptive Training for the Art-of-Living . . . . . 157
    - 5.4.1 Introduction. . . . . 157
    - 5.4.2 Hypotheses . . . . . 159
    - 5.4.3 Method . . . . . 159
    - 5.4.4 Results . . . . . 167
    - 5.4.5 Discussion. . . . . 168
  - References. . . . . 169

- 6 Summary and Outlook . . . . . 175**
- 6.1 Art-of-Living in the Arts . . . . . 175
  - 6.1.1 Savoring/Pavarotti . . . . . 176
  - 6.1.2 Openness/Dalai Lama . . . . . 177
  - 6.1.3 Coping/Eric Clapton . . . . . 178
  - 6.1.4 Serenity/Henry David Thoreau . . . . . 178
  - 6.1.5 Self-Determined Way of Living/Mandela . . . . . 179
  - 6.1.6 Summary: Art-of-Living in the Arts . . . . . 180
- 6.2 Nomination Study for Art-of-Living . . . . . 180
  - 6.2.1 Process of Nomination . . . . . 181
  - 6.2.2 Nomination Study . . . . . 182
  - 6.2.3 Main Study . . . . . 183
  - 6.2.4 Results . . . . . 185
  - 6.2.5 Summary . . . . . 189
- 6.3 Summary . . . . . 190
  - 6.3.1 Summing Up on the Introduction . . . . . 190
  - 6.3.2 Summary on the Questionnaire . . . . . 191
  - 6.3.3 Summary on the Validation . . . . . 191
  - 6.3.4 Summary of Process Analyses Based on Diary Data . . . . . 192
  - 6.3.5 Summary of Intervention Studies . . . . . 193
  - 6.3.6 Limitations . . . . . 194
  - 6.3.7 Perspectives . . . . . 195
- References . . . . . 195

# 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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